A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF TAGALOG PROFANITIES THROUGH VARIABLES: AGE, SEX, AND CONTEXT

Article · October 2022

1 author:

Orlyn Joyce Dollente Esquivel
University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa
3 PUBLICATIONS **30** CITATIONS

O. J. D. Esquivel
University of the Philippines Diliman

A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF TAGALOG PROFANITIES THROUGH VARIABLES: AGE, SEX, AND CONTEXT

In the Philippine society, profanity has been a way of expelling out anger, frustration, and has been used to express surprise and joy as well. To most people, any sort of profanities has negative connotations and seen as socially offensive, vulgar, and indecent, and are associated with low social class and low prestige. However, in sociolinguistics, the swearing phenomena deserves a constant attention in different aspects, for its significance might be an eye opener for the society. This study shed the light on the function and interpretation of Tagalog profanities with the influence of social factors (age, sex, and context) using a survey questionnaire and an interview protocol. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling of 30 students from a Philippine public university in Nueva Ecija. Moreover, 15 respondents were female (50 %), and the other 15 respondents were male (50 %) — with ages ranging from 18- to 20-year-olds. Analyses indicate that the respondents' linguistic strategies of swearing vary according to the situation they are in, as well as according to the people they are talking to. Another observation reveals that sociocultural stereotypes on language and sex could be a determining factor, since it showed that the female samples were more likely to evade swearing in certain situations than the male samples. Through the statistical results, it was shown that specified profanities are exclusively incorporated with the respondents' age and sex. Likewise, these specified Tagalog profanities can be regarded as the identity markers of the respondents.

Keywords: Tagalog profanity, social variables, sociolinguistics, sex, culture.

О. Дж. Эсквивель

СОЦИОЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ НЕНОРМАТИВНОЙ ЛЕКСИКИ ТАГАЛЬСКОГО ЯЗЫКА НА ОСНОВЕ ПЕРЕМЕННЫХ: ВОЗРАСТ, ПОЛ И КОНТЕКСТ

В филиппинском обществе ненормативная лексика является способом выражения гнева, раздражения, а также удивления и радости. Для большинства людей любой вид ненормативной лексики имеет негативный оттенок, рассматривается как социально оскорбительный, вульгарный и неприличный и ассоциируется с низким социальным классом и низким престижем. Однако с точки зрения социолингвистики феномен бранной речи заслуживает детального рассмотрения в различных его аспектах, поскольку он помогает пролить свет на характеристики об-

щества. Так, настоящее исследование приближает нас к пониманию функции и интерпретации ненормативной лексики в тагалоге в взаимодействии с социальными факторами (возрастом, полом и контекстом) с помощью анкеты и протокола интервью. Участники были отобраны путем целенаправленной выборки из 30 студентов филиппинского государственного университета в провинции Нуэва-Эсиха. При этом 15 респондентов были женщинами (50 %) и 15 респондентов — мужчинами (50 %), в возрасте от 18 до 20 лет. Анализ показывает, что языковые стратегии брани у респондентов различаются в зависимости от ситуации, в которой они находятся, а также от их собеседников. Кроме того, социокультурные стереотипы в отношении языка и пола могут быть определяющим фактором, поскольку женщины в выборке в определенных ситуациях с большей вероятностью избегали ругательств, чем мужчины. Статистический анализ показал, что некоторые ненормативные лексические единицы используются исключительно в связке с возрастом и полом респондентов. Данные тагальские ненормативные единицы также можно рассматривать как маркеры идентичности респондентов.

Ключевые слова: тагальская ненормативная лексика, социальные переменные, социолингвистика, пол, культура.

Introduction

Like any other language, profanities have etymology, grammatical features, and dialectal variations. It is also noteworthy to mention that profane words are culture-specific and time-constrained. Hence, what is considered offensive in some cultures may not be in others, and what is regarded as profane today may not be remarked as obscene in the future. In sociolinguistics, there are wide disparities in nasty words' actual use and complexities by entering social factors or variables. Certain social factors such as age, sex, and context turn out to be important in accounting for language choice in many different kinds of speech communities.

Tagalog profanity (also called Filipino profanity) can refer to a wide range of socially offensive, vulgar, and indecent taboo words or expressions. In Philippine society, it has been a way of expelling out anger and frustration and has been used to express surprise and joy. Moreover, Tagalog vocabulary was primarily embedded in words from its Austronesian origins; thus, its certain profanities. However, due to the successive Spanish and American colonisation, Tagalog profanity also has its etymological roots derived and borrowed from European and Hispanic languages. Such profanities thrive to this day, reminiscent of the 16th to the 19th-century Spanish and American occupation. Jubilado, Ingilan, and Dumanig (2015) stated that "many of the Spanish loanwords are those of flora and fauna which were brought to the Philippines from Mexico and the rest of

the Spanish colonial world" [Jubilado, Ingilan, Dumanig, 2015, p. 142]. In addition, English profanities are being Filipinized and have entered the Tagalog language: 'shit' — *shet*, 'fuck' and 'shit' — *pakshet*, etc. On the other hand, Tagalog profanity is a social and context-sensitive language in which the profane words and terms may or may be considered offensive based on different situations. As such, by using a sociolinguistic approach, what is aimed in this paper is the attempt to present an investigation on the frequency and appropriateness of Tagalog profanity usage (word choice) based on social variables (age, sex, and context) among speakers of the same speech community.

Purpose

There has been limited research on the sociolinguistic functions of Tagalog profanity among speakers. By using a sociolinguistic approach, what is aimed in this paper is the attempt to present an analysis on the influence of social factors (age, sex, and context) in the use of Tagalog profanity among speakers of the same speech community; correspondingly, the frequency usage and appropriateness levels associated with their respective attitudes and learning experiences of profanity.

Materials and methods

Participants. This study's 30 participants were selected through a purposive sampling of students from a Philippine public university in Nueva Ecija. Moreover, 15 respondents were female (50 %), and the other 15 respondents were male (50 %), ranging from 18 to 20-year-olds. All the participants gave their permission for the researcher to analyse their responses.

Corpus building. The researcher gathered 74 Tagalog profane words online. Moreover, an online survey was also administered through Cognito Forms to gather more Tagalog obscene words — to which 13 Tagalog speakers with ages ranging from 20- to 44-year-olds took part and volunteered. Thus, 105 Tagalog profanities were gathered for the actual survey in this study.

Materials. The researcher mainly utilised the following instruments to answer the research questions: (1) survey questionnaire and (2) interview protocol.

The seven-page questionnaire was divided into two sections; each section pertains to a word-rating task composed of 105 Tagalog profanities. The first word-rating task was used to measure the frequency usage,

and the second word-rating task was employed to measure the appropriateness ratings in terms of context and severity. The survey questionnaire used a standardised 5-point Likert scale for the first section and a 6-point Likert scale for the second section to quantify the data. The survey questionnaire used a standardised 5-point Likert scale for the first section and a 6-point Likert scale for the second section to quantify the data. Moreover, the respondents answered the survey by placing a checkmark on the box corresponding to their answers for each item. Upon completing the questionnaire, the participants were invited to participate in a follow-up interview to discuss their solutions in further detail.

The options for the first section of the survey questionnaire were as follows: never (NR), one point; rarely (RY), two points; sometimes (SS), three points; often (ON), four points; and always (AS), five points. The scale of the statistical values adopted to assess the focus group's frequency usage is as follows:

Weighted Mean	Arbitrary Value	Verbal Interpretation
4.51–5.00	5	always
3.51–4.00	4	often
2.51–3.50	3	sometimes
1.51–2.50	2	rarely
1.00–1.50	1	never

The selections for the second section of the survey questionnaire were as follows: abusive-severe (ASV), one point; abusive-moderate (AMO), two points; abusive-mild (AMI), three points; casual-severe (CSV), four points; casual-moderate (CMO), five points; and casual-mild (CMI), six points. The scale of the statistical values adopted to assess the focus group's appropriateness ratings is as follows:

Weighted Mean	Arbitrary Value	Verbal Interpretation
5.51–6.00	6	casual-mild
4.51–5.00	5	casual-moderate
3.51–4.00	4	casual-severe
2.51–3.50	3	abusive-mild
1.51–2.50	2	abusive-moderate
1.00–1.50	1	abusive-severe

The interview protocol, composed of 15 questions, was employed to provide written responses from the students. Specifically, the interview was used to assess the attitudes and learning experiences of the participants toward Tagalog profanity. The researcher based some of the questions on Paramasivam and Baudin's (2014) study.

Analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequency, frequency percentage, mean, standard deviation, and variance) was utilised for the quantitative data, particularly the data from the survey questionnaire. The researcher manually encoded the individual scores onto an Excel spreadsheet, after which the quantitative statistics were obtained using the same software. The researcher used Manifest-level content analysis for the qualitative data, mainly the interviews. Moreover, IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows (IA-32) was used for the Pearson correlation tests.

Results

The design of the study is descriptive quantitative, and qualitative in nature. Thus, a survey questionnaire and an interview protocol were employed as measuring instruments. The selected respondents were required to provide answers to all items in the questionnaire and the interview. Further, the following section shows the descriptive and inferential results of the survey questionnaire and discussion, which were administered to the respondents. The results are shown through descriptive statistics, which includes the frequency, frequency percentage, mean, standard deviation, and variance — followed by detailed descriptions of the findings.

How are the Tagalog profanities be described in terms of the respondents' age group and sex samples based on frequency?

Table 1. **Distribution of predominant Tagalog profanities in terms of the male students' ratings toward their frequency swearing based on the wordlist**

No.	Wordlist	Mean
17	buwisit/bwisit	4.6
28	hanep	4.33
24	gago	4.26
7	baliw	4.13
72	puta	4.13
83	sira	4.13
92	tanga	4.13
88	tae	4.07

No.	Wordlist	Mean
10	bobo	3.93
18	demonyo	3.93
69	pucha	3.93
84	sira-ulo	3.9
29	hayop	3.86
23	gagi	3.8
14	bugok	3.73
63	pakyu	3.73
80	shet	3.73
55	malandi	3.67
56	malantod	3.67
22	gaga	3.6
89	taena	3.6
94	tangina	3.6
38	jusmio	3.53
47	langya	3.53

The results confirm that the male focus group rated certain profane words according to usage, with *buwisit/bwisit* having the highest frequency usage (M = 4.6). In the Philippine social context, *buwisit/bwisit* is a mild vulgar word that refers to 'being unlucky' or 'being annoyed'. It was borrowed from Hokkien Chinese, 無衣食 (*bû-ui-sit*) that signifies 'without clothes and food'. Moreover, only one profane word has the "always" statistical value and 23 profane words have the "often" statistical values. Hence, a total of 24 profanities out of the 105 profane words of the wordlist have the "always too often" statistical ratings done by the male samples (18- to 20-year-olds).

On the other hand, the results also show that the female participants' rating *baliw* (a mild vulgar word, which means either 'crazy', 'insane' or 'mad') has the highest frequency usage (M = 4.27). Moreover, 6 profanities out of the 105 profane words of the wordlist have the "often" statistical ratings done by the female samples (18- to 20-year-olds).

Figure 1 presents the comparative distribution of predominant Tagalog profanity ratings of female and male samples. Focusing on the same age group, it was observed that male participants' statistical ratings in terms of

Table 2. **Distribution of predominant Tagalog profanities in terms of the female students' ratings toward their frequency swearing based on the wordlist**

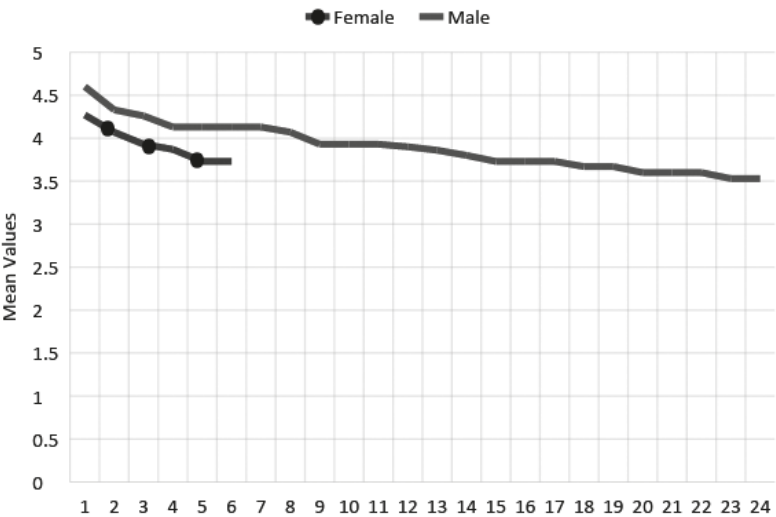| No.	Wordlist	Mean
7	baliw	4.27
17	buwisit/bwisit	4.07
80	shet	3.93
83	sira	3.87
24	gago	3.73
23	gagi	3.73

Fig. 1. Comparative distribution of predominant Tagalog profanities in terms of the female and male students' ratings toward their frequency of swearing based on the wordlist

frequency usage are higher than the female participants. In addition, there are certain predominant profane words, which showed robust sex targeting. The male samples tend to use offensive comments more frequently than females. According to Knyazyan, "women's language reflects powerless…" and "…woman swearing is classified or described as disgraceful" [Knyazyan, 2016, p. 34]. Traditional stereotypes tend to represent females as individuals who avoid profanity usage. This claim strongly suggests that

195

females often develop different practices to reinforce their in-group recognition using Tagalog profanities.

How are the Tagalog profanities be described in terms of the respondent's appropriateness ratings based on the context and severity?

Table 3. **Distribution of highly appropriate Tagalog profanities based on female students' ratings**

No.	Wordlist	Mean
51	loka-loka	5.47
81	shucks	5.4
28	hanep	5.4
52	loko-loko	5.33
83	sira	5.27
38	jusmio	5.13
25	gags	5.13
37	jusme	5.07
2	anak ng pating	5.07
23	gagi	4.93
79	shems	4.87
19	engot	4.87
12	bruha	4.8
4	anak ng tokwa	4.8
1	anak ng jueteng	4.8

Table 3 statistically reveals the highly appropriate Tagalog profane words based on the context and severity in terms of the female participants' ratings. A total of 15 profane words out of 105 were rated as "casual-moderate" by the sample group, with *loka-loka* that means 'crazy' (feminine term), having the highest appropriateness rating (M = 5.47). This term was derived from the Spanish profanity *loca*, which means 'out of one's mind'.

In Table 4, 13 profane words out of 105 were rated as "abusive-mild to abusive-moderate" by the female focus group, with *salsal* and *kantut* having the lowest appropriateness ratings (M = 2.4). *Salsal* is interpreted as male masturbation in the Philippine context, while *kantut* means 'sexual intercourse.

196

Table 4. **Distribution of poorly appropriate Tagalog profanities based on the female students' ratings**

No.	Wordlist	Mean
78	salsal	2.4
40	kantut	2.4
48	laspag	2.47
104	uten/utin	2.67
91	tamod	2.73
99	titi	2.8
74	putang-ina	2.8
34	inutil	2.8
5	asal-hayop	2.8
103	utak-lamok	2.87
71	puking-ina	2.87
27	hampas-lupa	2.87
101	ulol-ulul	2.93

Table 5. **Distribution of highly appropriate Tagalog profanities based on male students' ratings**

No.	Wordlist	Mean
2	anak ng pating	5.53
4	anak ng tokwa	5.27
38	jusmio	5.27
86	susmaryosep	5.27
1	anak ng juteng	5.13
25	gags	5.13
90	takte	5.13
11	bopols	5.00
37	jusme	4.93
23	gagi	4.87
52	loko-loko	4.87

No.	Wordlist	Mean
7	baliw	4.80
19	engot	4.80
62	pakshet	4.80
76	putek	4.80
81	shucks	4.80
3	anak ng puta	4.73
22	gaga	4.73
24	gago	4.73
64	pastilan	4.73
73	putakte	4.73
101	ulol/ulul	4.73
26	gurang	4.67
79	shems	4.67
98	tingil	4.67
102	ungas	4.67

Table 5 presents a total of 26 profane words out of 105 that were rated as "casual-mild to casual-moderate" by the male sample group, with *anak ng pating* having the highest appropriateness rating (M = 5.53). *Anak ng pating* is a mild-vulgar term that denotes an expression of annoyance and acts as an alternate expletive to *anak ng puta* ('son of a bitch').

Table 6 shows a total of 14 profane words, which were rated as "abusive-mild to casual-severe" by the sample group, with *laspag* having the lowest appropriateness rating (M = 2.80). *Laspag* means a woman is worn out to have several sexual intercourses. It is mainly used to describe a female being either a whore or a slut.

On the other hand, Fig. 2 displays the comparative distribution of the highly appropriate Tagalog profane words based on the context and severity of the female and male participants' ratings. With the same age group, it was observed that male participants' statistical ratings in terms of appropriateness are higher than the female participants. Also, male samples provided 26 profanities with "casual-mild to casual-moderate" ratings, while the female samples provided 15 profanities with "casual-moderate"

Table 6. **Distribution of poorly appropriate Tagalog profanities based on male students' ratings**

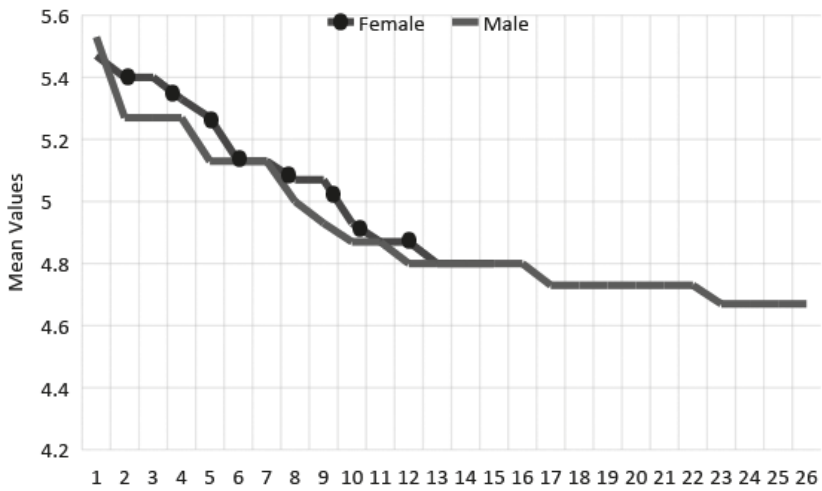| No.	Wordlist	Mean
48	laspag	2.80
56	malantod	2.87
68	pok-pok	3.00
55	malandi	3.07
96	tarantado	3.40
16	burat	3.53
70	puke/puki	3.53
74	putang-ina	3.53
91	tamod	3.53
15	bulbol	3.60
27	hampas-lupa	3.60
35	iyot/iyut	3.60
36	jakol	3.60
94	tangina	3.60

Fig. 2. Comparative statistical distribution of highly appropriate Tagalog profanities based on the female and male students' ratings

ratings. Likely, it can be discerned that the male samples tend to use pro-
fane words more casually than the female samples. In casual settings, mild
to moderate profanities were the least inappropriate, while severe exple-
tives in abusive contexts were the most problematic. According to Bur-
goon (1993), mild or moderate profane words might not have violated
conversational expectations in casual situations, raising their appropriate-
ness compared to severe offensive words (as cited in [Kapoor, 2014]).

Fig. 3 reveals the comparative distribution of the poorly appropriate
Tagalog profane words based on the context and severity of the female
and male participants' ratings. With the same age group, it was observed
that male participants' statistical ratings in terms of severity are lower
than the female participants. Male samples provided 14 profanities with
"abusive-mild to casual-severe" ratings, while the female models provided
13 profanities with "abusive-mild to abusive-moderate" ratings. Accord-
ing to the data, it can be seen that the female samples tend to perceive
profane words more inappropriate than the male samples. Jay (1981) and
Beers-Fägersten (2012) support the previous observation by stating that
male participants found using profanities more appropriate than females
conferring to their respective studies (as cited in [Kapoor, 2014]).
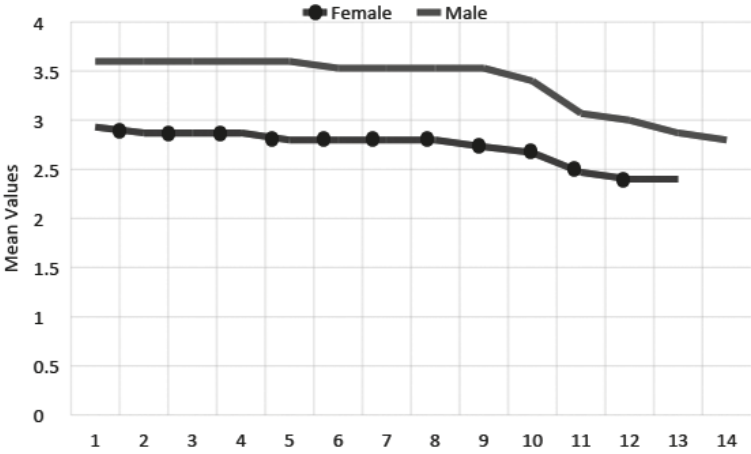

Fig. 3. Comparative statistical distribution of poorly appropriate Tagalog
profanities based on the female and male students' ratings

*What is the relationship between the females' frequency usage and
males' frequency usage in the survey?*

Fig. 4 shows the correlation coefficients and the significance values
between the focus group's frequency usage survey scores. There is a mod-

erate positive correlation between the females' frequency usage and males' frequency usage of Tagalog profanities.

		Female Students' Frequency Survey Scores	Male Students' Frequency Survey Scores
Female Students' Frequency Survey Scores	Pearson Correlation	1	.123
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.664
	N	15	15
Male Students' Frequency Survey Scores	Pearson Correlation	.123	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.664	
	N	15	15

Fig. 4. Results of the Pearson R Correlation Analysis (Female students' frequency survey scores vs male students' frequency survey scores)

What is the relationship between the females' appropriateness ratings and males' appropriateness ratings in the survey?

Fig. 5 displays the correlation coefficients and the significance values between the focus group's appropriateness survey scores. There is a strong positive correlation between the females' appropriateness ratings and males' appropriateness ratings of Tagalog profanities.

		Male Students' Appropriateness Ratings Survey Scores	Female Students' Appropriateness Ratings Survey Scores
Male Students' Appropriateness Ratings Survey Scores	Pearson Correlation	1	.044
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.876
	N	15	15
Female Students' Appropriateness Ratings Survey Scores	Pearson Correlation	.044	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.876	
	N	15	15

Fig. 5. Results of the Pearson R Correlation Analysis (Female students' appropriateness survey scores vs male students' appropriateness survey scores

How can the respondents' attitudes and learning experiences toward Tagalog profanities be described in the interview?

All the participants were asked to comment on their experiences and attitudes toward profanity usage. On the other hand, the researcher provided a total of 15 questions for the participants to answer. The results show that most of the participants (both females and males) have 'posi-

tive' attitudes on using Tagalog profanities. However, the participants still consider the 'appropriateness' of profane language in various social settings. On learning experiences, all the female and male participants answered that their friends or acquaintances influenced Tagalog profanities. Steinberg and Monahan (2007) and Simpson, Duarte and Bishop (2016) stated that peer pressure could influence swearing habits more than parents at younger ages. In addition, a total of 14 females and 15 males have responded that they did not learn profanities from their parents. In the Philippine culture, it is assumed that most Filipino parents consider profane language as verbal aggression; thus, they habitually avoid using profanities in front of their children.

Further, 13 female and ten male participants revealed that they have also learned some Tagalog profanities from the media. Vice versa, two female and five male participants answered that the media did not influence their profanity usage. For instance, it can be assumed that media sources play an influential role in exposing children and adolescents to profane language. According to Wright and Mokbel (2016), exposure to swearing from media and social sources were associated with the participants' swearing acceptance. Another study has concluded that exposure to swearing words through television and video games was related to more positive attitudes concerning the use of profanity [Coyne et al., 2011]. It was also inferred in the analyses of the interviews that there are specified reasons, motives, and functions for swearing among both sexes, such as expressing the speaker's feelings in certain situations.

Conclusion

This study provides an initial investigation regarding the influence of social factors (age, sex, and context) toward the contextualised functions of Tagalog profanities. The statistical results showed that specified profanities are exclusively incorporated with the respondents' age and sex. These specified Tagalog profanities can be regarded as the identity markers of the respondents. In the frequency usage and appropriateness ratings, differences in swearing patterns are evident between the female and male participants. As observed from the analyses, these sex patterns revealed that male participants tend to use Tagalog profanities more frequent and more casually than the female participants.

Concerning the appropriateness ratings, the focus group recognised certain Tagalog profane words as highly appropriate and highly inappropriate. According to the sex samples, females tend to define Tagalog profanities as more inconvenient than males. Vice versa, males tend to

express Tagalog profanities more "casually" than females in traditional social settings. Overall, mild and moderate Tagalog profanities are more appropriate in casual settings, and severe swears are the most inappropriate. Thus, it can be argued that the context of their use was influencing the use of mild, moderate, and severe curses.

In analysing the interviews, the respondents' linguistic strategies of swearing vary according to the situation they are in and the people they are talking to. Another observation reveals that sociocultural stereotypes on language and sex could be a determining factor. It showed that the female samples were more likely to evade swearing in certain situations than males. Nevertheless, it was inferred by this research that age, sex, and context might contribute to the speakers' different views of using profanities.

References

Beers-Fägersten, K. (2012). *Who's swearing now? The social aspects of conversational swearing*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/1609710/Whos_Swearing_Now_The_Social_Aspects_of_Conversational_Swearing (accessed: 12.09.2021).

Burgoon, J.K. (1993). Interpersonal expectations, expectancy violations, and emotional communication. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 12(1–2), 30–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X93121003

Coyne, S. M., Stockdale, L. A., Nelson, D. A. & Fraser, A. (2011). Profanity in media associated with attitudes and behavior regarding profanity use and aggression. *Pediatrics*, 128: 867–872. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-1062

Jay, T. B. (1981). Comprehending dirty-word descriptions. *Language and Speech*, 24(1): 29–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/002383098102400102

Jubilado, R., Ingilan, S. & Dumanig, F. P. (2015). Expressing Profanity in Cebuano and Bahasa Sug. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. https://doi.org/10.22452/jati.vol20no1.9

Kapoor, H. (2014). Swears in context: The difference between casual and abusive swearing. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 43 (6): 683–854. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10936-014-9345-z

Knyazyan, A. (2016). Gender and disparaging humour. *International Journal of English Studies*, 2 (14): 27–32.

Simpson, E., Duarte, J. & Bishop, B. (2016). When moms say bad words: Family and peer influence on the frequency of swearing. The University of Central Florida. *Undergraduate Research Journal*, 8 (2): 1–7.

Steinberg, L. & Monahan, K. C. (2007). Age differences in resistance to peer influence. *Developmental Psychology*, 43 (6): 1531–1543.

Wright, C. L. & Mokbel, J. (2016). The Media Scapegoat and Mom's Mouth: Influences on Swearing. *SAGE Open*. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016651911