

USE OF OBSCENE LANGUAGE AMONG YOUTH

UTILIZAÇÃO DE LINGUAGEM OBSCENA ENTRE OS JOVENS

USO DE LENGUAJE OBSCENO ENTRE LOS JÓVENES



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ABSTRACT: The study focuses on the use of profanity among modern youth, emphasizing its psychological, social, and educational aspects. The authors employ a mixed methodological approach combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with students at the Industrial University of Tyumen (Tyumen, Russia). The authors propose a classification of reasons that prompt young people to use obscene language and determine their specifics. Psychological reasons behind the use of profanity include the need for integration, attention, catharsis, self-expression, and freedom. The theoretical and practical significance of the study lies primarily in the collection, systematization, and generalization of material on obscene language and the elaboration of the reasons for its use. The study provides a basis for training sessions to develop students' speech culture, build their self-regulation skills, and relieve tension in stressful situations. The findings can be used by psychologists, linguists, and teachers in the preventive and educational work at educational organizations.

KEYWORDS: Obscene language. Young people. Profanity. Speech.

RESUMO: O estudo centra-se no uso de palavras entre os jovens modernos, realçando os seus aspectos psicológicos, sociais e educativos. Os autores utilizam uma abordagem metodológica mista, combinando inquéritos quantitativos e entrevistas qualitativas com estudantes da Universidade Industrial de Tyumen (Tyumen, Rússia). Os autores propõem uma classificação das razões que levam os jovens a utilizar linguagem obscena e determinam as suas especificidades. As razões psicológicas subjacentes ao uso de palavras incluem a necessidade de integração, atenção, catarse, auto-expressão e liberdade. O significado teórico e prático do estudo reside principalmente na recolha, sistematização e generalização de material sobre linguagem obscena e na elaboração das razões para o seu uso. O estudo fornece uma base para sessões de formação destinadas a desenvolver a cultura da fala dos alunos, a desenvolver as suas capacidades de autorregulação e a aliviar a tensão em situações de stress. Os resultados podem ser utilizados por psicólogos, linguistas e professores no trabalho preventivo e educativo em organizações educativas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Linguagem obscena. Jovens. Profanidade. Discurso.

RESUMEN: El estudio se centra en el uso de blasfemias entre la juventud moderna haciendo hincapié en sus aspectos psicológicos, sociales y educativos. Los autores emplean un enfoque metodológico mixto que combina encuestas cuantitativas y entrevistas cualitativas con estudiantes de la Universidad Industrial de Tyumen (Tyumen, Rusia). Los autores proponen una clasificación de las razones que impulsan a los jóvenes a utilizar un lenguaje obsceno y determinan sus especificidades. Las razones psicológicas que subyacen al uso de palabrotas incluyen la necesidad de integración, atención, catarsis, autoexpresión y libertad. La importancia teórica y práctica del estudio radica principalmente en la recopilación, sistematización y generalización de material sobre el lenguaje obsceno y la elaboración de las razones de su uso. El estudio proporciona una base para las sesiones de formación destinadas a desarrollar la cultura del habla de los alumnos, fomentar su capacidad de autorregulación y aliviar la tensión en situaciones de estrés. Las conclusiones pueden ser utilizadas por psicólogos, lingüistas y profesores en la labor preventiva y educativa en organizaciones educativas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Lenguaje obsceno. Juvenil. Profanidad. Discurso.

Introduction

According to the Public Opinion Foundation (n.d.), the use of obscene language has become a common phenomenon in contemporary society. Sociological research indicates that young people constitute the most active group when using this type of language. With the continuous transformations in social values and attitudes, youth subculture has come to view profanity as the norm, using it in everyday communication as well as on social media, messaging apps, and other digital platforms. According to Semenкова *et al.* (2019), the use of rude and vulgar expressions reflects a low level of spiritual and moral development in both the individual and society.

Obscene language, originating from the Latin *obscenus* ("indecent, lascivious, immoral"), is a subset of profane language that includes rude and vulgar expressions, often used to express a spontaneous reaction to uncertain or disturbing situations (Levin, 1998).

Recently, obscene language has become a subject of scientific investigation. Professor Zhelvis (2001) was one of the pioneers in addressing this issue, analyzing the sociopsychological characteristics of invective. According to Zhelvis, the use of this language depends on factors such as social status, gender, age, level of education, and religion of the speaker. He defines invective as a form of direct and active verbal aggression, expressed through socially unacceptable obscenities, which performs various functions in speech. The use of obscene language can provide psychological relief (catharsis), help create bonds with interlocutors of similar status, insult or animate the listener, and express both rebellion and admiration. The popularity of profanity is related to its unique ability to precisely express emotions, as emotions are complex psychological processes that cannot always be adequately conveyed through conventional means.

Grisheva (2014) identifies sociopolitical and psychological factors as the most important in stimulating the use of offensive language. She emphasizes that aggression and rudeness serve as outlets for state repression, which, previously controlled, has found in modern society a means of expression without restraint. Additionally, inflation, unemployment, and low living standards have contributed to the spread of cursing, especially in media platforms such as television and radio, where censorship has been abolished.

Mitin (2009) adds that deviant behavior, mental disorders, negative emotional states such as anxiety and fear, and low cultural and religious levels also influence the use of vulgar language. In contrast, Sudakova and Grigoreva (2020) point out that the ability to control the use of swear words and substitute them with other linguistic forms while maintaining the

emotional impact of speech is an indication of maturity. This maturity manifests in the individual's ability to constructively express emotions and feelings, facilitating conflict resolution and establishing productive social relationships.

While some authors suggest that obscene language can harm health, recent studies indicate that profanity may act as a mechanism of self-defense and emotional catharsis. Hussian *et al.* (2023) demonstrate that frequent use of swear words is inversely correlated with levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, revealing a complex relationship between profanity and mental health. On the other hand, geneticist Gariaev (1997) argues that excessive use of vulgar language can cause hormonal imbalances and DNA mutations, especially among women, who would lose feminine energy and power. Gariaev even developed a device that transforms speech into electromagnetic waves and discovered that harsh words damage chromosomes, triggering a process of self-destruction, while kind words have beneficial effects on the human body (Gariaev, 1997; Proniushkina; Komarova, 2020; Svetorusie, 2017).

The theoretical analysis conducted allows the identification of four fundamental psychological components in the structure of obscene language: cognitive, emotional evaluation, behavioral, and motivational. The *cognitive component* encompasses knowledge, thoughts, statements, and moral conceptions related to the notion of profanity. The *emotional evaluation component* includes positive or negative attitudes, feelings, and emotions surrounding the use of swear words, both by oneself and by others, in different situations, as well as a moral evaluation of these occurrences. The *behavioral component* refers to the frequency and context in which swear words are used and the individual's willingness to improve their speech. Finally, the *motivational component* relates to the reasons and factors that motivate the use of swear words within the youth environment.

The aim of this study is to investigate the prevalence and use of obscene language among contemporary youth, with an emphasis on the psychological and social motivations driving such behavior. This analysis also seeks to explore the implications of this linguistic phenomenon for educational practices and suggest strategies that promote a culture of respectful and effective communication among students. By analyzing the cognitive and emotional components of obscene language, the study aims to provide insights that can assist educators, psychologists, and policymakers in developing interventions aimed at reducing the use of swear words and encouraging more positive speech habits in educational environments.

Methods

Study Design: This research was conducted using a sociopsychological approach, focusing on the use of offensive language among young people, from both psychological and educational perspectives. A sociopsychological study investigates the interaction between individual psychological processes and social behaviors in specific contexts. In this case, the study was designed to analyze how social influences and individual psychological factors contribute to students' use of profanity.

Theoretical Framework: The theoretical foundation of this work is based on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel; Turner, 1979). Social Cognitive Theory posits that behavior is learned through observation, imitation, and modeling, which is particularly relevant for explaining how young people adopt obscene language from their social environment. Social Identity Theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of group membership and social identity in shaping individual behavior, helping to understand how students use profanity to align with group norms and consolidate their identity within social circles.

Sociopsychological Study: The sociopsychological study aims to explore the interactions between individual psychological processes and the broader social environment. This type of investigation seeks to identify social and psychological constructs such as attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, using tools like questionnaires and interviews to measure them. The purpose is to understand how social factors (e.g., cultural norms and peer pressure) and psychological factors (such as self-esteem and emotional regulation) influence behaviors, in this case, the use of obscene language.

Application to the Study: In the context of this research, the sociopsychological study was conducted through a combination of quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews at the Industrial University of Tyumen (Tyumen, Russia). The study focused on students' attitudes toward the use of profanity, involving a sample of 90 full-time students (50 men and 40 women). The questionnaires employed a Likert scale developed to assess students' cognitive understanding of obscene language, their emotional responses, and their behavioral tendencies in different social contexts. Key areas of analysis included cognitive understanding, emotional attitudes toward the use of profanity, and behavioral patterns in various settings. The research also examined students' awareness of the social and legal consequences of using obscene language in public spaces.

Results

The research findings led to the formulation of the following conclusions:

1. *Cognitive Component Analysis:* The analysis of the cognitive component of obscene language reveals that all students have a clear understanding of the phenomenon. They define offensive language as the use of profanity, inappropriate terms, and expressions considered unacceptable in public contexts. Among the respondents, 58% associate the use of profanity with the violation of social norms, while 42% view it as mere insults, believing that “too much importance should not be attributed to these words.” Additionally, 74% reported frequently hearing obscene language from others, and 32% are aware that using profanity in public places can be classified as a misdemeanor, resulting in fines.

2. *Emotional Assessment Component:* This component reflects students’ attitudes toward the use of offensive language in contemporary society. For 63% of the respondents, the use of profanity is considered acceptable, but only in intimate circles, such as among friends. In contrast, 23% expressed indifference, stating that each individual is responsible for their behavior. Only 8% disapprove of others using profanity, maintaining that “it should not be used under any circumstances.” Conversely, 17% argue that communication without profanity would lose its emotional impact.

Regarding emotional perception, 47% of participants reported that using profanity gives them a sense of self-confidence. Another 27% said they feel emotionally energized and motivated when they can express themselves freely and provoke positive emotional reactions among their friends. However, 22% reported feeling embarrassed if their words were overheard by adults in essential positions.

When asked how they feel when hearing insults from a conversational partner, 46% of respondents said they would respond in kind. Subsequent responses, in descending order, were: “I would remain silent and continue the conversation” (17%); “I wouldn’t notice” (14%); “I would consider it disrespectful” (8%); and “I would ask them not to use that language in my presence” (10%).

3. *Behavioral Component:* The behavioral component is manifested through the insertion of profanity into everyday speech and is related to an individual’s ability to control their verbal behavior, i.e., consciously refraining from using obscene language in various situations, including moments of stress.

Approximately 42% of respondents admitted to frequently using profanity (“regularly”). In contrast, 23% indicated that they use it rarely, only in moments of extreme tension or strong

emotional excitement. Another 17% try to replace profanity with more harmless expressions, while 8% stated they never resort to offensive language.

Regarding the possibility of living without the use of profanity, 21% of respondents believe it is feasible, provided the individual learns to control their emotions. These individuals recognize that profanity constitutes a bad habit that can be overcome through effort and self-awareness, opting for interjections and more appropriate word combinations to express their thoughts. In contrast, 36% are unwilling to give up profanity, as they believe it makes their speech more persuasive, emotional, and engaging. These respondents consider obscene language to enable more concise and effective communication. Only 23% of respondents suggest that profanity should be restricted to certain contexts, avoiding its use in public spaces, in the university environment, or in the presence of adults.

Regarding the question, “In which situations do you most frequently use this type of language?” the results among profanity users are:

- Expression of emotional states (fear, aggression, excitement): 37%;
- Reaction to pain: 57%;
- Increased expressiveness of speech: 43%;
- Insults directed at an opponent: 23%.

The research revealed that 46% of participants believe it is essential to learn how to communicate without resorting to profanity. Effective strategies for combating the use of obscene language include:

- Monetary fines as a form of punishment;
- Public reprimand;
- Educational campaigns with posters encouraging abstention from profanity and promoting moral norms, courtesy, and mutual respect.

On the other hand, 33% of respondents expressed no concern about people around them adhering to the lexical norms of literary Russian, showing skepticism regarding the possibility of eradicating profanity from society. They argue that “profanity is deeply ingrained in people’s vocabulary.” The students highlight the need to prioritize banning the use of obscene language in the media and emphasize that family upbringing and education play crucial roles in shaping

behavior, values, and communication culture. Thus, educational efforts to prevent the use of profanity should begin in childhood, with parents serving as positive role models by avoiding the use of obscene language at home, especially in the presence of children. The same principle applies to the consumption of movies and TV shows that promote profanity.

4. The *motivational component* of the research helps identify the underlying reasons for the use of obscene language. Based on the studies by Stapleton *et al.* (2022) on the subject and the analysis of the data obtained, the following psychological motivations were identified:

- *Need for Integration:* In some communities, the use of profanity serves as a way to align with the group and conform to its norms. Acceptance by the group creates a need to speak the same language;
- *Need for Attention:* The use of obscene language may be associated with insecurity and a desire for attention. For balanced psychological development, it is essential to receive care, affection, and love, especially from the family. When these elements are insufficient due to factors like constantly busy parents or family conflicts, a person may resort to profanity as an alternative way to attract the desired attention;
- *Need for Catharsis:* Offensive language often serves as an outlet for repressed emotions and thoughts, typically negative ones. The use of profanity to relieve stress and psychological tension is characteristic of individuals with limited control over other forms of emotional management.
- *Need for Self-Expression:* To make a strong impression on the listener or to add a humorous or ironic effect to their speech, individuals may use profanity. This intensifies communication and amplifies the emotional response from the audience.
- *Need for Freedom:* Students believe that using obscene language helps them appear more mature, independent, and free in the eyes of others. Profanity then becomes a way to express protest or dissatisfaction with social, authoritative, or moral norms.

Preventing the use of obscene language among modern youth requires:

- *Teaching Verbal Etiquette:* Verbal etiquette consists of a set of rules of verbal behavior accepted by society in different spheres and situations of communication;
- *Practicing Polite and Refined Speech:* Choosing appropriate literary expressions for critical situations;

- *Developing Emotional Self-Regulation and Constructive Behavior Skills*: Learning to manage conflicts constructively and regulate emoticons;
- *Cultivating a Conscious Attitude Toward Inappropriate Expressions*: Recognizing that obscene language is often seen as harmful or inappropriate, based on cultural norms, legal standards, and social values (Debray, 2023);
- *Enriching Vocabulary Through Reading Fiction*: Expanding vocabulary to allow for more sophisticated expression;
- *Finding Motivation to Avoid Profanity*: If controlling one's speech proves difficult, it is recommended to seek support and assistance from loved ones to overcome this habit.

Final considerations

The study of the psychological reasons behind the use of profanity provides insight into the essence, motivation, and multifaceted nature of this phenomenon. A lack of attention, low self-esteem, inability to manage stressful situations constructively, and the absence of adequate communication skills lead young people to express their thoughts through obscene language. Using profanity can serve as a form of self-expression and a conscious violation of social prohibitions and norms.

While the use of obscene language is disapproved of by public morality and considered taboo, it is crucial to develop strategies and tactics to combat it. These strategies include fostering a culture of speech through literature and art, finding appropriate verbal alternatives, implementing rules and ethics for communication in specific contexts, and teaching psychological techniques for emotional tension relief. By promoting a respectful and effective language use culture, educational institutions can enhance students' communication skills, emotional intelligence, and overall personal growth, preparing them for personal and professional future success.

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