Creating Verbal Weapons

A Sociolinguistic Study on Taboo Words and Acceptance in Social Communities

Bachelor Thesis, 15 credits

Halmstad 2018-06-30
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Abstract

This study focuses on the differences between philological and sociolinguistic aspects of profanities, and it identifies and analyses which of the chosen words are deemed offensive, why this has come to be, and the emotional and cognitive feedback connected to them being heard. The research considers the extent to which there is a difference between the genders in terms of profanity use and acceptance and what the changes in the perception of such expressions reveals about their general acceptability.

Furthermore, this research explores why profanities from the English language have been integrated into native Swedish speakers' everyday vocabulary. For this study, nine commonly used profanities have been used in the questionnaire together with seven demographic questions and 11 qualitative questions.

The data collected appears to show that English profanities are popular amongst native Swedish speakers because of the influences from global media. It has been found that males and females use English profanities differently, and that they have divergent views on how acceptable certain profanities are in everyday conversations. Females were more prone towards uttering profane words cathartically whereas males tended to use them among friends as markers of in-group solidarity.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, profanities, taboo words, offensive language
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1. Introduction

This essay will explore the philological and sociolinguistic aspects of profane words, identify and examine which words are regarded as profane, why they are deemed to be profane, how profane they are believed to be, why people use certain ones and not others and their emotional and cognitive responses to hearing them uttered by others. Profanity is a condition or quality of being profane; a profane conduct or speech, and the Oxford English Dictionary defines profane as: “Of persons, behaviour, etc.: characterized by, exhibiting, or expressive of a disregard or contempt for sacred things (esp., in later use, by the taking of God's name in vain); not respectful of religious practice; irreverent, blasphemous, impious; (hence, more generally) ribald, coarse, indecent. Now the most common sense.” (OED Online, 2017). In other words, the use of profanities was originally a behaviour which was directly connected to religion and blasphemy. In modern society, the word “profane” can be more commonly related to treating something sacred with some disrespect, contempt or abuse to be offensive towards another person. (OED Online, 2017).

The profanities that will be chosen as examples for this research are selected to represent taboo words with different levels of acceptance in everyday conversations. They will be chosen to include three categories in the research, where each one contain some taboo words believed to be representative of commonly used English profanities. As previously mentioned, profanities are defined as a speech act designed to disrespect something deemed sacred, often concerning religion. Taboo words, on the other hand, are prohibited or strongly discouraged in relation to social intercourse. Profanities assign certain qualities to make people understand that it might not be acceptable; taboo words refer to phenomena that are regarded as unacceptable objects for discussion and should be avoided since they are considered offensive. There is also a difference between offensive language and profanities.
since something can be deemed highly offensive but, at the same time, not be considered to be profanity.

According to Yule (2014), taboo words are defined as words and phrases not suitable to be used in social communities, that is, words which are considered to be sacred, banned, or just inappropriate. This essay will study how a sociolinguistic approach to taboo words and their effect on society developed from Ancient Egypt to the Modern Age and what the causes or influences might be.

The profanities in this research will be categorised into three groups: body parts, religion, and physical/mental disorders. To class certain words as profane, statistics from Bergen (2016) will be used which include a variety of different taboo words and an assessment of how they might be accepted in society. Through an examination of which profanities might be deemed acceptable, neutral, or unacceptable, by the prevailing social communities' standards as outlined by Bergen (2016), the three groups will be created.

The research in this essay will add to the existing body of research of taboo words and, through close observation of the patterns in social communities and the development of certain words, it will provide a clearer picture of why taboo words are coined and used, and their effects. Thus, the primary aim of this research project will be to examine the motives for using different taboo words and where they come from, while the secondary aim will be to explore how taboo words affect society and behaviour in social communities. The tertiary aim will be to provide a more extensive understanding of taboo words through a sociolinguistic approach through semi-structured interviews conducted with the aid of the questionnaire. Throughout the essay, the focus will be upon English taboo words and profanities, and both a quantitative and a qualitative method will be used.
The construction of the essay will begin with an introduction to the intended research which will be followed by the theoretical background. The theoretical background will provide historical information regarding taboo words and their origins. The remaining chapters of this essay will consist of the methodology, subsequent chapters describing the results, an analysis of the results, a discussion and the conclusion.

The research in this essay will aim to answer the following thesis questions:

- Is English profanity use common amongst native Swedish speakers? If so, why?

- Is there a difference between particular profanities in terms of acceptance and is this difference related to gender?

- Have some profanities become mannerisms (as defined by Crystal & Shirley, 1986) because of language change and development in society?

However, the aims described are extremely broad, and the research will focus on two small aspects: these are the way profanities in English have transferred to, and embedded themselves within, other European, non-English speaking languages, and the relevance of gender to this process.
2. Theoretical Background

Taboo words are connected not only to words that are considered inappropriate for use in particular social surroundings, but also what people tend to use to exclaim feelings, both positive and negative, and proffer opinions regarding particular types of matters. Yule defines taboo as “words or phrases that are avoided in formal speech, but are used in swearing, for example (e.g. fuck, shit)” (Yule, 2014, p.298). This is not, however, the only way of determining what words are to be regarded as taboo. Allan and Burridge (2006) connect profane expressions to how people tend to consider their politeness and impoliteness when being around other people, which can be related to what people believe to be socially acceptable in their current situation. Behaviour in different social communities depends on adaptation and word knowledge. This can be exemplified in how an individual may be inclined to adapt their language when attending church or a student changing their vocabulary when talking to a teacher instead of having a conversation with a classmate. Crystal and Peckham (1986) explain how swearing is necessary to participate in a particular social group which provides a logical reason why people tend to change their vocabulary, depending on to whom they are talking. They argue that that the psychological aspect of swearing is partly to display solidarity with a particular group or subculture, as can be seen with teenagers within a particular community. Crystal and Peckham (1986) explain it thus: “…a third function of swearing – its social function. In other words, swearing shows you belong. When you join a social group, you pick up the language of that group. If you don’t, you remain an outsider. And if the group uses swearing as a marker of identity, then you must swear too…” (p.35). Adapting to the social group through using taboo words can enhance “survival” in that particular group which can explain why certain classes use swearing as an important part of the language and some do not (p. 35). Crystal and Peckham (1986) cite a psychological study involving a group of zoologists on an expedition and they note how this group used more
profanities when they were relaxed and in the presence of others who used a similar type and recurrence of swear-words rather than talking to non-swearers. This study concludes that people have the tendency to want to be part of a particular social group and, because of this, swearing is “contagious” and often reinforced (ibid).

Allan and Burridge (2006) account for how people decide what constitutes taboo language, and what particular taboo words convey, stating: “The phrase taboo language commonly refers to language that is a breach of etiquette because it contains so-called ‘dirty words’. But words are sounds heard, sequences of symbols on a page, abstract language constituents: how can they sound as dirty? The description derives from a persistent belief that the form of an expression somehow communicates the essential nature of whatever is being referred to.” (p.40). Madan, Shafer, Chan and Singhal (2017) enrich the definition of taboo words in the following way: “Taboo stimuli are defined as ‘a class of emotionally arousing references with respect to body products, body parts, sexual acts, ethnic, or racial insults, profanity, vulgarity, slang, and scatology’” (p.1). Furthermore, they attempt to account for how taboo words are used to generate more impact on the hearer with the verbal stimulus, or perhaps to make any instructions or information conveyed by the utterance more memorable, than by adopting neutral expressions of emotion. The occurrence of a taboo word will strengthen the impact of a statement considering how the word or words used are generally inappropriate in a conversation.

The Russian-American linguist, Roman Jakobson, introduced a model for the functions of language during the 1960s which distinguishes six factors of communication that are considered necessary for communication to work properly. The functions are the following, in order: (1) referential ("The Earth is round"), (2) emotive ("Yuck!"), (3) conative ("Come here"), (4) phatic ("Hello?"), (5) metalingual ("What do you mean by 'krill'?"), and
(6) poetic ("Smurf"). (Hébert, 2011, p.1). Each of the different factors is a focal point of a function which is used to operate between the intended message and the factor. Hébert (2011) states: “When we analyse the functions of language for a given unit (such as a word, a text or an image), we specify to which class or type it belongs (e.g. a textual or pictorial genre), which functions are present/absent, and the characteristics of these functions, including the hierarchical relations and any other relations that may operate between them.” [ibid]. When hearing a taboo word, the addressee of the message will, according to Jakobson’s functions of language, categorise the particular utterance or word into a class or type and through that decide further which functions apply. Profanities and foul language are related to people’s almost automatically reflex to use “forbidden” words to exclaim frustration, anger, or other emotional feelings which means that the expressive and emotive function of language is important. Additionally, the phatic function can be related to swearing considering how it can help relationship bonding between people. Allan and Burridge (2006) state: “Language is used as a shield against malign fate and the disapprobation of fellow human beings; it is used as a weapon against enemies and as a release valve when we are angry, frustrated or hurt.” (p.2).

The emotive or expressive function in Jakobson’s model can be related to how a taboo word create certain associations when being received, how the functions operate between the message and the addressee to establish the intended meaning. Hébert (2011) states: “Any semiotic act, then, is indexical in relation to its producer (the expressive function) and a means of signalling to its receiver (the conative function). We could add that is is also an index of the state of the other factors and of the mental image that the message’s producer makes, rightly or wrongly, consciously or unconsciously.” (p.5). The emotive function aids in establishing the message’s intensity and how the receiver should interpret what is being said or written. Together with the other five factors of communication and the different functions
of language, a taboo word can be understood correctly and interpreted the way in which it was intended.

The use of taboo words, or swearing, can be considered a necessity in language, especially when studying it from a sociolinguistic perspective. Crystal and Peckham (1986) argue: “Swearing, whether mild or strong, makes an excellent relief mechanism. It actually helps to turn on the inanimate object that has hurt you and berate it verbally… Or, if you would prefer a more literary allusion, swearing is a way to ‘unclog the heart.’…” (p.34). This mechanism in language is included under Searle’s (1976) five basic kinds of illocutionary acts: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. The emotive, or expressive, function exemplified above can be related to the expressive illocutionary act by Searle. The expressive class is defined by Searle as; “The illocutionary point of this class is to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content” (Searle, 1976, p.12). When uttering profanities, a speech act is performed in the sense that the speaker uses an expressive illocutionary act to deliver the message. Searle explains: “In performing an expressive, the speaker is neither trying to get the world to match the words nor the words to match the world, rather the truth of the expressed proposition is presupposed.” [ibid]. Wardhaugh (2006) outlines how Searle’s focus is on how the receiver is responding to a particular message, to an utterance made by the speaker. The receiver is trying to understand the intention, and the statement made and to interpret it as a warning, a promise, an assertion, a request, or something else (p.288-289).

2.1 The Origin of the Word Taboo

Yule defines taboo terms as being: “…words and phrases that people avoid for reasons related to religion, politeness, and prohibited behaviour” (Yule, 2014, p.263). These words are generally not broadcast on television or radio at peak times or when audiences are likely to
include children. Where they do occur in a dialogue, they are made inaudible by the broadcaster superimposing a bleeping sound over the word in question. This is done both to avoid offending (and thereby complaints) and in compliance with rules imposed by state-employed regulators.

The meaning of the word “taboo”, and what it stands for, might differ between English and other languages, but still often refers to sexual activity, the genitals, and some bodily functions. The definition of what “taboo” is in different countries can vary depending on culture and society. Hughes (1998) states: “Taboos often reveal divisions within a society, there being different conventions according to class, social position, sex, and age. In some societies, taboo terms may be uttered only by the priestly class (as in formal cursing or the uttering of an anathema), while in others they are the sole class prohibited from taboo utterances: it would obviously be most inappropriate, for example, for a priest to indulge in genital swearing” (p.21). Many taboo words are simply used as dysphemism, which will be explained in subchapter 2.5. McGregor (2009) further discusses how taboo words and swearing are not universal and how in some societies, such as in Japan, Polynesia and Malaysia and, among Native Americans, profanity is not a feature of language (p. 22).

Taboo words have changed throughout time, and this becomes more apparent when studying the aspect of what was considered to be taboo words during the Anglo-Saxon period of British history.

The use of taboo words is relative to the social aspects, that is, which social community and class a speaker belongs to and how that particular community and class view various taboo words. McGregor (2009) describes how the relationship between different classes and their use of swearing in English is quite complicated. He states: “Broadly speaking, swearing has flourished most in the upper and lower or working classes, but not in
the bourgeoisie or middle class. Queen Elizabeth I reportedly 'swore like a man', while in
medieval times foul language was designated as 'cherles termes', or peasant talk.” (p.21-22).

Additionally, words with religious connotations are generally regarded as taboo in
many cultures when they are used outside of the appropriate religious context with
expressions such as, “God!”’, alternatively, “Christ!” (McGregor, 2009, p.98). These examples
are described by McGregor (2009) as words prohibited from casual use when he was a child.
This stems from the scriptural precept that prohibits God's names being “taken in vain”.
Taboo words can have different meanings depending on the particular culture within which it
is being used. The associations connected to one word can differ in another culture, creating
cultural gaps which can become problematic if the word used is considered to be a strong
 taboo word. For instance, in New Guinea and Australia, expressions and terms relating to
game animals are considered taboo for hunters to utter [ibid]. There is also a taboo concerning
mentioning the name of a person who has recently died. In some Australian and New Guinea
societies, the definition of taboo includes words that can sound like the name of the deceased.
McGregor (2009) exemplifies this as follows: “In many societies in New Guinea and
Australia, there is a taboo on uttering the name of a recently dead person. In many Australian
languages, this taboo extends to a word that sounds like the name of the deceased. Thus, when
a man named Djayila died at Yirrkala (North-East Arnhem Land, Australia) in 1975, the verb
djal- 'to want' was tabooed, and replaced by duktuks; after a few years djal- started

Many lexical words carry associative meaning and connotations, and a speaker's
choice of a word will convey a person’s attitude towards the direct object clearly. For
example, the word “policeman” refers to an appointed law enforcement officer; however,
terms such as “cop”, “bobby” “fuzz”, “the filth” and “pig” have the same denotation, but
convey other information including, in some instances, the attitude of the speaker to the
referent. Additionally, the words exemplified are slang highly connected to the regions in which they are used. In London, for example, a policeman can be referred to as “the old Bill”, a slang expression only used in this particular city. The difference lies in the additional meaning and the information about the speaker’s regional or social dialect, or to the speaker’s attitude to the object mentioned.

Words can have varied connotations, depending on the particular context of the utterance; for example, the word “scab” does not have any connotation beyond its denotation when it is being used in to refer to a: “disease of the skin in which pustules or scales are formed: a general term for skin diseases, but sometimes spec. = itch or scabies (also, dry scab), ringworm or tinea, syphilis; wet scab, eczema (“scab, n.”, OED Online, 2017). Using the word “scab” as a term of abuse is not referring to the previous definition of the word, instead, “scab” related to profanity means: “A mean, low, ‘scurvy’ fellow; a rascal, scoundrel. †occas. applied to a woman” (“cab, n.”, OED Online, 2017) and, while strongly derogatory, may not be regarded as profane. In contrast, some words can be highly-charged and have exceptionally strong affective values, that is, values caused by emotions or feelings like, for example, “shit”, “fuck”, and “cunt”. These words are generally considered profane, or even obscene, McGregor (2009) states: “They are often called 'dirty' words or 'filthy' words, although there is nothing intrinsically dirty (or for that matter, clean) about them, and there is nothing at all unpleasant about them phonetically or phonologically. (Fuck surely sounds no better or worse than duck, luck, fun or fuddle.)”(McGregor, 2009, p.124). The three profane words exemplified above (i.e. “shit”, “fuck” and “cunt”) are, however, often avoided in English and speakers tend to refrain from using them in “polite company” since they are considered inappropriate in formal, and some informal, situations and using them may convey incivility, impoliteness and even aggression on the part of the speaker.
The word “fuck”, as exemplified above, is viewed in different ways, and this variation occurs among the various speech communities who use English, and it is influenced by both regional and social factors. This word might be perceived as highly obscene in some communities while in others it can be considered to be only mildly offensive and verging on the acceptable in everyday speech. The English vocabulary has, naturally, other more accepted words for the examples mentioned which can be used in conversations; for example, “fuck” can be avoided through using “having sex”, and “cunt” can be replaced with a somewhat formal term, “vagina”. These examples will be further discussed in subchapter 4.1 and 4.4 below.

2.2 Taboo Words and Body Parts

Many modern taboo terms are heavily associated with the human body and the different names for our genders, our sexuality, and sexual acts, including intercourse itself. Colloquial words which denote a male’s or female’s genitals are commonly used metaphorically as terms of abuse, and these words are often combined with the taboo word “fuck” or “fucking”, to emphasise the cursing a bit more. For instance, the word “cunt” is defined by The Oxford Dictionary as; “A woman’s genitals” which is what the literary meaning of the word is (OED Online, 2017). However, “cunt” is often used as a more offensive word than the description in the dictionary; the word can be commonly heard or seen in modern society where the original meaning is subordinated. Calling somebody “a woman’s genitals” can be viewed from a critical discourse analysis perspective, portraying a person as weak because of the CDA perspective of phallocentric power. However, not all terms for body parts are related to this concept as many words are gender neutral and can be abusive regardless of the sex of the referent, or the individual to whom it is directed. The
words “arse” (BrE) and “ass” (AmE) are considered as vulgar slang terms that refer to the buttocks and anus areas of the human body possessed by people of both sexes.

The word “cunt” may be directed towards a person whose character or actions are viewed with the strong disapproval or the speaker. This can be because they are selfish or antisocial and may be applied in an utterance such as: “She is being a real cunt”. The OED defines the word thus: “A despised, unpleasant, or annoying place, thing, or task” and “As a term of abuse for a man” as definitions for the word “cunt” (“cunt, n.”, OED Online, 2017).

Bergen (2016) offers another word which is used in a way that departs from its literal meaning when applied as a profanity. In this case, the word is “cock”, which has a number of homonymic denotations, one of which is “penis”. In the case of British English, the first entry in the OED denotes the word as referring to “a male bird, especially of a domestic fowl” (OED Online, 2017). Bergen (2016) explains the word has been used since AD 890-897, where it referred to the kind of cock that crows, but during the eleven hundred years later, the words originally meaning has gained another denotation due to semantic broadening. In American English, neither the term “cock” nor “cockerel” is used in relation to male birds as the creature referred to would be known instead as a “rooster”. Nevertheless, “cock” does share its vulgar usage as a male sex organ with British English. Etymologically, the word “cock” is defined as: “male chicken,” Old English coc “male bird,” Old French coc (12c., Modern French coq), Old Norse kokkr, all of echoic origin. Old English cocc was a nickname for “one who strutted like a cock,” thus a common term in the Middle Ages for a pert boy, used of scullions, apprentices, servants, etc.” (OED Online, 2017) and it was not used as slang for the male gender until around 1610. Bergen (2016) describes how the denotation of a word changes over time and how it might not have the same meaning as of a word in Late Modern English, stating: “Before cock and dick became profane, they already existed as words but with different meanings. This is true of most profanity” (p.11-17).
According to Bergen (2016), taboo words related to body parts if they are generally ranked with a high degree of offensive connotation; the word “cunt” may be regarded as being one of the most offensive ones. He provides statistical information related to how offensive a word is perceived to be, and if the word is ranked as being unacceptable. The word “cunt” is viewed as especially taboo, being the top-ranked word in two of the three different categories and therefore confirming that the word is socially unacceptable. Language change is a continuous process, and the transformation of the word “cunt” is noteworthy from a philological perspective, considering how the word originates from the female genitals and being a reproductive organ.

2.3 Taboo Words and Physical/Mental Disorders

Taboo words in relation to specific terms such as “retarded” have been claimed to originate from the fear of becoming mentally ill and being labelled as insane (Allan and Burridge, 2006, p.213). Allan and Burridge (2006) exemplify how lay people view psychotic disorders and put an assortment of conditions together which was viewed as being related to insanity; this was perceived as a demonological concept during the 1800s and was associated with abnormal beliefs and behaviour. Furthermore, the fear of becoming insane triggered people into creating a taboo language and Allan and Burridge (2006) state: “The fear of becoming insane is one of the most common of fears felt by normal people, taking equal place with those of cancer and death. This fear continues to inspire strong linguistic taboos” (p.213). In order to explore further how these linguistic taboos developed and were used against others, two expressions have been selected and will be investigated. These words are, or at least were, in common parlance and regarded as usable in technical and medical contexts; they relate, respectively, to intellectual development and physical disability.
The word “retarded” is defined by The Oxford English Dictionary as: “delay or hold back in terms of progress or development” when being used as a verb it is defined as: “A person who has a mental disability (often used as a general term of abuse) (OED Online, 2017). Etymologically, the term can be traced back to the late 15th century French word “retarder” which is described as making something slow or slower or restrain, hold back someone from doing something (OED Online, 2017). The first recorded instance of the noun being used in a demeaning or pejorative sense was during the 1970s in applied American English (OED Online, 2017). Since then, the use of the word “retarded” has spread, and it is now commonly used as a strong and abusive epithet which is synonymous with “stupid person” because of the negative connotations associated with the word. The Oxford English Dictionary states: “…slang. Stupid, silly; foolish; pathetic (sometimes considered offensive)” (OED Online, 2017). “Retarded” is not generally used in its denotative sense any more owing to these colloquial connotations: “dummy”, “stupid”, “foolish” or plain “simple”. It can be considered acceptable to modify an adjective and say that a child has “retarded intellectual development”, but it might not be acceptable to modify a noun relating to a human entity, e.g. “a retarded child”. Using “retarded” as an adjective rather than a noun can be more acceptable because the original denotation of the word is linked together with diagnosing a person’s mental health, not using it to diminish somebody’s intelligence offensively. The Oxford English Dictionary states: “In the formal sense the term is now often avoided, particularly in the United Kingdom, as potentially offensive, expressions referring to learning difficulties and intellectual or developmental disabilities now being preferred” (OED Online, 2017).

Similarly, the word “cripple” has been used as a term with offensive connotations instead of being used only for its literal meaning. This word is defined as; “Cause (someone) to become unable to walk or move properly” or “A person who is unable to walk or move properly through disability or because of injury to their back or legs” (OED Online, 2017).
The etymology of the word is “Old English crypel, related to cryppan “to crook, bend,” (OED Online, 2017) something; however, due to the processes of language change, the word has since become widely regarded as offensive, and its use is discouraged. It can be used in as an insult by pointing out an individual’s flaws or physical imperfections. Not being able to do something properly, or accidentally falling to the ground, may be a reason for calling somebody a cripple in an offensive sense, that is, a person not being able to perform the deliberate act and therefore being marked as a cripple. With regard to this term, Oxford states: “it has now been largely replaced by broader terms such as ‘disabled person’”. (OED Online, 2017) Using the word as a noun to describe a person’s ability to do something physically is considered to be offensive, even though it might be accurate in its literal sense. The use of the adjective derived from “cripple” is most often not regarded as offensive, for example: for example: “Luckily, the man survived the attack, but it left him crippled”. Similarly, its use as a verb is generally acceptable, as with the expression: “he was permanently crippled by the attack”.

2.4 Taboo Words and Religion

Religious swearing originates from Ancient Greek and Latin where people swore oaths in order to create a connection between God as a witness and a person fulfilling a promise, or simply telling the truth. Mohr (2013) elucidates how swearing and oaths are associated with religion and its origin, and states: “For the origins of oaths as we know and use them, we look of course to religion. Or perhaps we should say that for the origins of religion, we look to the oath” (Mohr, 2013, p. 55). Taboo words related to religion began with how the Bible asked the believers to swear in God’s name, or directly towards Him, to fulfil certain tasks expected of them. Mohr (2013) supplies the following example: “For I lift my hand up to heaven and swear…” (Mohr, 2013, p71). The original denotation of swearing meant to make an oath by invoking God as a witness to the truth of a proposition. The
denotation has broadened, however, and it can now also constitute blasphemy bordering on profanity.

Development in swearing and taboo words related to religion occurred as time passed, with denotations changing their original meaning and the use of certain words is associated with direct cursing or an exclamation of frustration. Mohr (2013) argues that a person can use an oath as an intensifier to display his or her frustration regarding a particular topic or action, for example, “For God’s sake, tell us a story!” (Mohr, 2013, p.73). Furthermore, some taboo words connected to religion have lost some of their potency as profane expressions as swearing is strongly influenced by other social trends, making words more or less acceptable because of what is the current mode and how they are established. Hughes (1998) offers this example: “Few people now would stop to consider the protean uses of hell in, say, “hell’s bells!,” “the hell it is!,” “to hell with it!,” “I’ve got the hell in with him,” “we drove like hell,” and “we had a helluva good meal.” (Hughes, 1998, p.19) The point is that these have become established idioms and so cannot be subjected to simple semantic analysis any more than can the phrase “come hell or high water.” (Hughes, 1998, p.20)

The invocation of God in a statement has developed from asking for God’s witness to making manifest one's religious belief for the purpose of expressing discontent or perhaps a need for something to happen faster. In Christianity and Judaism, this exemplified usage of taking God’s name in vain is forbidden by the Third Commandment, namely the one that proscribes blasphemy, which was both a sin and also a crime in law in many western countries until the late twentieth century. Taboo words are, however, sometimes influenced by this dictum in so far as they manifest disobedience to rules as a means of expressing negative or positive emotions. Mohr (2013) furthermore illustrates well-known sentences connected to religion. He states: “People use the divine name today in imprecations like 'God damn it, he
took my parking space!' or a simple 'Jesus Christ', along with the immensely popular
exclamation: 'Oh my God' (helpfully shortened in text-speak to OMG)” (Mohr, 2013, p.62).

Crystal explains that the use of swear-words and their impact has changed over time:
“The swear-words no longer mean anything, literally, of course. They are not even there to
shock (though that may have been their origins). They have become a mannerism.” (Crystal
and Shirley, 1986, p.35). This can be connected to the previously mentioned examples, where
religious taboo words are used in everyday sentences without the intention to be offensive or
even to use the words as profanities.

2.5 Euphemism and Dysphemism

Taboo words are defined as words or expressions that are prohibited or strongly
discouraged by social convention, and they also include raising topics which are to be avoided
in conversations as they are considered impolite, embarrassing or give rise to the offence.
However, this does not mean that people do not try to create a particular taboo language with
the use of other words and therefore gaining the same effect. Wardhaugh (2006) accounts for
this as follows: “Certain things are not said, not because they cannot be, but because ´people
don’t talk about those things´; or, if those things are talked about, they are talked about in very
roundabout ways” (p.238). The act of maintaining one’s “face”, and avoiding direct taboo
language belong under the term “euphemism”, about which Allan and Burridge (2006)
explain thus: “…euphemism are words or phrases used as an alternative to a dispreferred
expression. They avoid possible loss of face by the speaker, and also the hearer or some third
party. A dispreferred language expression is simply one that is not the preferred, desired or
appropriate expression” (p.32). Strictly speaking, euphemisms are sometimes used when a
person is approaching a subject but does not want to use taboo language, or as Mey (1993)
defines it: “talking about something in terms that are deliberately chosen to pre-empt any negative reaction on the part of the receiver” (p.50).

The use of euphemism can often be found in a language where certain words or terms might be considered to be taboo. Gao (2013) broadly interprets 'euphemism' to encompass instances which might not be readily identified as such, and he offers an example of renaming certain occupations in order to enhance their status. He explains this as follows: “Euphemisms make unpleasant jobs more attractive, even the word job itself is called a profession. For example, janitor becomes custodian; sanitation engineer replaces garbage collector; gardener is changed into landscape architect” (Gao, 2013, p.4) Euphemism is a possible alternative when trying to avoid taboo language; however, when and how it is appropriate to use this device, and how much euphemism there should be, is dependent on the circumstances and how the social group interact in the particular conversation.

Dysphemism is the obverse counterpart to euphemism in that it takes polite words and conversations and turns them into a language with heavy taboo influences. Allan and Burridge (2006) state: “…dysphemism is the opposite of euphemism and, by and large, it is tabooed. Like euphemism, it is sometimes motivated by fear and distaste, but also by hatred and contempt” (p.31). Instead of trying to maintain certain politeness in a conversation, the use of dysphemism allows the speaker to emphasise the utterance through the use of taboo words. McGregor (2009) exemplifies how the word “toilet” can be changed into “shithouse” or “boghouse” through the use of dysphemism (p.99), placing a negative perspective on the object in the utterance instead of referring it to a more commonly used word without taboo. A more technical description of the term is “a dysphemism is a word or phrase with connotations that are offensive either about the denotatum and/or to people addressed or overhearing the utterance” (Allan and Burridge, 2006, p.31).
3. Methodology

3.1 The Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach to the research will be necessary in order to accomplish the intended goal of the essay. The study’s focus will be placed on a sociolinguistic perspective, where the participant's relationship to taboo words will be examined. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) state that a qualitative approach will discover: “…what can be learned about some phenomenon of interest, particularly social phenomena where people are the participants (or as traditionally referred to—subjects).” (p.39). The human factor in the research will be important because the study will be based on the participant's experiences with profanity. Additionally, the questionnaire will be devised to establish a connection between the participant and the possible reasons behind the use of taboo words. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), qualitative researchers are: “interested in understanding people’s experience in context.” (p.41). Thus, when investigating people’s perspective of profanity, the qualitative approach will be chosen as it allows the participants to express how s/he feels regarding the subject in different scenarios.

The advantages of a qualitative approach include the fact that it will allow a broader and more nuanced investigation by a researcher who needs to understand the social aspect. Considering how the research will be based on the subject’s experiences, a qualitative approach will be suitable since it allows the research to examine that particular factor more efficiently.

3.2 Participants

The questionnaire will be completed by fifty-four individuals who are believed likely to have a moderate to high proficiency in spoken English. All participants will be native
Swedish-speakers who speak English as L2 (Second Language). The volunteers will be selected such that they will comprise a reasonable representation of the intended Swedish population in terms of gender, age, education, and occupation. The questionnaire will be designed whereby a certain level of English will be necessary in order to comprehend and answer the questions accurately. All the participants will be informed that their confidentiality in answering the questions in the questionnaire will be respected.

3.3 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire will be divided into four parts: the first one will consist of seven questions, focusing on demographics; the second part will compose five questions, one multi-choice answer, three closed questions, and one open question; the third part will comprise five open questions, qualitative; the fourth part will consist of thirteen statements, the will be answers designed as a Likert scale.

The interviews will be conducted through an online link which allows the participants to respond to the questions without the pressure of time. Furthermore, the questionnaire will be designed to examine the use of and responses to profanity, a subject which can offend sensibilities or about which speakers may be reluctant to discuss. For that reason, it was decided to avoid face-to-face interviews, and allow participants to respond discreetly and privately by completing the survey electronically. The research will also benefit from using an approach where the interviewees will be contacted online because it allows the questionnaire to be completed by subjects not limited to one specific geographic area.
3.4 The Questions

As previously mentioned, the questionnaire will be divided so that certain sections consist of demographic, qualitative, and quantitative questions. The most suitable way to collect information might not always be the obvious, according to Wray and Bloomer (2006), the researcher’s goal to gather data is: “…to help the informant give you the information you need, and you must think about whether the questions you have formulated will do that successfully.” (p.155). Hence, questions will be designed to maintain a certain level of interest in order to encourage the subject to continue until the end of the questionnaire.

The questions in the survey will aim to discover the subject’s sociolinguistic perspectives on the use of taboo words. Therefore, there will be a combination of explicit, inexplicit, open, and closed questions asked in order to gain a range of more comprehensive, and thereby more insightful, data. The last part of the questionnaire will consist of statements where the subject respond through choosing one from five alternatives, constructed using a Likert scale.

3.4.1 Taboo Words

The questionnaire will include a variety of expressions which may be considered profanities and where the subject has to determine the level of taboo. The words have been chosen to match the theoretical background of the research and to cover a broad range of commonly used expressions\(^1\). The following profanities have been selected for the questionnaire: “cunt”, “cock”, “fuck”, “retarded”, “cripple”, “God”, “shit”, and “bastard” and these particular words were chosen because they are commonly used, as explained in subchapters 2.2-2.4.

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\(^1\) See chapter 2 for more information.
3.5 Expected Obstacles and Results

As previously mentioned, it is intended that the respondents in the questionnaire will constitute a representative sample of native Swedish-speaker speaking English as L2. Thus, a moderate to high understanding of English will be expected among the subjects, allowing a completion of the survey. Nevertheless, they will be allowed to answer the questions in Swedish if necessary.

The aim of the questionnaire will be to collect data from a demographically diverse range of individuals. The diversity will be related to age, gender, education and current occupation. Having this diversity will be necessary in order that the sample group will be representative of the population, as described in chapter 1. The diversity aspect will also have the advantage in revealing social trends regarding the use of profanity, and establish varying attitudes towards profane words between genders, generations and social status.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data will be recorded electronically through using an online survey programme. After collecting the data, the answers were summarised in a spreadsheet together with a variety of graphs in order to be successfully analysed. The results will then be related to the theoretical background to examine possible connections and draw conclusions.
4. Results and Analysis

This chapter will present the results from the qualitative questionnaire together with an analysis of the participants’ answers. The subchapters have been divided into categories where each one focuses on a particular area of the research. The questions where the respondents were asked to write a longer answer have been analysed and placed in a category that reflects their response the most. Some of the participants chose not to answer specific questions. That does not, however, affect the results of the research in any significant way. The respondents who did not answer some of the questions left no reason why.

4.1 Body Parts – Cock and Cunt

One of the goals of the research was to establish how the use of profanities connected to body parts would differ depending on age, gender, education and employment status. The questionnaire was devised to investigate if the taboo words “cock” and “cunt” elicited different responses when it came to everyday use concerning to the previously mentioned demographics.

![Chart 1 – Attitude towards the word ”cock”](image-url)
In question eight, “In your opinion, how acceptable is the following words in everyday conversations?” the following options were displayed as a Likert scale: acceptable, fairly acceptable, neutral, fairly unacceptable, and totally unacceptable, as can be seen in Chart 1 and 2. The subjects were able to choose the option that reflected their opinion the most. The results indicated that the word “cunt” was deemed more offensive by the majority of the participants, even though the word “cock” also was considered to be a word not suitable for everyday speech. “Cock” was viewed as more substantially offensive to females than males, and older respondents. Nearly all the subjects that chose the options “acceptable” and “fairly acceptable” were young male adults.

The results showed that the respondents who found the words “cunt” and “cock” acceptable, fairly acceptable and neutral were mostly young male adults. Only three females chose one of the three options. The age groups over 30 years old and both genders in this age group answered that they did not find the said words acceptable in everyday conversations.
In question 15, “Which taboo words do you use the most?” profanities related to body parts were used very seldom; only 11 out of 57 participants. All the male respondents who use these terms stated that they were students in response to question 6. This may indicate that the use of taboo words has increased during the last 20 years, as discussed in subchapter 4.5. Furthermore, only one young female adult answered that she used body parts as swear words; the rest of the subjects were young male adults who belonged to age group 20 – 30 years. See results below. The full results can be found in Appendix 2.

4.2. Physical / Mental Disorders

The research also investigated whether the participants found the words “retarded” and “cripple” offensive in everyday conversations. In addition to the Likert scale and the question regarding which profanities the subjects use, the last part of the questionnaire contained two statements related to physical and mental disorders.
The results showed that almost all the male respondents strongly disagreed that it is acceptable to call a disabled person a “retard”. The second statement was designed to focus on whether the word “cripple” is viewed as offensive no matter the use, or if it is acceptable to
use the term such as the example presented above. The majority of the respondents chose the option “disagree” or “strongly disagree”, providing the conclusion that the term “cripple” is acceptable in some contexts. See Chart 4 and 5.

The female participants’ response to the first statements regarding the use of “retard” was almost the same as the males. All respondents deemed the use of “retard” to be unacceptable in terms of offending a particular person with a disability. The next statement regarding the use of “cripple” differs more from the male responses. Almost half of the female participants chose the option “neither agree nor disagree” with regard to this statement. This stands in contrast to the males, where the majority perceived the sentence not to be offensive. See Chart 4 and 5.

The number of participants using physical or mental disorders as taboo words was also deemed low. Four of the subjects presented the profanity “retard”, and only one of them was a female. See Chart 6.

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**Chart 6 – Usage of the word “retard” based on age groups and gender**

The number of participants using physical or mental disorders as taboo words was also deemed low. Four of the subjects presented the profanity “retard”, and only one of them was a female. See Chart 6.
4.3 Religion

The research aims to discuss the relationship between religion and profanity and how the connection between swearing an oath to God has developed into common words in modern society. Using religion in order to curse has lost some of its potency as profane expressions, see subchapter 2.4, which can be found in the results provided by the questionnaire.

The results from question 8, “In your opinion, how acceptable is the following words in everyday conversations?” show that approximately all the respondents consider the word “God” to be acceptable or neutral in everyday conversations. Contrasting the results from body parts with religion indicates that the participants do not view religious taboo words as offensive. The results present no significant difference between the demographic categories regarding the word “God”. See Chart 7.

![Chart 7 – Attitude towards the word "God"](image-url)
Chart 8 – Usage of the word “hell” based on age groups and gender

Chart 9 – Usage of the word “God” based on age groups and gender
The results from question 15, “Which taboo words do you use the most?” show that a variety of religious profanities were used on a daily basis by the respondents, as can be seen in Chart 8-10. A translation from English into a Swedish equivalent of the words “hell” and “damn”, i.e. “helvete” and “fan”, is provided in case the students were less than entirely familiar with their meaning. Analysing the results from an overall perspective, females tend to use religious profanities more than males, especially the word “God”. Furthermore, the questionnaire provided results that present how females use the more acceptable term when swearing in contrast to the males who prefer stronger offensive words. In conclusion, the results that females use the word “God” more than males can be connected with how they view other profanities, using words that are deemed to be acceptable or neutral.
Question 18, which contained a number of statements, asked the participants whether religious profanities were more offensive than body part profanities. This statements focused on common religious exclamations, “Oh my God!” and “Go to Hell!”, in contrast to taboo words which is deemed very unacceptable, “cunt” and “cock”, see Table 13. As discussed in chapter 2.4, McGregor (2009) relates how profanities connected with the word “Hell” have become established idioms. Furthermore, this can explain why the majority of the male respondents chose to strongly disagree or disagree with the statements that the religious phrases are more offensive than body part profanities.

The female respondents to the same question present similar results as for the male ones. The majority find religious taboo words less offensive in comparison to the examples “cunt” and “cock”, see Table 11. Chapter 4.2 discusses how Crystal’s perspective on how profanity changes its impact over time and that swear-words no longer mean anything literally when being used, see chapter 4.2 for the full discussion. Religious profanities have become a
mannerism which can explain why the results show a higher acceptance in everyday conversation for the examples provided in the questionnaire.

4.4 Fuck and Other Taboo Words

The research aimed to investigate profanity use related to the participator’s vocabulary and everyday use. The word “fuck” was discussed in subchapter 2.1 together with a variety of other taboo words, e.g. “shit”, as they tend to appear frequently in other research. As a result of this, both of the words were included in the questionnaire for further investigation together with the word “bastard”.

The results from question 8, “In your opinion, how acceptable is the following words in everyday conversations?” show how acceptable the participants found the words “fuck”, “shit”, and “bastard” in everyday conversations, see Chart 12.

4.4.1 Fuck

![Chart 12 – Attitude towards using the word “fuck”](image)
The results from the word “fuck” showed that the male respondents found it more acceptable than the female respondents. A much higher proportion of the males chose the option “neutral” in contrast to the females who chose the option “fairly unacceptable”. Both the female and the male respondents’ choice of option varied among all age groups; however, age groups 40 – 50 and 50 – 60+ were more prone to choosing the options “fairly unacceptable” and “totally unacceptable”. Most of the respondents who chose one of the three first options had answered the other questions regarding triggers, situations and locations, and it can be seen in subchapter 4.5 that they use profanities among friends. This can be connected to what was discussed in subchapter 2.1, that the word “fuck” is viewed in different ways depending on various speech communities and that, in some communities. It is considered highly obscene while in others it might be acceptable in everyday speech.

![Chart 13 – Usage of the word “fuck” based on age groups and gender](chart.png)

The results from question 15, “Which taboo words do you use the most?”, “fuck” was a popular answer from both genders, especially among the age group 20 – 30 years old.

Considering the results from question 8, many of the respondents answered the word “fuck” as
the word they used the most. The reason behind this might be what is discussed in subchapter 2, that using profanities can have a cathartic effect, used as a way to release tension, and it can also be a way to express solidarity with a particular subculture or social group where one has to prove her/his membership through using taboo words. This is supported by looking at which age group who answered “fuck” as their option, most of the respondents are students and belong to a particular social community where particular profanities are deemed more acceptable and considered a necessity in order to belong.

4.4.2 Shit

![Chart 14 – Attitude towards using the word “shit”](chart.png)

The next word, “shit”, had a much higher acceptance among the respondents and all of the males chose an option which deemed the word acceptable or neutral in everyday conversations. The results from the female respondents were similar to the males; some of them, however, found the word “fairly unacceptable”. The three respondents who considered “shit” to be fairly unacceptable all belonged to the age group 50 – 60+ years old. The results of the questionnaire showed that this particular word was an example of a word that had lost
its literal meaning when used as a profanity. Furthermore, the word “shit” was not considered to a highly obscene one, even though it might have been viewed as one before.

Question 15, “Which taboo words do you use the most?” showed that the participants frequently use “shit” as a profanity, in comparison to the taboo words related to, for example, body parts and religion. The word was written almost as many times as the example “fuck”. Even though the participants deemed the word “shit” acceptable twice as many times as the word “fuck”, the results showed that it was equal to the word they tend to use the most as a profanity. Choosing “fuck” over “shit” as the taboo word most used can be connected with the reason behind foul language, see subchapter 4.5.

The results also showed that the female respondents were more prone to use “shit” as a taboo word than the males. The age groups varied as well, and this indicates that most of the age groups found the word “shit” to be acceptable or neutral in everyday conversations.
4.4.3 Bastard

The results from question 8, “In your opinion, how acceptable is the following words in everyday conversations?” showed that the female respondents did not find the word “bastard” as acceptable for everyday conversations as the male respondents. Only 11 females deemed the word to be “acceptable” or “fairly acceptable” in contrast to the 22 male respondents with the same answer. There was also a higher number of respondents who chose “fairly unacceptable” and “totally unacceptable”, comprising eight females on the first one and two females on the second. The results from the male respondents showed that only two individuals deemed the word “bastard” to be “fairly unacceptable”. None of the male respondents thought the word was “totally unacceptable”.

The results showed that the participants who chose one of the options “neutral”, “fairly unacceptable” or “totally unacceptable” mostly belonged to one of the older age groups, i.e. 40 – 50 years old or 50 – 60+ years old. The reason for the older generations
deeming certain profanities to be highly obscene in contrast to younger generations viewing them as acceptable will be discussed further in subchapter 4.5.

Chart 17 – Usage of the word “bastard” based on age groups and gender

The results from question 15, “Which taboo words do you use the most?” showed that the word “bastard” was not among the most used taboo words with the participants. Only two respondents, one male and one female, exemplified the word as being part of their most common profanities.
4.4.4 Other Taboo Words

Question 15, “Which taboo words do you use the most?” allowed the respondents to answer freely which taboo words they use the most in everyday conversation. The following profanities were written by the respondents: “piss off”, “asshole”, “motherfucker”, “mongoloid”, “fuckballs”, “bitch”, “asshat”, and “gaywhore”. The results showed that the male respondents had a more extensive vocabulary when it came to the use of taboo words. Only two female respondents provided profanities which were not included in one of the other categories.

All of the cited taboo words could be placed under one of the already discussed categories (body parts, physical/mental disorders, and religion). They were, however, mostly compounds of the words in those particular categories. In other words, the profanities often contained two lexemes which were combined to create a more extraordinary taboo word.
4.5 Taboo Words - Triggers, Locations and Situations

The research conducted in this essay aimed to investigate the reasons behind the participants’ profanity use and in which situations and locations they occurred most frequently. In order to create a wider perspective on the matter, the questionnaire included a number of questions of questions focusing particularly on these three aspects.

4.5.1 Triggers

The results from question 14, “What triggers you to use taboo words or offensive language?” aimed to show how the participants viewed profanities. The first five categories have been placed under the same title since they all deal with emotions. The full results can be found in Appendix 2.

![Chart 19 – Most frequent used “trigger” categories based on age groups](image-url)
The results show that the majority of the respondents use profanities while being in an emotional state. The answers provided examples as; anger, excitement, frustration, pain, stress and irritation. Anger was the most used example by all the respondents in relation to what triggers them to use taboo words. This is further discussed in subchapter 2. Only one female respondent answered that she uses profanity to emphasise something and create a stronger effect in the words while this seemed far more common amongst the male respondents. Some of the respondents answered that when they eat something that tastes really good, or when something good in general happens to them, they use profanities as an exclamation, e.g. “Fuck! This is a really good pizza”.

The last category was created to focus on the participants’ profanity use among friends or family. The results showed a difference between the genders as the male respondents were more prone to use a more offensive language when in the company of friends or family. Many of the male respondents answered that they felt comfortable enough around friends which led to greater use of profanity in contrast to the choice of words used at work or in most
environments. The question of how people behave according to which social community they belong to is discussed in subchapter 2 and 2.1, above.

4.5.2 Locations

Question 13, “In what situations/locations do you use taboo words or offensive language the most?” focused on the locations in which the participants use taboo words. The results showed that there were three different locations where the respondents used profanities the most, namely during certain activities, in the presence of friends and family or when something positive/negative happens. The full results can be found in Appendix 2.

![Chart 21 – Most frequent used “locations” categories based on age groups](chart21)

The question of how people behave according to which social community they belong to is discussed in subchapter 2 and 2.1, above.
The most frequent answer was that the respondent used profanities when participating in a sports activity or a similar social activity, for example, video games. Other activities included driving a car, being home alone or being at their workplaces. The male respondents exemplified sports and video games the most while the female respondents were more prone to use profanities at work or when they were home alone.

Question 9, “How often do you hear offensive language at your place of work?” asked the participants whether they heard offensive language at their place of work and how frequently they heard it. The question was devised as a Likert scale, and they offered the following options: “very often”, “often”, “quite often”, “not that often”, “seldom”, and “very seldom”. All the respondents answered the question. Five male respondents answered that they heard offensive language very often at their place of work, in contrast to the females where none of the respondents chose the same option. The second option provided a similar result; “often” was chosen by seven male respondents and only two females. The third option, “quite often” were almost equal by both genders and the last three options “not that often”,

![Chart 22 - Most frequent used “locations” categories based on age](image-url)
“seldom”, and “very seldom” consisted of twice as many female respondents as male respondents. The results from Question 9 can be connected to the theory discussed in subchapter 2 and 2.1, in relation to how females tend to use fewer profanities, especially at their place of work, in comparison to males. The results can also be affected by where the participants work and how divided the genders are at that particular place of work. As discussed in subchapter 4.1, the male respondents said they were more prone to use profanities, and the females claimed they often avoided foul language.

The results from question 18 statements relating to taboo words at work and other people’s perspective on the participants’ profanity use showed the following.

![Chart 23 - Statement 3 from Question 18](image-url)
The statements showed that the male respondents did not agree with them using too many profanities at their place of work. Most of their work colleagues expected them not to use any profanities, an observation which can be related to the male respondents not agreeing with the first statement. Assuming most of the males spend approximately 8 hours a day at their place of work, where they are expected not to use any profanities, the results from the first statement can be related to the second statement.

The results from the female respondents were similar to those of the males; however, the females chose the option “strongly agree” on the second statement twice as much as the males did. The females were more prone to agree strongly with the second statement, where the males chose “agree” instead. The majority of both genders answered that they did not agree with the first statement, but they did agree with the second one.

![Chart 24 - Statement 5 from Question 18](chart.png)
The last of the three categories on question 13 mostly included how the participants accidentally did something wrong and used profanities as an exclamation or did something that made them feel stupid and because of it felt they needed to curse. The positive happenings consisted of the respondents feeling joy in particular locations through, for example, achieving something positive or praiseworthy at work or succeeding with something at home.

4.5.2 Situations

The variety of situations in which the participants used profanities was mostly connected with different locations, see subchapter 4.5.1. The questions were devised to investigate both the participants’ situations and their opinion on other people’s most frequent situations related to offensive language.

Question 18 included two statements regarding the participants’ use of taboo words in public and whether they use taboo words around particular people/environments.

Chart 25 - Statement 4 from Question 18
The results from the male respondents showed that the majority tend to avoid offensive language in public situations and around particular people. Furthermore, the results from question 16, where they were asked to reveal what kinds of situations other people use taboo words, showed that many of the respondents thought it depended on the situation. The male respondents also suggested situations where other people felt emotional, wanted to emphasise something or were surrounded by friends. The results from question 13, the respondents’ situations, closely correlated with what they thought about regarding other people and the situations where they used taboo words the most. The full results can be found in Appendix 2.

The results from the female respondents were similar to the male respondents. They chose “strongly agree” instead of “agree” to the first statement more times than the males did which can once more be related to how the female participants were more prone to avoid offensive language overall in their everyday speech. The females’ responses to Question 13 were entirely different from those of the males; they thought an emotional situation was a much more common reason behind profanity use. Furthermore, the females chose emotional
situations, where the male respondents instead thought that other people used profanities to emphasise a particular point. The females only mentioned everyday conversations as a situation twice, where the males responded with a similar option six times. The full results can be found in Appendix 2.

4.6. English Taboo Words in Sweden

The research aimed to investigate whether English profanities were commonly used in Swedish society and the participants’ responses to it and experience with it. A questionnaire was devised to ask the participants why English taboo words might be popular among native Swedish speakers and to establish whether there has been any noticeable change or increase/decrease in usage over the last 20 years. Three demographic questions were asked in order to ensure and demonstrate that the sampling frame was representative of the population being investigated. The results collated from the responses to these questions were used to relate the respondents’ experiences with regard to their perceptions and use of English profanities.

4.6.1 Three Demographic Questions

The first question asked the participants whether English was their first language. The results showed that 55 of the respondents answered Swedish as their L1 and two respondents answered another language, specifically Romanian and Hungarian.

The second question asked the participants whether they could speak any other languages and, if so, which ones. The results showed that 10 of the respondents did not speak any other languages besides Swedish and that 47 respondents could speak another language.
The languages were: English, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Danish, Persian, Lithuanian, Slovak, Latin, Portuguese, Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Icelandic, and Czech.

The third demographic question asked the participants whether they had lived in an English-speaking country and, if so, where and between what ages. The results showed that 44 of the respondents had not lived in an English-speaking country and the remaining 13 respondents had. Out of the 13 individuals who answered yes, two respondents did not specify where; however, all of these respondents had lived in an English-speaking country between the ages 17 – 27 years old. The majority answered that they were between 17 – 19 years old at the time. The answers included the following countries: Holland, England, USA, Australia, Ireland, and Canada.

4.6.2 English Influences in Swedish Vocabulary

As mentioned previously in this chapter, the research aimed to investigate the participants’ opinions as to why English taboo words might be commonly used in Swedish vocabulary. All but 3 participants chose to answer. The reason for declining to answer the question is unknown. The respondents’ answers were placed under six categories: “media”, “global culture”, “sounds better”, “less offensive”, “to emphasise”, and “don’t know”.


The results from question 17, “Why do you think English taboo words are commonly used in Swedish vocabulary?” showed that the majority of the male respondents answered that media or global culture was the reason for the influences of English taboo words in Swedish vocabulary. The rest of the respondents answered that the English taboo words either sounded better compared to Swedish ones or that they perceived the English profanity was less offensive than the corresponding Swedish expression. None of the male respondents answered that the use of English taboo words was common because they were used to emphasise something. The full results can be found in Appendix 2.
The results from Question 17, “Why do you think English taboo words are commonly used in Swedish vocabulary?” showed that the female respondents had similar opinions regarding the influences from media and global culture. In contrast to the male respondents, more females answered that the English profanities sounded better than Swedish ones. Both genders responded that they regarded English taboo words as being less offensive equally. While the male respondents did not select the answer that the English profanities were a tool for emphasis, two female respondents chose this as a reason for using profanities. The full results can be found in Appendix 2.

Question 18 included three statements which focuses on English influences in Swedish vocabulary and if the reason for its increase depended on media. The third statement was devised to investigate whether the increase of English taboo words was connected to popularity among Swedish youth.
Chart 28 - Statement 9 from Question 18

Chart 29 - Statement 11 from Question 18
The results from the first statement can be connected to the results from question 17 where the majority of the male respondents answered that the reason for the influences was media. Most of the males chose the options “strongly agree” or “agree” with this statement, confirming the results from question 17. The results showed that the participants who did not agree were mostly young male adults belonging to age group 20 – 30. The older age groups 40 – 50 and 50 – 60+ were more confident that the influences came from media.

The results from the second statement showed that the respondents had very different thoughts regarding the matter. The 30 males have been divided into five almost equal-sized groups with different answers. The five groups varied in which age group they belonged to.

The results from the third and final statement showed that 25 out of 30 respondents agreed with the statement that the increase depended on popularity among youth. These results can be related to the development of media and how profanities evolve in order to create a stronger impact, as discussed in subchapter 2 and 2.1.
The results from Question 18 showed that the majority of the female respondents chose to agree with the three different statements. The females were, however, more prone to choose the option “neither agree nor disagree” instead of choosing one side of the scale. In comparison to the male respondents, the females’ answers tended to end up in the middle between two more direct choices. This will be discussed further in chapter 5.

The results from the female respondents on question 18 were similar to those from the male respondents. The younger age groups, 20 – 30 and 30 – 40, chose to disagree more often than the older age groups, 40 – 50 and 50 – 60+.

The results from the second statement showed that the female respondents chose “agree”, “neither agree nor disagree” and “disagree” the most, instead of the male respondents who produced a similar number on each option.

The last statement showed the same results as the male respondents, namely, a high number of the respondents chose one of the two first options, and this confirmed the suspicion that the increase of English taboo words was related to its popularity among youth.

Chart 31 - Statement 8 from Question 18
Question 18 also aimed to investigate the participants’ experience with regard to how the use of taboo words has increased during the last 20 years. The results showed that 22 respondents out of 30 agreed with this statement and the majority of them belonged to the age group 20 – 30 years old. Most of the female respondents chose either to agree or else they chose the option to neither agree nor disagree with the statement. The females who chose the options “disagree” and “strongly disagree” were both young female adults, age group 20 – 30 years. The rest of the respondents comprised a mixture of all the age groups; however, more females who belonged to age group 20 -30 were uncertain and chose the options “neither agree nor disagree”. This was in contrast to the male respondents, where most of the participants chose to strongly agree even though they belonged to age group 20 – 30. Whether the age of the female respondents had anything to do with their choice of option will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.7 Taboo Words and Its Effect on People

The research aimed to investigate whether the participants thought offensive language might affect other people’s view on them and if they looked different on people who used profanities. Furthermore, the participants were asked to explain how taboo words affect their communicative environment, negatively or positively, and this aspect will be explored in the next chapter.

4.7.1 Do You Look at People Differently?

The results from question 11, “Do you look at people differently because they use offensive language and taboo words?” showed that 40 respondents, both genders, chose the option “Yes” and the remaining 17 respondents chose “No”. The examples from the respondents who chose the first option have been divided into eight different categories, four of these categories will be presented in this subchapter. The most frequent examples consisted
of the following: “Image of Person”, “Education”, “Low Vocabulary”, “Frequent Use”, “Depends on the Word”, “Depends on Social Community”, “Depends on Situation”, and “Lack of Self Control”. The full results can be found in Appendix 2.

Chart 33 - Do you look at people differently because they use offensive language and taboo words? Based on age groups

Chart 34 - Do you look at people differently because they use offensive language and taboo words? Based on age groups
The results from question 11 showed that both genders thought that using offensive language made them perceive that particular individual in a negative way.

The image of a person was considered to be portrayed more negatively when using profanities in comparison to a person who did not use any taboo words. The second category included examples where the respondents answered that a person using offensive language was directly related to lower levels of education and intelligence. Many of the respondents, both male and female, answered that the use of profanities showed that a person had a less expansive vocabulary and, in one case, a respondent proposed that using offensive language was evidence that he/she had no fundamental understanding of the language at all. The majority of the respondents who connected profanity use with insufficient education belonged to the age groups 40 – 50 and 50 – 60+; however, more male respondents were inclined to relate taboo words to lack of education.

The third category focuses on how the respondent answered that various profanities should be viewed differently, so the respondents perceive other people differently depending on which particular word they use, rather than profanities in general. As discussed in subchapter 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4, the respondents deemed a variety of taboo words to be acceptable, neutral, or unacceptable in everyday conversations. This can be further related to how the respondents might view other people differently, depending on which word they use and how that respondent views that particular profanity. The results showed that more female than male respondents answered that it depended on the particular word in question: specifically, the results were nine females of various ages and only three males who felt this way.
The last category was connected to the situation in which the profanity was used. The results showed that seven male respondents answered that it depends on the situation while only two female respondents answered the same. As discussed in Subchapter 2 and 2.1, males tend to use profanities more often when in the company of friends or in a particular social community where profanity use is accepted. This can be further related to why more male respondents claimed they perceive people differently, depending on the situation.

Question 10, “Do you think offensive language and taboo words affects how people look at you?” was included to investigate whether the participants thought other people regarded them differently if they used profane expressions. The results showed that 44 respondents answered “Yes” and the remaining 13 respondents answered “No”. The full results can be found in Appendix 2.

5. Discussion

This chapter discusses the analysis and results from the research in relation to the theoretical background and considers the broader implications of the research. The Discussion will include the profanities from the questionnaire, and the chapter will be divided into four sections to match the structure of the essay. It will also answer the thesis questions, see Chapter 1, and relate them to the research and the results. Additionally, the Discussion will investigate the findings more broadly and relate them to language and societal change alongside the implications of that.

As discussed in Subchapter 2.1, profanities related to body parts are deemed to be less socially accepted rather than taboo words connected for example religion or mental disorders. The research in the essay was conducted to investigate the words “cock” and “cunt” further to establish how they were accepted in society amongst a variety of ages and between males and
females. The questionnaire aimed to investigate whether there was any difference between the genders and how often they used the said profanities.

Subchapter 2.1 discussed the possibility that the word “cunt” might be connected to how people used it in order to diminish someone’s strength or lack of masculinity, that is, comparing a person to the female genitals to create the sense that they are weak. The OED defined the word as used as a term of abuse for a man or something unpleasant. The results from the questionnaire lead to the understanding that the word was more commonly used as an exclamation when the participants were frustrated, angry, in pain, or to express disappointment or angst.

The results from the questionnaire showed that both genders found the word “cunt” unacceptable in everyday conversations which can be related to the statistics discussed in Subchapter 2.1. The word “cunt” was proven to be one of the profanities which people, no matter the age or gender, deemed to be the highest rank of taboo. However, the results showed that some males found the word to be acceptable and that they sometimes used it amongst friends because that particular word was considered acceptable in their social community.

The age difference between the participants, both genders, showed that the younger ones, age 20-30, were more prone to find profanities acceptable where the age groups above 30 years old did not. This can be further connected to how higher ranked taboo words have become more commonly used in certain social communities, for example amongst students or working classes. The strict denotation is gradually being relegated and may eventually be absorbed into the lexicon as an item of everyday speech. The frequency and casual nature of its use is likely to rob the word of some of its potency as a profanity in the years to come.

The second word connected to body parts, “cock”, showed similar results as the word “cunt”. However, slight differences were detected between the genders, and this confirmed
which confirmed that the males were more prone to use body parts as profanities compared to the females. The reason behind the males’ tendency to use “cock” as a profanity might relate to the participants feeling more comfortable using their genitals as an offensive word and therefore claiming it to be more acceptable. The results showed that the females had almost no acceptance for the word “cock” in comparison to the males where nearly 50 percent of the respondents deemed the word to be acceptable. The difference between the genders was also significant when they were asked to exemplify which profanities they use the most (see Subchapter 4.1). The connection between the male participants and their more frequent use of taboo words related to body parts was easily established because they frequently answered “cock” and “cunt” while the females did not.

The research showed that there was only a slight difference between the age groups and their use of profanities related to body parts. This finding was unexpected considering how the theoretical chapter discussed the evolvement of profanities amongst generations and that younger people were more prone to use words that are considered more profane in comparison to older generations. The results from the questionnaire showed the opposite to what was discussed in subchapter 2.2, that is, there was no difference between the ages regarding the words “cock” and “cunt”.

The research aimed to investigate the difference between using body parts as profanities and using religious words. Subchapter 2.4 discussed profanities connected to religion and provided information regarding peoples’ habit of swearing in the name of God, the Devil, Hell or Heaven. The results from the questionnaire showed that native Swedish speakers often used religious profanities when cursing and that their examples were mostly connected to Hell and the Devil. The participants were allowed to use Swedish profanities when answering the question concerning which taboo words they use the most. The Swedish words “Helvete” and “Fan” were commonly exemplified, and the direct translation from
Swedish to English is “Hell” and “Damn”. These two words belong to the most used Swedish profanities and are directly connected to religion as they refer to Christianity where there is a Heaven and a Hell. Even though the Swedish word “fan” is directly translated to “damn”, there is a clear difference between the two words. “Damn” is a shortening of the word “damned” which OED Online defines as: “To doom to eternal punishment in the world to come; to condemn to hell” or “The souls in hell, ’the lost’”. (OED Online, 2017).

As discussed in Subchapter 2.4, profanities connected to religion have lost some of its potency as profane expressions. A person yelling “God!” instead of “cunt!” is deemed much more acceptable in the majority of social communities and situations according to the results of the questionnaire. Blasphemous expressions have come to be regarded as idioms rather than obscenities and this can explain why the participants in the research found religious words to be far more acceptable in comparison to the words related to body parts. The research showed that where the male respondents used body part profanities, the females were more prone to use religious words. This might be connected to how religious profanities have developed over time into being acceptable and therefore more commonly used by females who rather not use taboo words at all. Almost all the male respondents thought religious profanities were neutral and accepted in everyday conversations. Only one respondent deemed the word “God” to be unacceptable which might be related to strong religious beliefs.

A pattern was easily found when analysing the data from the results, taboo words connected to body parts was the strong opposite to religious taboo words. In between these two categories, the research investigated profanities related to physical/mental disorders and three recurring profanities commonly used in various social communities; “fuck”, “shit”, and “bastard”. The first category was designed to establish the degree to which certain profanities can be acceptable, depending on how the sentence is constructed and in what kinds of contexts a person may use it. The questionnaire used the words “retarded” and “cripple” in
different questions and statements in order to ascertain if the participants could accept using one or the other. Both of the words originally referred to a physical or mental disorder, but the connotation has changed, and the words can sometimes be used in offensive language. As discussed in the Theoretical Background (subchapter 2.3), it is not acceptable to modify a noun relating to a human entity in order to say, e.g. “that kid is retarded”. Most of the participants in the research were aware of this social rule and answered that both “retarded” and “cripple” were unacceptable expressions. Only three participants exemplified the word “retarded” as one of their most used taboo words. This does not, however, change the fact that the words are commonly regarded as objectionable. The reason the participant’s answers regarding how acceptable it is to use terms denoting mental or physical disorders as offensive epithets might be that people usually consider it to be unfair to use people who are sick or disabled as verbal weapons. The fact that a person with a disorder might not be able to fend for themselves may explain why it is not acceptable to use their disability or disorder as something offensive toward others. Profanities and taboo words can be considered the dark side of language as they refer to words which often are not polite or acceptable in everyday conversations. That is why it might also be a reason to use words that denote mental or physical disorders as offensive and as such they have the capacity to hurt feelings. Through using words connected to disorders, a person can make another person feel as if they are incapable of being normal and perhaps insane, a fear which is discussed in Subchapter 2.3.

The research also collected data regarding how words related to certain disorders might be acceptable depending on the context. An example was used where the word “cripple” was written in a sentence formed as a headline: “She was left crippled after the accident”. The context made the use of the word “cripple” more acceptable than if the sentence had been something like “She acted like a cripple”. In the first sentence, the word referred to a person being physically injured and therefore made it acceptable to categorise
him/her as a “cripple” since it is a medical term. The second sentence refers to a person’s behaviour in an offensive way, labelling a person as a “cripple” through the way he or she acts, not through a confirmed disability. As discussed in the theoretical background, human beings often need some release when they are angry, frustrated or emotional in some way. This release might manifest as the use of verbal expressions which are to a greater or lesser extent unacceptable in society, specifically, words which are considered taboo and offensive. An example would be of a driver yelling “Retard!” at another driver for stealing a parking space.

The two most common profanities in social communities, according to the data collected from the questionnaire, were “fuck” and “shit”. These two taboo words seemed to be viewed as almost neutral words, allowing the speaker to insert the words anywhere in a sentence in order to emphasise or to reveal some emotion. A person can scream “Fuck!” when they stub their toe, win the lottery, become suddenly surprised, enjoy something, or make a statement regarding their opinion on a particular matter. Media is considered to be one of the greatest influences when it comes to profanities, and the word “fuck” is used as an enhancer to express opinions or create the feeling of community. “Fuck” has become part of the everyday conversations and the acceptance of the word is growing, allowing it to be a part of any language without people acknowledging its original denotation and this has been demonstrated in chapter 4. The participants in the research were certain that mass media is the greatest influence when it comes to English profanity use amongst native Swedish speakers. Social media, TV, radio, the movies and the news are all responsible for making the word “fuck” acceptable. People do not react to the word being used in songs, or when people curse during a radio program. It may be received negatively, or suggest to them that the speaker is impolite, immature or even uneducated, but the word no longer assaults their sensibilities as it might have done in previous decades. The more people in the media use profanities casually
and with no evident intention to cause offence, the less potent it will be as a profanity and the more it will be accepted as prosaic language.

The results from the questionnaire showed that females deemed the word “fuck” to be unacceptable to a lesser degree than the male respondents did. However, when they were asked to exemplify the most commonly used taboo words, “fuck” was as frequently answered amongst the females as with the males. Even though the females might consider the word to be more unacceptable, they still use it as much as the males do. The ones who deemed the word to be the least acceptable were mostly middle-aged women and men. This group of people were also the ones who thought that profanity use was directly related to lesser intelligence and poor education. The reason behind this might be that they have not adapted to the age of social media and its influences on language. Younger people did not react to the questions regarding profanity use as strongly as the older age groups; their answers were more neutral and they indicated that they had little concern when profane or taboo expressions were uttered.

6. Conclusion

This essay aimed to ascertain whether the use of English profanities amongst Swedish people differs between different groups of participants, and the extent to which a correlation exists between gender, age, occupation, social communities, and standard English profanities. Furthermore, the essay investigated how profanities in common usage changed their connotation from non-offensive to being considered offensive.

First, a study of the origin of the English words was made in order to obtain a clearer understanding of the following words denotations and connotations: “cock”, “cunt”, “fuck”, “shit”, “God”, “Hell”, “bastard”, “damn”, “retarded”, and “cripple”. The theoretical aspect of
the essay was of great importance, considering how the change in the English language was necessary to understand in order achieve a fuller picture of the creation of profanities. The findings were used to design a questionnaire containing the most common English profanities which were used to collect information from the target groups. The questionnaire contained a mixture of qualitative, quantitative and demographic questions.

The analysis of the results of the questionnaire, together with the theoretical background, provided a conclusion to the research. As a result of increasing social media usage, English profanities are now in common parlance by native Swedish speakers. The participants in the research stated that it is preferable to use English profanities over Swedish ones because it adds more emphasis to their sentences and they are what people in their social communities use. The English profanities have become embedded in the Swedish language in a way that makes the native Swedish speakers use the words naturally. The profanities have transferred from one language to another to the point that Swedish people use these expressions as if these words were part of their own language.

Furthermore, the results indicated that gender has a significant bearing as to which kinds of profanities were used amongst the participants and how frequently. The results from the female participants showed that they were more keen to avoid potentially offensive language overall, deemed many of the given statements in the survey unacceptable and their chosen swear words were less strong. On the other hand, the male participants had no issue with using profanities in their everyday life, and even though they had similar opinions as the females, their answers often inclined towards profanities being acceptable. Additionally, through comparing the results of the questionnaire, it was concluded that the males used many more words which were generally regarded as more offensive expressions compared to the females. The greatest difference between the sexes that was revealed was the frequency of use of profanities, and also the circumstances in which they were used. However, the findings
suggested that the gender difference only applied between younger age groups and that the older age groups showed no difference in results between the sexes.

The findings in this research indicate that younger people tend to use more profanities, mainly originated from the English language, due to more significant exposure to social media. These findings relate to both sexes, although the females use fewer profanities than the males. The older generations expressed almost identical opinions regarding the use of profanities, and this could be related to the fact that they have been less exposed to social media across their lifetimes than their younger counterparts. The expansion of social media, along with a relaxation of linguistic taboos may account for how the younger generation speak and the frequency and types of profanities they use in regular conversations. There was no significant difference between the categories within the target groups, and the main difference that existed was between age and gender.

Considering how the aims in this research were very broad, a suggestion for future research is to create more defined aims and a wider study with more participants where more languages are analysed through the socio-cultural differences that exist. A suggestion for future research is to develop a study that has a way of categorising obscene words concerning their potency or the degree of offence they cause. Additionally, it is suggested to test generational attitudes with regards to different kinds of swear words or taboo words (sexual, intimate body parts/functions, religious, racial, and so forth.).
7. References


Yule, George. (2014). The Study of Language. 5th ed. United Kingdom: Bell and Bain Ltd.


Appendix 1

The Questionnaire

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE REGARDING THE USE OF TABOO WORDS AND ACCEPTANCE IN SOCIETY

Hello,

I am an English student at Halmstad University conducting research on the use of taboo words in different social communities. The questionnaire is based on your personal experiences with taboo words. Please answer the questions honestly, there are no right or wrong answers, and your participation will be treated with full confidentiality.

Obtaining information from you will be vital to my research process, and I would appreciate you taking the time to complete the following questionnaire. Answering the questions is voluntary and should take about ten to fifteen minutes of your time. Your responses will be analysed together with other participants answers and not be identified individually.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the participation in this questionnaire, please contact me through one of the following options;

Email: johaol@student.hh.se
Telephone: +46 723 72 64 18

Thank you for your cooperation,

Johanna Henriksdotter Olsen
Student, Halmstad University
Name: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

The questionnaire will consist of four parts containing questions or statements. Each part will have separate instructions. Please answer truthfully; your participation is fully optional.

Part 1.
The first part of this questionnaire will consist of eight questions where you provide a brief answer regarding personal information.

1. What is your gender?
   
   [ ] Female
   [ ] Male
   [ ] Other

2. What is your age?
   
   [ ] 20-30 years old
   [ ] 30-40 years old
   [ ] 40-50 years old
   [ ] 50-60 years old
   [ ] 60+ years old
3. Is English your first language?  
   If not, please write your first language.

   [ ] Yes

   [ ] No. __________________________


   [ ] Yes. ______________________________________________________________

   [ ] No

5. Have you ever lived in an English-speaking country?  
   If so, where and between what ages?

   [ ] Yes. __________________________

   [ ] No

6. What is your employment status? Are you currently…?

   [ ] Employed for wages. Please specify _________________________________

   [ ] Self-employed. Please specify _________________________________

   [ ] A student. Please specify _________________________________

   [ ] Looking for work

   [ ] Retired

   [ ] Unable to work

   [ ] Other: __________________________
7. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.

[ ] No schooling completed

[ ] High School graduate

[ ] Associate degree

[ ] Bachelor’s degree

[ ] Master’s degree

[ ] Professional degree

[ ] Doctorate degree

[ ] Other: ____________________

Part 2.

The second part of this questionnaire will consist of five questions focusing on your view on some taboo word’s level of acceptance in society.

8. In your opinion, how acceptable is the following words in everyday conversations? Mark your answer through putting an X in one of the boxes on each word.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Acceptable</th>
<th>Fairly Acceptable</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Fairly Unacceptable</th>
<th>Totally Unacceptable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cunt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cock</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offensive Word</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>Fairly Acceptable</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Fairly Unacceptable</td>
<td>Totally Unacceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuck</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retarded</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cripple</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shit</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bastard</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. How often do you hear offensive language at your place of work?  
Put an X in one of the boxes.

[ ] Very often

[ ] Often

[ ] Quite often

[ ] Not that often

[ ] Seldom

[ ] Very seldom
10. Do you think offensive language and taboo words affects how people look at you? 
   *If you choose yes, please develop your answer further.*

   [ ] Yes  
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

   [ ] No

11. Do you look at people differently because they use offensive language and taboo words? *If you choose yes, please elaborate your answer further.*

   [ ] Yes  
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

   [ ] No

12. In your words, explain why you think the use of taboo words affects your surroundings in a negative/positive way.

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
Part 3.

The third part of the questionnaire will consist of five questions focusing on your experiences and actions related to taboo words and offensive language.

13. In what situations/locations do you use taboo words or offensive language the most? Be brief.

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

14. What triggers you to use taboo words or offensive language? Be brief.

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

15. Which taboo words do you use the most?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________
16. In your opinion, in what kind of situation do you think people use taboo words?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

17. Why do you think English taboo words are commonly used in Swedish vocabulary?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Part 4.

The fourth and last part of the questionnaire will consist of different statements regarding taboo words and their usage in social communities.
18. Circle the number that reflects your opinion the most.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calling someone a retard when they are a disabled person is acceptable.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find the sentence, “She was left crippled after the accident” offensive.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People in my surroundings tell me that I use too many taboo words/offensive language.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I avoid using taboo words in public.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My workplace expects me not to use any taboo words.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think taboo words reflect a person’s lack of vocabulary.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not use taboo words around particular people/environments. <em>(e.g. children, older relatives, in church, etc.)</em></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of taboo words has increased during the last 20 years.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of taboo words has increased because of influences from media.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Increasing usage of taboo words or offensive language is part of the development in human nature.

People use English taboo words as much as they use Swedish taboo words.

English taboo words is increasing because they are popular among youth.

Religious taboo words (e.g. *Oh my God!*, *Go to Hell!* ) are more offensive than words connected to body parts (e.g. *cunt, cock*).

Thank you for completing my survey!

Thank you for taking your time to answer the questions and participating in my research.
Appendix 2

Full results from the questionnaire.

| Question 1: What is your gender? |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Answer Options                | Response Percent| Response Count  |
|Female                        | 45,60%          | 26              |
|Male                         | 52,60%          | 30              |
|Other                        | 1,80%           | 1               |
|Answered question:            |                 | 57              |
|Skipped question:             |                 | 0               |

| Question 2: What is your age? |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Answer Options                | Response Percent| Response Count  |
|20 - 30 years old             | 59,60%          | 34              |
|30 - 40 years old             | 15,80%          | 9               |
|40 - 50 years old             | 7,00%           | 4               |
|50 - 60 years old             | 14,00%          | 8               |
|60+ years old                 | 3,50%           | 2               |
|Answered question:            |                 | 57              |
|Skipped question:             |                 | 0               |

<p>| Question 3: Is English your first language? If not, please write your first language. |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Answer Options                                   | Response Percent| Response Count  |
|Yes                                               | 0,00%           | 0               |
|No                                                | 100,00%         | 57              |
|Answered question:                                |                 | 57              |
|Skipped question:                                 |                 | 0               |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 4:</th>
<th>Can you speak any other languages? Please specify.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer Options</strong></td>
<td><strong>Response Percent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>17.50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>82.50%</td>
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<td>Answered question:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipped question:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Dutch, English, French 10. English, French
2. English, German, Italian, Spanish, Danish 11. Swedish
3. Dutch, Spanish, German 12. Persian
5. English 14. German, Lithuanian
7. English 16. English, German
8. English, German 17. German, Danish
9. English, French, German, Danish 18. English, Dutch
19. German, French
20. German
21. German, English
22. English, some French
23. Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian
24. Czech
25. Icelandic
26. English
27. Spanish, Swedish
28. English, French
29. English
30. Swedish, Czech, Spanish
31. English
32. English
33. English, Serbian
34. English, German
35. Swedish, Serbo-Croatian, English, German
36. English
37. English
38. English
39. English, Spanish
40. English
41. Spanish
42. English
43. English, Spanish
44. English
45. Dutch, English
46. English
47. English

**Question 5:** Have you ever lived in an English-speaking country? If so, where and between what ages?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>24.60%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answered question: 57

Skipped question: 0

1. Holland: 0-18 years, England: 20 – present
2. 17 – 18, 27
3. London, age 17
4. USA 17 – 18
6. London when 19 – 20 years old
7. In USA for one year when I was 19
9. USA 17 – 18 yrs
10. No
11. 22 – 23
12. Ireland age 27
13. Canada, 25 years old
14. Canada, 3 months when I was 19
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>14,00%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student</td>
<td>38,60%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for work</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to work</td>
<td>1,80%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8,80%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed for wages</td>
<td>36,80%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Answered question:      | 57               |
| Skipped question:       | 0                |

1. Smartphone repair
2. Yes
3. Teacher
4. Region Halland hospital
5. Yes
6. Student and employed
7. Process operator
8. Hourly
9. Teacher
10. Engineer
11. Group Account Manager
12. Part time employed
13. Employed
14. Construction
15. Teacher
16. IT-specialist Active Directory
17. And work
18. Registered nurse
Question 7: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>No schooling completed</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>36,80%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>10,50%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>21,10%</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>15,80%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doctorate degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12,30%</td>
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</table>

Answered question: 57
Skipped question: 0

1. Gymnasium
2. High school
3. Medical school
4. Gymnasium
5. Civil engineering
6. Will start studying

Question 8: In your opinion, how acceptable is the following words in everyday conversations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Acceptable</th>
<th>Fairly Acceptable</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
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<th>Totally Unacceptable</th>
<th>Rating Average</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cunt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>56</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cock</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3,70%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuck</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2,72%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retarded</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3,86%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cripple</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3,77%</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,86%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shit</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,72%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bastard</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,39%</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answered question: 57
Question 9: How often do you hear offensive language at your place of work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Rating Average</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very often</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>15,80%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite often</td>
<td>19,30%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not that often</td>
<td>28,10%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>10,50%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very seldom</td>
<td>17,50%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answered question: 57
Skipped question: 0

Question 10: Do you think offensive language and taboo words affects how people look at you? If you choose yes, please develop your answer further.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Rating Average</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>22,80%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>77,20%</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answered question: 57
Skipped question: 0

1. I hardly swear at all and it’s part of the image that people have of me. My personality has got nothing to do with me swearing or not, but people tend to count the fact that I don’t towards their overall evaluation of me. People get really shocked when I do swear. It has a real impact.
2. Less educated.
3. Pointing out you have a poor vocabulary.
4. If it is used inappropriately.
5. In a negative way.
6. Lack of self control, brash and disregarding of circumstances if used extensively.
7. Everything we say affects how people see us in one way or another. Even if it’s not the particular words themselves it could still be the way we say them. I’m sure I don’t have to make examples of words that can both be used as descriptive in one context and offensive in another seeing as one of the previous questions had a few of them.
8. A poor language including excess of offensive, taboo words, create a bad picture and personality of the person it concern.
9. Use the language you feel is right for you.
10. Lack of education.
11. Some people will find it offensive.
12. If I as a teacher use words like this on my job I wouldn’t be “popular” around my colleagues or students.
13. Using these taboo words can make you look very ignorant, and rude.
14. For example my brother’s Christian wife doesn’t like swearwords so I feel bad if I happen to say shit or god…
15. A couple of years ago some groups of people used those words to look “cool”. Now I would say overusing those words sounds like a bad habit and sometimes sound stupid.
16. The use of taboo words implies that a person is lacking common sense and having difficulties with self-control.
17. It gives an insensitive and negative impression.
18. It depends on expectations and your education.
19. Using words that targets a certain group of people in a hurtful way, like retard or faggot for example would probably make people feel bad and uncomfortable around me.
20. Åtminstone en gång har folk blivit MYCKET förvånade då jag svor (trots att jag gör det rätt ofta…).
21. They won’t take me seriously and they make negative assumptions about me that isn’t true.
22. Some people would get disgusted and offended whilst others share the same humour and feel more at “home”.
23. Language is a tool to have power and be accepted in some kontexts.
24. You appear uneducated and rude if using this type of language.
25. Depends on what words.
26. There are people who is really against offensive language and taboo words and if you use them and they hear you they will think you’re completely stupid and don’t have a brain to use for formal language.
27. I think people will look down on you. They will think that you are low educated and that you have a very limited vocabulary.
28. I think it affects how people look at me, but the important part is knowing when to use taboo words and when not too.
29. Poor language.
30. Man framstår som mindre intelligent och upplevs ofta som om man har ett smalt vokabulär.
31. Probably in which situation I use it.
32. Educated people do not use taboo words.
33. People in general are more prone to judge you negatively if you use offensive language regularly.
34. It gives the picture that I can’t express myself without using curse-words.
35. And no. Depends on you think its offensive. Peoples experience and also how concerned they are to the norm or and they have ego/famely to defend. It’s a differenc to be a duche and saying the wrong word. You are right to have wrong and your wrong to be right.
36. Well if you curse a lot then that may be a show of immaturity.
37. People that use cusswords are often seen as dumber or bad.
38. Some people think it is an unattractive quality.
39. It sounds bad and gives the wrong reflection of me.
40. Poor language, low education.
41. I’m not PC.
42. How you are as a person.
**Question 11:** Do you look at people differently because they use offensive language and taboo words? If you choose yes, please elaborate your answer further.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Rating Average</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>70.20%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answered question: 57

Skipped question: 0

1. I think it depends on how often you use them but if swearing is part of your everyday, normal vocabulary, then yes, I think it influences how others look at you. You could come across as not caring about things that others might find offensive, not caring about being "politically correct", and swearing all the time is just really not that attractive in a person.

2. Less educated.

3. If it is used inappropriately.

4. Some words are very offensive which makes them inconsiderate.

5. Lack of self control, brash and disregarding of circumstances if used extensively.

6. Even if the offensive words specifically targets people that are not around to hear them at the moment (racial or homophobic slurs for example) it would probably still make me look at the people saying them differently, sure.

7. In some cases, yes.

8. Bad language is not a plus in most cases.


10. Depends on situation.

11. Depends on which words. If you just curse it’s okay but if you use it to offend someone it’s not okay.

12. Usually people who curse a lot have a bad vocabulary, or rude.

13. Depends on levels of words… the words I use myself seem ok…

14. Most of the times what is said doesn’t sound as “smart” or interesting compared to using describing adjectives.

15. See above.

16. It gives a bad first impression and I find it difficult to be around such a person.

17. I guess, I believe that don’t think before they speak, it is respectless sometimes.

18. I can’t hang with people who discriminate through words or jokes, especially since I myself are a targeted minority.

19. Skulle jag höra någon kallas bög/flata/etc. skulle jag inte kunna komma överens med dem. Mer generella svordomar förändrar inget.

20. As above.

21. Taboo language is used by funny people I would like to hang out with. I’m positive its considered faul by others.

22. I think they are not educated and in a way more stupid. People that have been reading are smarter. If you reed you get better language.

23. See answer above.

24. Depends on what words.

25. I think they come across as low educated with limited vocabulary.
26. See answer at question 12.
27. They do not have much vocabulary.
29. Depends on when and where they use is as my answer above.
30. Educated people do not use such words, they express themselves differently.
31. Similar to the above anser. My view of people using that kind of language regularly, becomes less positive.
32. Some people are just really rude.
33. Depends on the words of their choice, if a person uses really in-appropriate words it gives me the feeling that they lack education.
34. And no. Depends on the situation. How much you know about the situations of the people in the room.
35. But it depends on what words they use, some words should not be used because they are offensive to other people. Naturally that makes me react.
36. It depends on who is using the offensive language and in which situation.
37. Sometimes, wondering why they can’t choose other “good” words instead.
38. Same answer as question 12.
39. Depending on how bad/strong the words are.

| Question 12: In your words, explain why you think the use of taboo words affects your surroundings in a negative/positive way. |
|---|---|---|
| **Answer Options** | **Rating Average** | **Response Count** |
| | | 52 |
| Answered question: | | 52 |
| Skipped question: | | 5 |

1. I think a lot of offensive language creates a harsh environment, like you just don’t care about you language and others people. Words are far more powerful than you think and people forget this a lot, in my personal opinion. I think there are no positive effects from using offensive language.
2. Society is coming apart.
3. To often use of taboo words generate a respectless society.
4. See above.
5. I can’t say. I only react negatively when used extensively around young children but on the other hand they always learn the taboo words regardless so I feel it’s a thing you’ve simply learned to repeat, ie not to swear around young children. Swearing often takes the edge off taboo words and I see it as devaluing the words. It “should” be used to create attention around a certain situation or subject rather than spewed effortlessly.
6. Overall I think using swearwords make some people uncomfortable and even though I personally use them a fair bit I avoid it in certain situations. Targeted personal slurs are kind of a different matter than just generic swearing and I avoid these entirely because it just seems so unnecessary. I guess that if you are a person who often find yourself in “shouting matches” it could be one of the very few times it could be useful to have an arsenal of insults and slurs ready to go.
7. A offensive language, show in most cases, a lack of education in early years school. Important with good quality, a large store of Words. Without quality in your home language it will be hard to succeed in further job career etc.
8. Brry mig ej om vilka ord som används utan m kontexten de används inom.
9. Most of the time it’s not welcome. It depends on the time and people.
10. Negative therefore, it indicates low level of education and lack of vocabulary.
11. Depends on circumstances.
12. I love me some taboo words. Us swedes love da AMERICA, we love the English language, no wonder we say fuck all the time.
13. In serious situation the use of taboo words get inappropriate and the surrounding people may think that you don’t talk appropriate. In everyday language people usually don’t react.
14. It can create bad mood if your hanging with your friends. In school it is not very appricaited to curse, in general I try not to curse as much, but it happens, usually when im angry or hurt myself.
15. There is nothing positive about it really but for example I know an old doctor and an old priest who swear and that makes you feel like they are human too… high level swear Words make me uncomfortable.
16. Try to stay away from them if possible. Im using some of them due to bad habit, trying to stop.
17. Kids get a bad example of how you shouldn’t behave With a wide vocabulary taboo words could be intirely left out.
18. It’s a person without respect for fellow human beings or a person with por self-esteem.
19. Eg cripple is offensive to people with some sort of handicap. So its unnecessary I think to say.
20. How you interact with other individuals and depends on trends in society.
21. It builds to the bigger picture. The jokes, the words, they are all a part of something bigger. I’m not talking about “shit” or “fuck” but racist slurs for example just feeds the everyday racism who then feeds the real dangerous racism who costs people their lives still to this day.
22. Vissa svordomar funkar bra för att förstärka poängen man försöker framhåva, och kanske få folk att känna sig lite avkopplade eftersom det inte är lika mycket press på hur man uttrycker sig. Andra pekar ut/diskriminerar folk (skulle aldrig kalla ngn bögg eller blatte, tex) och påverkar därför omgivningen negativt. Allting beror på ”kontexten”.
23. To use derogative statements will only take away from what you want to say. You don’t need to belittle others (by calling them retards etc) to get you point across. I think it’s more difficult to be taken seriously if you have to put others down in trying to explain something.
24. Positive: with the help of taboo Words you can really verbally express how you feel. Negative: people might take it offensive.
25. I just did!
26. If used in to emphasize meaning or strength of a statement I feel its okay to use most “taboo” words, but not to call someone something offensive.
27. It’s like pollution. Hard to avoid but makes it less nice to be around.
28. Gives a more honest impression.
29. You have to respect your surroundings, to use these words make you look uneducated and disrespectful and people do not get any confidence in you.
30. It is not polite to swear, an occasional fuck, shit or fan is acceptable. Amongst friends it’s okay to say some taboo words ‘cause they’re your friends and you can be yourself with them, it depends on the people and the words. Even saying retarded to a friend is fine if they’re not retarded and you’re just saying it as a joke (not 100% okay cause you shouldn’t make fun of people but still).
31. Depends on what situation you using them in, if you say it to someone it can be in a negative way but if you say like fuck or shit when you drop something or something else then it’s more in a neutral or positive way.
32. I think people mainly use taboo words, when they are angry or sad, so when you hear taboo words you get this negative connotations.
33. Some might say it’s a sign of “dåligt ordförråd” as we say in Sweden, some do however point towards the opposite. I do think a lot of words can be exchanged to others, but there is a certain amount of liberty in using taboo words.
34. Because the words are negative.
35. Jag tror att all form av språkbruk medför en utveckling av kulturen. Flera ord som förut bar en negativ klang uppfattas nu som allmänt neutrala eller rent av positiva ord.
36. If I use it when I am at board meetings they would probably don’t take me seriously. When I am with my friends and joke around then they would see me as open and friendly and can take a joke.
37. It’s rough words, offensive with negative sounds.
38. I think people judge other people a lot, based on what kind of language they use, and because they often connect language use with personality.
39. I’m a construction worker so offensive languages is heard pretty often, I don’t think negative about I though. At home I don’t hear it quite as much, in a positive way!
40. In a negative way is because if you can’t use a language without using these words at all you don’t really know the language through my opinion.
41. You are with this question emplying that its a right and wrong to say something. This is the problem not what is said. The self image “of offended” people should not include the freedom of speech. If you say something offending. The worst thing is that you can learn something new. To day you have to be offending to get trough the noise. Nothing wrong or right in feelings. Its how we humans comunicae =).
42. The positive part is that you get a good time with friends but unfortunately some people don’t know when not to curse and therefore it gets a negative effect.
43. Again, it depends on the words. But when someone uses words that offend or discriminate against people, that should not be acceptable. Even if the person doesn’t think so, other people may interpret the word differently and it can really hurt people.
44. The use of taboo words has been integrated to a major part in our day-to-day language. And as such it does not affect my surroundings negatively.
45. In no way.
46. Some people can be offended when hearing taboo words and might react badly towards the people uttering them.
47. People unfortunately use offensive language in the wrong environments and in front of people they do not know, not giving jack shit about what anyone thinks. Personally I rarely use any offensive words, if I ever do it is in front of people who know that I wouldn’t use them to hurt anyone.
48. If affects the energy around us badly, and bad energy always goes wrong. It also creates a lot of misunderstandings.
49. It can make people sound rude.
50. Negative: Less respect between people. Positive: None.
51. Banter, you need to adjust tone accordingly.
52. They mostly affect the surroundings in a negative way since people often use them to complain or to be rude to someone.
**Question 13:** In what situations/locations do you use taboo words or offensive language the most? Be brief.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Rating Average</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipped question:</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. In private, when I’m really upset, usually when no one else is around.
2. In a work environment with both sexes present.
3. Stress situation or someone make me pissed off.
5. When upset, hurt or attempting to convince others.
6. Informal with close friends.
7. Swearing in frustration for whatever reason is probably the most common and I guess the location could be anywhere.
8. Excited, angry, strong engagement situations.
9. I vänner sällskap och vid tv spelande.
10. With friends.
11. When I get really angry.
12. Sometimes when joking or when I’m really angry.
13. When I get hurt or mad at someone. Usually around friends.
14. With friends online and IRL.
15. In situation when talking with people of the same age and who you know well in non-professional company.
16. Soccer games, in the kitchen, sometimes I curse at my dog when she is behaving bad, while driving also occurs.
17. When agitated, surprised, in pain…
18. In sport activities.
19. When I’m disappointed with myself When the kids are somewhere else.
20. If I’m at home and an accident happens.
21. When I am with friends.
22. I curse a lot, I say fuck and shit and cunt and cock probably everyday. Mostly at home, because I don’t think my boss would like if I used that language at work. But as I said, words and jokes that are racist, sexist, homofonic, transphobic and exetera is something I would never use.
24. When I watch football (soccer), when I injure myself.
25. School when I get angry, in traffic.
26. At work.
27. To emphasize.
28. When I am alone and have some accident of any kind.
29. Friendly banter.
30. At home, among friends. In surroundings where you feel “safe”.
31. With friends and people I know.
32. I mostly say shit to myself when I forgot something or if something’s happened. I never say them in formal things or to people.
33. I use taboo words mostly when I am angry or sad. But also when I am playing video games with my friends and I am losing something isn’t going my way, in this instance I aint actually angry or sad, its more just the type of language me and my friends use when playing video games…
34. Anger
35. When angry.
36. Personal situations with friends and my spare time.
37. When I am surprised or angry.
38. I en inre vänskapskrets eller vid chockande upplevelser.
39. When i am with my friends.
40. When I’m angry. When I fail with something.
41. I seldom use that kind of language, and for me it’s not location bound. If I do, it’s because I’m upset over something, or if I feel stressed and/or angry.
42. Injuring myself, doing something wrong or playing a game.
43. I use offensive words when I feel pain physically.
44. In play.
45. Everywhere (very discreet when out on the streets or other public areas).
46. With my friend, I never cuss around my family or in my workplace.
47. When I’m angry.
48. All day.
49. In my home or with my closest friends whom I know won’t be offended by the words.
50. Infront of friends and family (or by myself, obviously).
51. Internal with friends.
52. When I mess something up.
53. When I get angry, upset. Angry at myself if I did something stupid. Upset specially when I’m driving. Sometimes when I get angry at anyone in my family.
54. Together with close friends.
55. When I am alone and angry.

### Question 14: What triggers you to use taboo words or offensive language? Be brief.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
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Answered question: 56

Skipped question: 1

1. Emotions.
2. With my mates.
3. To make my voice better heard.
4. Friends.
5. Strong emotions, anger.
6. Pain, stress, irritation, anger, frustration.
7. Mostly frustration as mentioned above.
8. See question 15.
9. Ilska och humor.
10. To put some extra colour to the story!
11. I lose my temper.
12. See above question.
15. To emphasise the meaning of something instead of using a word as “very” instead. Also when other use it frequently as well as to express frustration.
16. Haha my mood, if im in a bad mood, I curse more often.
17. See above.
18. When I get too excited and I don’t have time to think through what im about to say.
19. Anger, pain.
20. If I cause something stupid!
21. Privileged white people who shoes no empathy.
22. When I am angry or in distress.
23. Sex, aggression and really good food.
26. When something bad happens or when someone is annoying me.
27. Comedy.
28. Anger or frustration.
29. Pain, unluck or if being treated badly.
30. Discussing poor performances of others with close work friends.
31. When mad at someone, when joking with friends, When I make a mistake.
32. It comes easier in Swedish in English it sounds much more terrible so I don’t really use many taboo words.
33. If I were to get really angry which rarely happens.
34. Rage or videogames I guess.
35. Anger.
36. Anger.
37. Anger, suprises, irritating events.
38. When I get angry.
39. Ilska, stress, smärta eller för komisk effekt.
40. I don’t know but it feels relaxed when you use it.
41. Obedience, indiscretion.
42. If I’m upset over something, or if I feel stressed and/or angry.
43. Anger and frustration.
44. When I feel physically pain. Driving.
45. To provoke people to act. Sometimes it’s fun to play the roll of a duche.
46. Joking, stress, frustration and pure anger and sadness.
47. When I feel strongly about something, when I’m annoyed etc.
48. Sometimes frustration.
49. If I get hurt in any way.
50. If I drop something or hurt myself I might say “shit”, or I might say “oh God this is good” about delicious food.
51. When I want to amplify neutral words with not enough feels in them.
52. Nothing, I am not a fan of those kind of words.
53. To express my feelings.
54. Same as question 15.
55. Funny way to express yourself.
56. Anger and frustration.

**Question 15:** Which taboo words do you use the most?

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Answered question: 55

Skipped question: 2

1. Shit, fuck, bastard, hell.
2. The above mentioned.
3. Shit, pissed off and fuck it.
4. Shit, fuck and God.
5. Fuck, shit.
6. Retard, fuck, shit, bastard, asshole, dick, cunt,
7. Just the most common ones. I’m not that creative.
8. Fan, skit!
10. None.
11. Fuck.
12. Shit, fuckballs.
14. Fuck.
15. Shit, fuck.
16. Fuck, fitta, fan, shit and helvete.
17. Oh god, oh shit.
20. Swedish ones like; fan jäklar.
22. Shit, God and Fuck.
23. Fuck and shit.
25. Mostly Swedish words (fan, jävlar, pissihelvete), if it’s English words: fuck, shit and bitch.
26. Fuck, shit.
27. Rövhål.
29. Shit.
30. Swedish equivalents of retard, idiot, fuck, shit.
31. Shit, oh my god, etc. I don’t consider God as a taboo word even though the subject might be.
32. Shit, God and sometimes fuck.
33. Fan och helvete. (fuck and hell).
34. Fuck.
35. Fuck.
36. Fuck, cunt, god.
37. Shit.
38. Fan, keken, rövhatt, papplodis.
39. Cunt, fuck and mostly random slang for those words.
40. Fuck.
41. “Förbannelse”, “förbannat”, “skit och elände”.
42. Fuck, shit, gaywhore and motherfucker.
43. Damn, shit and fuck.
44. Fuck, fuck you, motherfucker and bitch.
45. Fuck probably, but mostly Swedish cusswords.
46. Fuck.
47. Pussy.
48. “Shit” or “God”, “Fuck” can also slip out sometimes, but never towards someone, only at things happening to myself.
49. “För fan/helvete” :D
50. Shit.
51. Fuck.
52. OMG.
53. Retard, dick.
54. Fuck and damn.
55. Retard, dick.
56. Fuck and damn.

**Question 16:** In your opinion, in what kind of situation do you think people use taboo words?

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<th>Answer Options</th>
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<tr>
<td>Answered question:</td>
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<td>Skipped question:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. Any situation above or below your normal emotional state, although I think usually in emotional situations that are negatively charged.
2. It depends on their social background.
3. Stressed situation and in sports.
4. When they are mad or sometimes banter with friends.
5. Trying to make a point.
6. Pain, stress, irritation, anger, frustration, to get attention.
7. I think the situation I mentioned before is the most common for most people.
8. See question 15.
9. Vid ilska och saker utanför normen som då något fantastiskt eller oväntat sker.
10. When they are angry.
11. See above.
12. All the time.
13. In frustrated, angry or upset moods.
14. When theyre stressed.
15. Relaxed, non-professional, frustration situations.
16. Do relieve anger or sometimes it just pop out even if the person didn’t mean to say it.
17. Different situations for different people.
18. People use them in groups. When they have a hard time with the language.
19. In a wide variety of situations, unfortunately.
20. At frustrated situationsTo hurt someoneIf you feel bad yourself or have a bad day.
21. When angry or wanting to impress.
22. When they are stressed.
23. When they are angry, when they hurt themselves or loose a competition or something.
25. It totally depends on who you’re talking about. I think teenagers use these kind of words in everyday life, when you become a parent I think most people try to avoid it. I think it hoppens in anger or when someone hurt themselves.
26. When they get angry.
27. In comedy and angered situations.
28. To emphasize.
29. When they are angry.
30. Most often to express anger.
31. Mostly among friends, not often when interacting with colleagues or other more “unknown” people.
32. With friends.
33. When they forgot something or drop something or do something wrong and found out after quite some time.
34. I think people mostly use it around people they know very well….. I think its just a small percentage that use taboo Words out in open society.
35. To express feelings.
36. When they lack better words.
37. Anger and/or daily speech.
38. Som uses them all the time.
39. Som kraftord I olika situationer. En effektiv teknik som jag har upplevt är att flera av mina nya chefer gärna slängt in ett ”fan” eller ”jävla skit” vid ett första möte för att positionera sig på en likvärdig nivå.
40. As I do with friends or when they are very angry.
41. When they are angry.
42. Difficult to pinpoint. People differ, personalities differ, and context differ. I think it can be any combination of those aspects.
43. Anger and frustration.
44. To express stronger feelings, instead of saying: “I feel marvellous today” they say “I feel fucking great today”.
45. Where it’s a listeners to think its taboo. If no one think it is taboo, is it och is it not taboo?
46. Gaming, arguing, sports events and when watching tv.
47. It depends on the people, but mostly in informal settings.
48. Stressful environment.
49. When they get angry.
50. When they hurt themselves, drop something, or maybe to express something, like my example with the food.
51. Either in discussions where people lack knowledge or to amplify otherwise very “neutral words”.
52. First reaction.
53. When they are upset.
55. Anger, lack or other powerful words.
56. When they wanna be offensive or are very angry.

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<th>Question 17:</th>
<th>Why do you think English taboo words are commonly used in Swedish vocabulary?</th>
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1. I’m not sure, I haven’t lived in Sweden, although it’s my mother tongue. I would guess media, and people being exposed to a lot of offensive language via media because it’s less censored than it used to be.
2. They sound cool and less offensive than their Swedish equivalence.
3. Movie, tv, etc.
4. Have not thought about it.
5. Because Sweden is very influenced by English.
6. Better variation of words and heavy cultural influence from TV, music and other English media. Can be used and understood more universally.
7. This question is asked in a way implying that they are and I don’t even think that is really the case except for the word “shit” but maybe it’s just not that common in my demographic and that’s the reason I’m not aware of it. However, on the internet English is fairly common means of communication since Swedish won’t get you that far and I will grant you that when Swedish people write and speak English they might use it’s taboo words too but I don’t think that is equivalent to “used in Swedish vocabulary” But just assuming this is the case I guess it comes down to that the united states in particular has a very influential culture with their huge exports and movies and media in general and it makes sense that the language of this media is appropriated by it’s consumers to some extent.
8. I think the answer here is television, movies etc. we are strongly effected by English and American culture. More and more we import parts of the English language. Also taboo words.
9. Global kultur, i sverige tar vi del av engelsktalande filmer och musik där orden används.
10. TV / films.
11. We are close to the English culture.
12. MTV and internet (youtube).
13. They seems “stronger” and more effective.
14. Cuz we love da America.
15. The presence of English media, TV and common use of taboo words there. It doesn’t sounds as bad to use an English taboo word as Swedish.
16. Because Swedish taboo words are not very heavy and English is more heavy.
17. It sounds even worse in Swedish…
18. Sounds better. We look at English tv / movies / computer games.
19. They are in a way less taboo than there Swedish translations.
21. Tv etc.
22. You get expression from American movies or it’s hard to translate.
23. Swedish curse words are nowhere near as satisfactory as English curse words.
24. Manga använder svordomar för att vara rebeller gentemot äldre personer, t.ex. föräldrar. Lite svårt då föräldrarna själva använder samma svordomar!
25. We have subtitles on TV-shows and films, which means that we’re exposed more to English. We’re used to speaking English, we use a lot of others English words as well.
26. We are indoctrined from American tv shows from childhood.
27. To emphasize.
28. We have been watching English films and tv-series.
29. We are strongly influenced by English media.
30. Because the use of social media, YouTube, and other media that was not available 20 years ago.
31. Some sound much worse in English than in Swedish and mostly it’s because of TV, we’re constantly surrounded of English everywhere.
32. Sounds better in English?
33. I think we are very influenced by TV, internet, Movies and videogames etc.
34. It’s easier to get away with than Swedish words of the same kind.
35. Do to our excessive use of the English language in our daily life. It’s everywhere. A good example is the fact that we don’t translate English movies or games to Swedish.
36. Because we know the language good and it sounds better than Swedish.
37. Amerikansk kultur har påverkat oss länge och lär göra det långt in i framtiden. Någon sa en gång att Sverige är det mest amerianska landet i världen och att USA kommer på andra plats.
38. I think it feels more powerful to say the Swedish words than the English once and that’s why people use it more often.
39. I don’t know.
40. Perhaps because an English taboo word doesn’t sound as direct, or as bad, as when using a Swedish taboo word?
41. Because English is a language that is used all around the world.
42. Cause the Swedish language sounds so nice, and when people want to sound tough they mix in English words.
43. Culture from hollywod.
44. To be honest no idea.
45. Because we are influenced by English language and culture.
46. I have no idea.
47. Don’t know.
48. The English language has influenced Swedish through media, and more and more people, especially young adults, are using the words more and more.
49. Humans are just great at the imitation game.
50. Sounds better and are more acceptable in English.
51. They are expressive.
52. We do have a lot of influence from USA and England from TV and ads. People travel more nowadays and English is the most common language to speak and one pick up words.
53. International language you here every day.
54. They do not sound as grotesque as the translation of e.x. Fuck in Swedish does and it might seem “cool” to do so.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 18:</th>
<th>Please select the option that reflect your opinion the most.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer Options</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calling somebody a retard when they are a disabled person is acceptable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I find the sentence &quot;She was left crippled after the accident&quot; offensive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>People in my surroundings tell me that I use too many taboo words/offensive language.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I avoid using taboo words in public.</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>My workplace expects me to not use any taboo words.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I think taboo words reflect a person's lack of vocabulary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I do not use taboo words around particular people/environments. (e.g. children, older relatives, in church, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The use of taboo words has increased during the last 20 years.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of taboo words has increased because of influences from media.</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increasing usage of taboo words or offensive language is</td>
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part of the development in human nature. People use English taboo words as much as they use Swedish taboo words.

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English taboo words is increasing because they are popular among youth.

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Religious taboo words (e.g. Oh my God!, Go to Hell!) are more offensive than words connected to body parts (e.g. cunt, cock).

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Answered question: 56

Skipped question: 1
Johanna Henriksdotter Olsen
Currently a student in English linguistics.
In the future, a Professor.