

## **Sociolinguistic study of the function of swearing language in cyber-gaming conversation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In most countries, swearing language is always considered as forbidden or offensive and is always judged negatively. However, to some countries swearing language is acceptable and commonly used. This study found out that swearing words are not always offensive in nature the way it is perceived by the listeners. It has been validated through the gathered data from the gaming conversations recorded in one of the internet cafes in Digos City. The players in the said internet café used swearing words without causing offense to their comrades but only intend to release their emotional state. The used of swear words contains intended meaning that requires further understanding and analysis. On the other hand, this research applied Conversation Analysis which used Swear Words Classification of Jay Timothy (1992) and the Functions of Swear Words by Andersson & Trudgill (1990) to analyze the words taken from the gaming conversations. The result has shown that sociolinguistic functions of swearing words specifically by gamers of internet café is mainly to express or emphasize one's emotional state without causing offense. It shows that there are three classifications used in the study was taken from the conversation, these are epithets, slang, insult/slur and four functions which are expletive, auxiliary, abusive and humorous.

*Keywords: sociolinguistic study, function, swearing language, cyber-gaming conversation*

## INTRODUCTION

Swearing words play a peculiar role in language. Depending on the context of use, they may serve to provide us knowledge that swearing has intended meaning. Using swearing words is a way to reveal the speaker's attitudes and feelings. Swearing words emphasize the messages of speaker that she/he wishes to convey and to gain attention to others. Moreover, swearing is the use of informal communication with the main purpose or expressing the speaker's emotional state. De Klerk (1991) observed that "Studies of linguistic taboo have tended to be neglected for obvious reasons".

Swear language is present all around the world. Many people regularly use swear words in their daily lives. Moreover, swearing words can be a unique way to communicate others. In American and Canadian cultures, it is common to them to use swear words in their daily conversation without causing an offense. Many American actors or actresses use these in their movies because they are acceptable in their country. In the study of Jay (1992), American and Canadian English speakers are not generally indiscriminate users and approved taboo language.

In the Philippines, swear words are also used even if it is not acceptable by the church. Most people find the act of swearing as a sin, in general, it is offensive or impolite. Though swearing word is not acceptable to our country, there are still many Filipinos who have used it especially adult and teenagers.

Furthermore, it has been observed that teenagers today are now using swear words and mostly it occurs in conspicuous places and in activities where their peers are present. This prompted the researchers to jumpstart a sociolinguistic study of swear words in Cebuano language (e.g. *yawa*, *buang*, *piste*, *animal*, etc.). Swearing is the way someone uses obscene words orally to insult, curse or even to offend something (someone or action), and also to emphasize when the person has strong emotion (Hughes, 1991: 206).

Moreover, this study is conducted on the premise that swearing has different sociolinguistic functions and classification. As aforementioned earlier, swearing is acceptable to other country but not in Philippines.

This ignites my interest to study swearing because swear words have different meanings either offensive or only to emphasize emotional state. Furthermore, this study aims to identify the different swear words that teenagers have created. To resolve the problems, researcher analyzed the data by using the theory of

classification by Jay Timothy and the theory of functions by Anderson and Trudgil (1990). However, due to data limitation, it does not cover every aspect of swearing.

This research is concerned in understanding that using swearing words have intended meaning depending on how it used. This would enlighten us that swearing words have different functions in linguistic study.

## **METHOD**

This research employed audio theory-recording technique method-qualitative research in the collection, transcription and analysis of data. Guided by this technique, the data focused only in swear words in recorded conversations. Furthermore, the data collected was analyzed using Anderson and Trudgil (1990) and Jay (1992) theories of Swear Language.

The participants of this study were internet users who incidentally used the internet café during the specified recording session. Furthermore, the participants were not informed about the nature of the study (the topic, the recording set-up) while they played games and surfed the internet to derive authentic data.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### *The Sociolinguistic Function of Swearing Language*

The functions of swear words examined how people communicate the words in their normal conversation. We have four functions of swearing language as cited by Trudgill and Adderson. These are expletive, abusive, humorous and auxiliary. These four functions are strongly related to the category of sociolinguistic study.

### *Expletive Functions*

This function shows that swearing words are not only offensive, these also express different emotions like anger, frustrations, excitement and etc. This can be observed in the following excerpts of the gamers' conversations:

Conversation 1:

0017 Player B: Dagan na lagi mo didto tanan.

0018 Player A: Ha! Unsa mahuman palang.  
 0019 Player B: Hadlok man mahuman.  
 0020 Player C: Out na si \_\_\_\_\_. Di naka TP (town portal)  
 0021 Player B: Adik!  
 0022 Player C: Dagana ninyo.

In the conversation above, Player B aimed attack the enemies' base and tried to command his co-players to go and be ready to their assigned position. However, Player A is afraid to follow because the enemies might make a counter attack. Player B was frustrated because his plan was not followed by his co-players so he used the word "Adik" to express his emotional state. Hence, in this conversation, swear words is used not to offend anyone but only to emphasize the feeling. This statement is similar to the study of Pinker (2008), he stated that swearing can be used of different situations not only offensive but also to emphasize our emotional state.

Conversation 2:

0046 Player B: Naka vulca ka, naka  
 vulca ka, nakavulca ka ha ha gahi  
 mong duha. Nakavulca ka. Yawa!  
 0047 Player C: Mura jud nipatay ug  
 tao si \_\_\_\_\_ ba.  
 0048 Player B: Yawa. Yawa.  
 0049 Player C: You fuck!

In the above conversation, player B used swear words during the encounter with one of the enemies and able to win the battle at the end. Likewise, Player C cheers him for what he did. The swear word used is part of Expletive Function because player B used it to express his emotion about what he did in the game. In other words, he is excited to kill the enemy.

Conversation 3:

0103 Player A: Sugod.  
 0104 Player C: Hay..  
 0105 Player A: Bwesita uie!  
 0106 Player C: Ka lag uie.

This example falls under Expletive function because Player C said "Bwesita uie" just to express a feeling of disappointment against the internet connection since they cannot attack well because the connection is slow. This excerpt is related to

the study of Jay (2000). According to him, swearing words expressed different emotions like anger or released stress or tension.

### *Abusive Function*

This function is directed toward others.

0035 Player A: Pungkol kayo ka.

0036 Player B: Weeeh.?

0037 Player A: Yawa.

The excerpt above shows that the two players argued with each other but not too serious. Player A said to Player B that he is not capable of doing such and Player B responded him with slang word, “weeeh”. Player A replied by using swear word to express his disagreement about what player B tells. They both have intense emotional feelings but not offensive.

### *Humorous Function*

It is at times abusive but sometimes it deals with playful words that cannot offend the listener. The examples of these are the following conversations:

Conversation 1:

0038 Player C: Amigaha ninyo mga buang.

0039 Player A: Mga buang. Yawa. Kinsa mga buang.

0040 Player C: Amigaha ninyo mga buang.

0041 Player B: Mga buang amegaha ninyo.

0042 Player B: Ahh. Yawa!

0043 Player C: Out namo.

0044 Player B: All for warrior. (laughs)

Players used swear words due to excitement and eagerness to win. It is so obvious that they enjoyed the game as they used to swear words without intention to offend others.

Conversation 2:

0057 Player A: Sudla part.

0058 Player B: Ahh. Tura ay. Buang ka.

0059 Player C: Buang ka! Buang! Buang ka! (laughs)

In the conversation, Player A commanded player B to go inside and kill one of them. Player B and C caught one of them and casted all their spells just to kill the enemy.

The two conversations showed that swearing words are used for fun or to heighten their feeling of joy and excitement (Fagersten, 2007)

### *Auxiliary Function*

The use of swear words does not only intend to offend others but to express one's laziness as well. The example of these is in the following conversations:

Conversation 1:

0001 Player A: Tan-awa \_\_. Paabuta ko \_\_\_\_. Kita duha \_\_\_\_.

0002 Player B: Aii. Kuan nalang ninyo pare motora nalang ninyo.

0003 Player C: Bugua ninyo oy.

In the conversation above, Player A insisted a technique to his co-player to kill one of the enemies who's farming gold while Player B opposed the idea. However, player C used swear word, "Bugua ninyo oy" to stress out that he has a better plan.

Conversation 2:

0006 Player B: Yawaa aning \_ oy. Musukol oy.

ISOG KAAYO.

0007 Player C: Nakapatay man, nakapatay.

0008 Player B: Wala man nakapatay, bugua pud aii.

0009 Player C: Mahadlok man diay.

0010 Player B: Alangan kania ra giinitan na hurot na ang kaisog ana ui.

The conversation shows how players communicate with each other while using swear words which are not offensive.

### *The Classification of Swearing Language*

The data gathered were examined and classified according to its usage. The data cannot be classified as to what is offensive or not, what is acceptable or not.

Hence, the researcher used theories of classification by Jay Timothy. The study used ten classifications; profanity, blasphemy, obscenity, vulgarity, slang, epithets, insult, slurs, scatology and taboo.

### *Slang*

Swearing words can be formulated within the context of the environment. We can learn unique swearing words from our neighbors, friends or colleagues from our casual conversations. But using these words are sometimes offensive and sometimes are not, it only depends on how we used it.

0046 Player B: Naka vulca ka, naka vulca ka,  
nakavulca ka ha ha gahi mong duha. Nkavuoca  
ka. Yawa!

0047 Player C: Mura jud nipatay ug tao si \_\_ ba.

0048 Player B: Yawa. Yawa.

0049 Player C: You Fuck!

The excerpt above shows that Player B and Player C used swear word to express their excitement. The word “vulca” is not used in the past century but not it is commonly used in exchange for the word drugs. According to the (The Encyclopedia vol26, 1826. P200e-f), we can create new words that can be part of the new vocabulary generation of English.

### *Epithets*

This is the way of expressing uneasy emotion so that we feel better after using the words. Examples shown below are the following excerpts from the gamers’ conversations:

Conversation 1:

0017 Player B: Dagan na lagi mo didto daan.

0018 Player A: Ha! Unsa mahuman pa lang.

0019 Player B: Hadlok man mahuman.

0020 Palyer C: Out na si \_ . Di naka TP (Town Portal)

0021 Player B: Adik!

0022 Player C: Dagana ninyo.

In the conversation above, Palyer B used swear wrprd, “adik” to emphasize his emotion which is the feeling of frustration because he failed to actualize his plan.

Conversation 2:

0103 Player A: Sugod.  
 0104 Player C: Hay..  
 0105 Player A: Bwesita uie!  
 0106 Player C: Ka lag uie.

This excerpt also expressed a feeling of frustration or disappointment because of the slow internet connection that hindered him to attack the enemy. This is related to the statement of Jay (2000) that using swearing intends to express emotional state that can release our excitement and disappointment.

### *Insults and Slurs*

This type of swearing is used to cause offense or to attack verbally the person or unreal character.

#### Conversation 1:

0001 Player A: Tan-awa \_. Paabuta ko \_. Kita duha \_.  
 0002 Player B: Aii. Kuan nalang ninyo pare motora nalang ninyo.  
 0003 Player C: Bugua ninyo oy.

The word “bugua” from the excerpt is used to express disappointment to his co-players by using offense. This is to further stress out that the speaker is not satisfied with his colleagues’ performance in the game.

#### Conversation 2:

0038 Player C: Amigaha ninyo mga buang.  
 0039 Player A: Mga buang. Yawa. Kinsay mga buang.  
 0040 Player C: Amigaha ninyo mga buang  
 0041 Player A: Mga buang amegaha ninyo!  
 0042 Player B: Ahh yawa!  
 0043 Player C: Out namo.  
 0044 Player B: All for warrior (laughs)

The swearing words used in this excerpt are addressed to unreal character. The enjoyed using swearing to intensify the excitement of the game. Thus, to release the feeling, they uttered the words, “yawa” and “buang”. This excerpt is similar to the study of Jay and Janschewita (2008) that swearing in public is not highly rude or offensive but still the impact of it depends on how it is used in a particular situation.



Conversation 3:

0006 Player B: Yawaa aning \_\_ oy. Musukol oy. Isog kayo.

0007 Player C: Nakapatay man, nakapatay.

0008 Player B: Wala man nakapatay, bugua pud aii.

0009 Player C: Mahadlok man diay.

0010 Player B: Alangan kanina ra giinitan na hurot na ang kaisog ana ui.

Swear words in the above conversation are used to attack the speaker's co-player. Player B expressed his emotion not to the extent of offending someone. The statement above is similar to the study of Trudgill and Andersson (1990). They claim that using swearing words that has different meanings and it shows the relationship between the speaker and listener.

Conversation 4:

0057 Player A: Sudla part.

0058 Player B: Ahh. Tura ay. Buang ka.

0059 Player C: Buang ka! Buang! Buang ka! (laughs)

Swear words in the last conversation are addressed to the unreal characters in the game. Absolutely, words here are not offensive to someone.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Language is an instrument used by the people to communicate each other. This is used in our daily conversations. One of the most important roles of an individual are to communicate and make interaction with other people. Now a days, I noticed that young people with the same age usually used swearing words in their casual conversations but so seldom used by older persons.

Swear words have intended meaning. It may be offensive at times but mostly intends to express one's feelings or emotions in respond to a situation. The used of words particularly in gaming conversations are playful in nature. The players have enjoyed the used of it as elucidated in the previous pages.

According to Locher and Watts (2005), speakers know the distinction between polite words from impolite words. The use of it only depends on how the speaker deliver the word and how the listener perceive it. As observed, swear words used

in the study as taken from the gaming conversations are friendly and playful in nature and did not cause any trouble.

In the light of foregoing finding, the following are recommended that we should be aware the different functions and classification of swearing language, included self-control in order to avoid conflict, we avoid unlocking knowledge about the meaning of swear words in a context, and parent's make an assessment of their children and be more attentive on their roles and responsibilities in guiding them not to use swearing language.

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