

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW,
GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNICATION
(IJLGC)
www.ijlgc.com



UNVEILING THE VEIL: EXPLORING GENDERED ABUSIVE LANGUAGE IN CONTEMPORARY PUNJABI DISCOURSE

Charanjit Kaur^{1*}, Ashwinder Kaur², Parveenpal Kaur³

¹ Department of General Studies, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia
Email: charanjit@utar.edu.my

² Department of Media, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia
Email: ashwinder@utar.edu.my

³ Centre for Foundation Studies, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia
Email: parveenpal@utar.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 18.04.2024

Revised date: 13.05.2024

Accepted date: 15.06.2024

Published date: 30.06.2024

To cite this document:

Kaur, C., Kaur, A., & Kaur, P. (2024).
Unveiling The Veil: Exploring
Gendered Abusive Language In
Contemporary Punjabi Discourse.
*International Journal of Law,
Government and Communication*, 9
(36), 286-305.

DOI: 10.35631/IJLGC.936021

This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



Abstract:

The pervasive use of coarse language, despite its prohibition grounded in cultural values and traditions, presents a complex societal phenomenon that warrants in-depth exploration. The ubiquitous nature of this linguistic shift is particularly evident in daily verbal exchanges and media dissemination, challenging the conventional understanding of language as a mere preserver of cultural and religious identity. Abusive language, which finds expression in moments of surprise, frustration, and happiness, has become a multifaceted tool that not only defies established norms but also plays a pivotal role in shaping social dynamics. This paper's specific focus on profanity within the Punjabi language community serves as a microcosm for understanding broader issues related to gendered language. Through a comprehensive study involving interviews with Punjabi respondents aged 21 and above, encompassing both genders, the research exposes the deeply ingrained gendered nature of coarse language. Females are frequently and directly associated with insults and curses, highlighting a troubling pattern that reinforces the societal devaluation of women. The findings underscore how profanity, beyond its linguistic implications, acts as a mechanism that perpetuates and strengthens the existing patriarchal system within the Punjabi community. As society grapples with evolving language norms, this examination sheds light on the intricate interplay between language, gender dynamics, and cultural practices, providing valuable insights for addressing the broader implications of linguistic shifts in contemporary society.

Keywords:

Coarse Language, Gendered Language, Patriarchal System, Profanity, Punjabi Community

Introduction

The use of offensive language, commonly known as foul language, often arises in moments of anger or unfavorable circumstances, and is generally considered impolite or rude. It serves as a means to express intense emotions and often involves the condemnation of cultural aspects (Anderson & Turgill, 2007). The history of using foul language can be traced back to the Middle Ages and Dark Ages, showcasing variations in discursive practices over time (Montagu, 2001). It is evident that the use of offensive language is a widespread phenomenon observed across languages globally (Ljung, 1984). The adoption of vulgar language has become a common practice among individuals of various genders in numerous societies. This form of abusive language is employed in situations of surprise, frustration, and even moments of happiness, serving as a means to articulate various states of mind in different contexts.

While some perceive the use of foul language as disrespectful and impolite, others view it as an integral aspect of everyday communication, as noted by Svensson (2004). The incorporation of prohibited terms into language is deeply rooted in cultural values and traditions. The inclusion of gender in offensive language is often based on profession and occupation. Research by Benwell (2001) suggests that men tend to engage in swearing more frequently with their colleagues, leading to the conclusion that swearing is more commonly associated with males. Culturally accepted traditions influence women's reduced use of profane language in two key ways. Firstly, the use of derogatory words is often seen as a forceful or assertive action, which may conflict with the culturally ingrained expectation for women to prioritize politeness and consideration towards others, aligning with stereotypical notions of femininity (De Klerk, 1991;1992) and Coates (1993) highlight that women's reduced use of profane language is influenced by culturally accepted norms. Secondly, in Western society, swearing serves to conform to behavioral expectations within a specific social context (Guerin, 1992).

Men typically possess a broader repertoire of strong swear words compared to women. For instance, in a study conducted by Foote and Woodward (1972), undergraduate students were asked to generate as many "dirty, vulgar, foul, or generally objectionable words or phrases" as possible. The findings revealed that men produced significantly more of these words compared to women, by a factor of 50%. Other research indicates that while women tend to use milder forms of swearing, men are more inclined to use stronger swear words (Bailey and Timm, 1976; McEnery, 2005; Kaur, et al, 2023b). However, men often reserve their use of swearing for male-dominated social contexts and tend to use fewer swear words when in the presence of women (Bayard and Krishnayya, 2001; Coates, 1986). Swearing is often perceived as a display of masculinity (Benwell, 2001). Professions where swearing is common are predominantly male-dominated (Johnson & Lewis, 2010). Men are more likely than women to swear when feeling frustrated or angry, whereas women are more inclined to view swearing in anger as a sign of losing control and recognize that swearing could potentially strain their relationships with others (Bird & Harris, 1990).

Gender & Foul Language

Lakoff (1975) and Jespersen (1922) asserted that cultural and social factors significantly influence the use of offensive language. Consequently, socially accepted values in some societies encourage women to use less profanity, while swearing is often attributed as a masculine trait. According to Maldonado Garcia (2015), languages, particularly in the context of the Spanish language, incorporate sexist grammatical elements. A similar observation can be made regarding the Punjabi language (Kaur, et al, 2023b). Van Oudenhoven et al. (2008) and Jay (1996) assert that the use of vulgar language is a widespread practice in numerous cultures, with the intention to harm or insult the recipient. Typically, swear words are more offensive when directed towards females than males, as observed by Guathier et al. (2015), Van Oudenhoven et al. (2008), and Jay and Janeschewitz (2008). The majority of studies have reached the conclusion that there are gender differences in the use of offensive language and in identifying the categories that are deemed most offensive to each gender (Benidixen & Gabriel, 2013; James, 1998; Harris, 1993). James (1998) argues that gender-specific abusive language enables individuals to engage in actions that deviate from socially desirable behavior.

Research on sex differences in the use of strong swear words indicates that males are more inclined to use such language and exhibit aggressive behaviors compared to females. Recent findings highlight that females have larger volumes of the orbital frontal cortex, which regulates anger and aggressiveness generated by the amygdala. This difference may be related to the observed sex differences in the use of strong swear words. According to Love (2021), the social distribution of swearing across gender and age groups generally aligns with males continuing to swear more than females, and swearing peaks in the twenties before declining. However, the pattern of swearing by socio-economic status in the 2010s were more complex than anticipated. The extent to which sex differences arise from established stereotypes and social rules remains a topic of debate in various fields of psychological science (Bijlstra et al., 2019; Breda et al., 2020; Hsu et al., 2021; Korb et al., 2023; Neel et al., 2012).

Cross-cultural studies are particularly well-suited to contribute to the debate on the origins of gender differences. The presence of significant cultural variations is often seen as evidence supporting the dominance of societal over biological factors, with the notable exception of the paradoxical increase in gender differences observed in more gender-equal countries (Stoet & Geary, 2018; see also Richardson et al., 2020 and Breda et al., 2020). The cross-cultural perspective has enriched the exploration of gender disparities in the emotional dimensions of non-verbal behavior. For example, McDuff et al., (2017) found that females exhibit a greater propensity to smile compared to males across 12 different countries. Yet, they also note that the contrast between men and women in furrowing the brow is accentuated in societies with a stronger emphasis on individualism. Regarding the experience of emotions, research by Fischer and his team (Fischer et al., 2004) spanning 37 countries reveals that the divergence in intensity assessments of anger and disgust between genders remains consistent across cultures. However, men from more gender-equal societies tend to indicate lower intensity levels for fear, sadness, shame, and guilt compared to men from less gender-equal nations.

Güvendir (2015) outlines the tendency for men to exhibit more aggression and use coarse language compared to women. This assertion finds support in local literature, as evidenced by a study on impoliteness strategies observed in comments on Facebook (Ghani, 2018). The research reveals that male commenters are more prone to expressing hostile complaints, while female commenters tend to favor indirect approaches, reflecting their less confrontational or more amicable language style. Moreover, a study conducted in Brunei examining language

differences between genders (Ghani, 2016) demonstrates, through analysis of recordings of same-sex conversations, that "men engage in more overlapping speech than women."

Scope of Study

Most research on foul language and gender implication involves English language (Maynard, 2002; Rassin & Muris, 2005; Ljung, 2011; & Jing-Schmidt, 2017). The current study is looking at usage of foul language in Punjabi language by identifying the gender differences and to whom these terms are directed to (females or males) and its broader implication of societal devaluation of women and reinforcement of patriarchal system within the Malaysian Punjabi community. The subsequent research questions will be answered in the study:

- (1) Is foul language most used by males or females in Punjabi language context?
- (2) Who are the foul words mostly directed to males or females?
- (3) What implication does the foul words have on Malaysian Punjabi women?

Literature Review

Foul language, also referred to as taboo language, is a linguistic expression considered indecent and vulgar within the cultural context of any society. The use of swear words serves as a means of expressing intense emotions that individuals carry within themselves (Kaur, et al, 2023b). Fourteen functions are demonstrated through the use of foul language, encompassing purposes such as affirmation, encouragement, defiance, insult, oath, hostility, abuse, emphasis, enhancement, exclamation, curse, denial, disapproval, and the reinforcement of new word meanings. Nichols (1983) study discovered women belonging to lower class were keener on using standard English with their colleagues. In the same study, it was also deduced that females are more insulted by bad words compared to men. Selnow (1985) stated that usage of foul language among undergraduate students were common among males compared to females.

Gendered Abusive Language

The connection between gender and language is profound, with gender performances and behaviors interaction shaped by prevailing social norms (West and Zimmerman, 2009). Swedish men tend to use more abusive terms in various situations (Sollid, 2009). Suyanto (2010) discovered that the Javanese frequently employ vulgar language among peers, illustrating the camaraderie and friendship within their social circle. Kirk's (2013) research inferred that females employ fewer sexual terms in their use of profanity compared to males. Sukanto and Nicolau (2014) concluded that women tend to use more extremely polite forms than men when using Indonesian as their first language. In contrast, Hindriks' and van Hofwegen's (2014) investigation revealed that women use more offensive terms in Dutch than men, who are less frequent users of such language.

Men Versus Women

Given that swearing at someone is considered an aggressive behavior linked to emotional expression (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008), the greater tendency of males to use strong swear words compared to females suggests a general tendency towards higher aggression in males and potentially reflects differences in brain function. Experimental evidence supporting this hypothesis indicates that male behavior and psychology exhibit greater inclinations towards aggression compared to females (Tooby and Cosmides, 1988; Wrangham and Peterson, 1996; Brown, 1991; Goldstein, 2003; McDonald et al., 2012; Navarrete et al., 2010). Recent studies on the neuroanatomy of the human brain suggest that male aggressiveness may be influenced by structural differences. Men tend to have a significantly smaller volume of the orbital frontal

cortex compared to women, whereas women possess a substantially larger orbitofrontal-to-amygdala ratio than men. These neuroanatomical differences may contribute to variations in aggressive behavior observed between males and females. Below is the summarised version of what have been discussed in detail above:

Table 1: Summary of Literature Review

Topic	Summary
Foul Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considered indecent and vulgar within cultural contexts. • Used to express intense emotions. • Serves various functions including affirmation, encouragement, defiance, insult, oath, hostility, abuse, emphasis, enhancement, exclamation, curse, denial, disapproval, and reinforcement of new word meanings.
Gender Differences in Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender performances shaped by social norms. • Swedish men use more abusive terms. • Javanese use vulgar language for camaraderie. • Females use fewer sexual terms compared to males. • Women use more polite forms in Indonesian. • Dutch women use more offensive terms than men.
Men vs. Women in Swearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Males tend to use strong swear words more than females, suggesting higher aggression. • Experimental evidence supports male inclination towards aggression. • Neuroanatomy differences contribute to variations in aggressive behavior. • Men have smaller orbitofrontal cortex volume, while women have larger orbitofrontal-to-amygdala ratio.
Socioeconomic Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women from lower classes prefer standard English. • Women are more insulted by bad words. • Foul language is more common among male undergraduate students.

Theory of Dominance

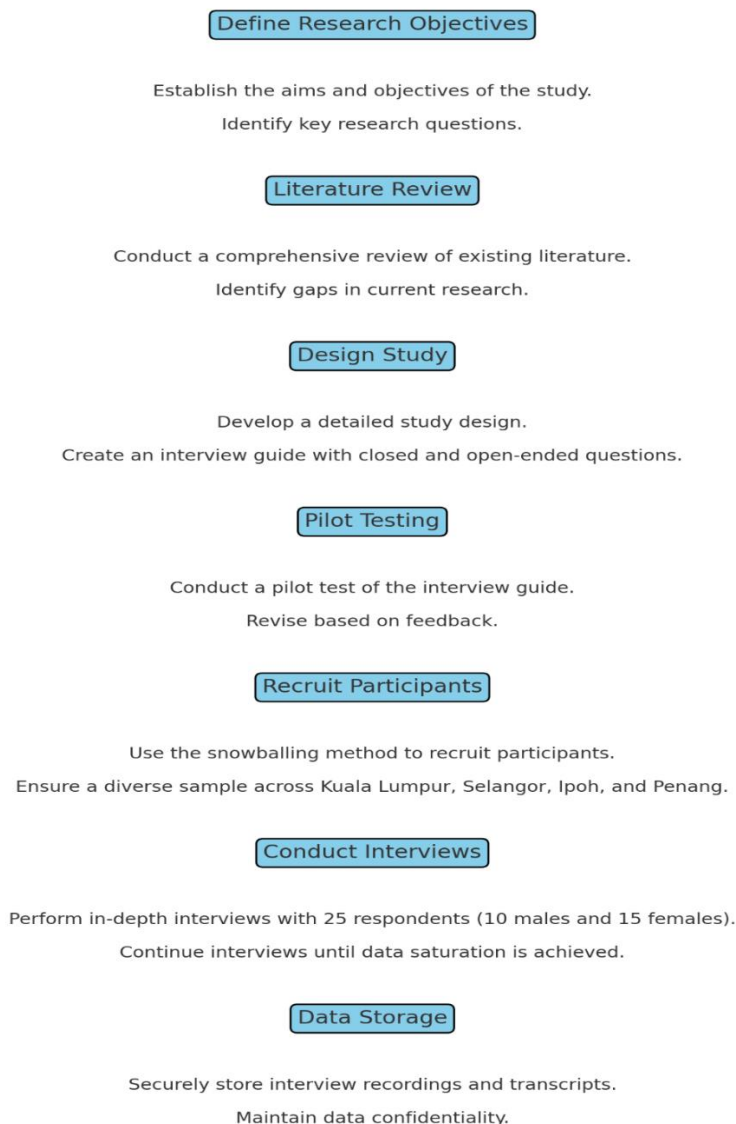
Throughout history, men have been associated with power and have predominantly held positions of power compared to women. Women are often denied access to power, with their perceived incapacity to maintain it evident in their linguistic behavior, as asserted by Lakoff (1975, p. 48). According to the dominance theory proposed by Lakoff (1973), women are considered as oppressed entities, linguistically dominated by men. The study of language in social interaction involves the investigation and analysis of everyday conversations, with a specific emphasis on gender. Spender (1980) suggests that language has developed over centuries to primarily favor men, serving their needs and interests. In essence, she argues that language is created by men, and she discusses how masculine terms, like he, man, and mankind, are used in grammars and dictionaries to inaccurately represent both males and females. This reinforced a perspective that centered on men, known as an andro-centric view (Baxter, 2011, p. 334). The dominance theory primarily investigates the role of patriarchy, which highlights male power and dominance, as the primary factor contributing to the linguistic subordination

of women in society. This phenomenon has been observed in the Punjabi society in Malaysia (Kaur & Gill, 2018; Kaur & Gill, 2022; Kaur, & Kaur, 2015; Kaur, et al., 2021a;2021b;2023a).

Methodology

The data for this study was gathered via qualitative technique, namely in-depth interviews. 25 respondents participated in the one-on-one interview, comprising 10 males and 15 females. All respondents were between the ages of 22-60 years old. The study covered a few states across Peninsular, namely Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Ipoh, and Penang. The interview session took place in March 2024 and lasted for a duration of two weeks. This geographic diversity enhances the representation of perspectives from different regions. Researchers in the current study continued the interviews until data saturation was achieved. Data saturation occurs when no new information or themes emerge from additional interviews, indicating that a comprehensive understanding of the topic has been reached.

Flowchart 1: Data Collection Process



Flowchart 2: Data Analysis Process

Transcription

Transcribe interviews verbatim.
Verify accuracy of transcriptions.

Data Cleaning

Check for inconsistencies and ensure completeness of data.

Coding

Code qualitative data using thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

Identify and analyze key themes and patterns.
Use NVivo or similar qualitative data analysis software.

Interpretation of Results

Interpret findings in the context of research objectives.
Compare results with existing literature.

Report Writing

Document findings in a comprehensive report.
Include visual aids to illustrate results.

Respondents were recruited via snowballing method. The snowballing method involves initially recruiting a few participants and then asking them to refer others who might be suitable for the study. This method is often used when the target population is challenging to reach directly. The interview guide contained mainly closed and open-ended questions. Closed ended questions were mainly covering the respondent's demographic data. Whereas open ended questions allowed researchers in the current study to ensure that participants were not confined to specific response options. This approach encourages respondents to express their thoughts in their own words, providing richer and more nuanced data. The interview sessions were more focused on exploring a specific topic or set of topics in-depth, given the qualitative nature of the study. The open-ended format allows for a flexible exploration of participants' experiences, opinions, and perspectives. the researchers began to do thematic analysis. Researchers in the current study utilized Braun & Clarke's (2006) six phase guide to do thematic analysis:

Table 2: Framework For Thematic Analysis

Step 1	Become familiar with the data
Step 2	Generate initial codes
Step 3	Search for themes
Step 4	Review themes
Step 5	Define themes
Step 6	Write up
Step 6	Write up

Source: (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Several challenges were encountered during this research. The snowballing method for recruitment proved to be time-consuming and required a flexible approach to reach data saturation. Coordinating interviews across multiple states presented significant logistical difficulties. Additionally, handling sensitive topics was crucial to ensure the comfort and honesty of participants. Accurate and confidential storage and handling of qualitative data were essential to maintain the integrity of the study.

Findings and Discussion

In order to investigate the use of profanity 25 males and females participated in the survey. Below is the table to show the respondents demographics.

Table 3: Respondents Demographics

Respondent (R)	Name	Age	Location	Education Level	Relationship Status
R1	Anilveer Singh	42	Malacca	Bachelors	Married
R2	Sunil Singh	34	Kuala Lumpur	Diploma	Married
R3	Sukhveer Singh	47	Selangor	Bachelors	Married
R4	Rohan Singh	30	Perak	Bachelors	Single
R5	Avinash Singh	36	Penang	Diploma	Single
R6	Sukhdip Singh	39	Kuala Lumpur	Postgraduate	Single
R7	Jasveer Singh	44	Malacca	Bachelors	Married
R8	Gurmesh Singh	41	Penang	Postgraduate	Married
R9	Pritam Singh	37	Perak	Bachelors	Single
R10	Jogjit Singh	32	Selangor	Bachelors	Single
R11	Gurmeet Kaur	54	Kuala Lumpur	Diploma	Single

R12	Meher Kaur	47	Ipoh	Diploma	Married
R13	Sunita Kaur	47	Selangor	Diploma	Married
R14	Satvin Kaur	22	Selangor	Diploma	Single
R15	Arveen Kaur	24	Kuala Lumpur	Diploma	Single
R16	Jaspreet Kaur	31	Seremban	Bachelors	Single
R17	Manmeet Kaur	30	Penang	Bachelors	Single
R18	Surinder Kaur	26	Penang	Diploma	Single
R19	Tanya Kaur	55	Kelantan	Bachelors	Married
R20	Swaran Kaur	35	Ipoh	Bachelors	Married
R21	Pehleen Kaur	35	Johor	Bachelors	Married
R22	Manisha Kaur	44	Kuantan	Bachelors	Married
R23	Dilbir Kaur	46	Johor	Bachelors	Married
R24	Keerat Kaur	45	Ipoh	Bachelors	Married
R25	Lavinsha Kaur	60	Ipoh	Bachelors	Married

As indicated in review of literature, Jay and Janschewitz (2008) mentioned that profanity is a form of an aggressive behaviour associated with emotional expression. Interestingly, the revelation in literature review unfolds that the use of culturally foul language is by no means a new phenomenon. Hence, the present research was intended to analyse differences in the use of Punjabi as foul language among the males and females. Data shows that majority of males use more foul terms as compared to females. Findings also indicated that females are less frequent users of these swear words. The corpus of Punjabi bad words shows that there are many terms used to insult both genders and females are greater recipients of these words than males. This observation aligns with the theory of dominance, which suggests that linguistic subordination of women in society is attributed to the power and dominance of males (Lakoff, 1973).

RQ 1: Is Foul Language Most Used By Males Or Females In Punjabi Language Context?

Findings indicated unanimous agreement among respondents that the predominant use of foul language is initially observed among males. Punjabi males are seen as the leaders of the household, displaying dominance in a household despite having tremendous involvement in other aspect of the society. Theory of dominance displays the male dominance trend where the primary cause of women's linguistic subordination in society is attributed to the power and dominance of males. The interviews conducted among the males and females showed the emergence of the themes below.

Machismo Attitude

Undoubtedly, the power and dominance are displayed by the males in their use of profanity towards the opposite sex. Male respondents echoed the presence of "machismo" within the family dynamic during the interview.

Pritam Singh: Growing up in an extended family, it was a common occurrence for me to observe my uncles and father engaging in conversations where they discussed various issues, often using explicit language.

Anilveer Singh: It is nothing new for my grandfather and dad use haramdi or kutti in their daily language.

Sunil Singh: In my house words like kutti, kamli, and haramdi (with a laughter) have become the common vocabulary among my uncles, brothers, and the males in my house.

Amazingly, while speaking of the “common language” in the house, the male respondents did not mention of any regrets or surprise. The respondent Sunil Singh did not show any remorse instead laughed the matter off while referring the “common words”. As the interview progressed, a noteworthy trend emerged where husbands tended to exhibit a proclivity for losing their temper, resorting to the use of offensive language directed at their wives. The excerpt below demonstrates such trend.

Sukhveer Singh: Well, if I'm angry I do use words like Bhenchod. It sounds impactful.

Rohan Singh: When you get angry or even when we joke, it is nothing more satisfying than to use kutti, haramdi and teri maa di to my wife. It's not that I disrespect her but it's just spontaneous.

Gurmeet Kaur: In my house as much as I dislike, my father-in-law calls my mother-in-law kutti or kenjeri. My mother-in-law seems to be so used to it that she responds to him. I hate it.

The excerpts above indicate that the males are complacent with such language and do not display any guilt. These traits support the dominance theory where the men linguistically dominate the opposite gender (Lakoff, 1973). Such behaviour within family dynamics seemed to have a cascading effect, notably manifesting in the actions of sons.

Meher Kaur: My husband is known to have temper. So, whenever he gets upset, he abuses me verbally in front of our sons. Our kids are small, and they laugh whenever their dad abuses me. I worry that they will grow up to think it's normal to talk to women that way.

Avinash Singh: Honestly, I'm not all excited about these foul languages. But then, I grew up in a big family and grandfather used foul language with his sisters and wife. That is how I picked up these words. Sometimes my father will use it. So, it's like a trend (with a laughter).

Sukhdip Singh: People say these are bad languages sometimes it is so much fun and has an uumph. Sometimes ladies also use foul language among us.

In an introspective, the derogatory language directed to women appears to bolster male ego and assert their dominance in the family. Sons in the family absorb these foul words which becomes an inheritance. However, the prevailing question remains if they are inheriting the foul language or machismos attitude.

RQ 2: To Whom Are Foul Words Primarily Directed: Males Or Females?

Foul language can be directed towards both males and females, and its prevalence depends on individual preferences, social contexts, and cultural influences. Referring to review of literature, foul language is adopted in anger, excitement, annoyance or even in displaying encouragement. In general, foul language is vernacular among the males.

Male Vernacular Language

The interviews with the respondents reveal how foul language are part of everyday emotions and conversation in daily life. Unsurprisingly, abusive language directed at women is a sign of victory. Linguistically dominant attitude adopted by the men in a family towards woman is vernacular.

Jasveer Singh: It is not that I knew this gala but mixing with the community has made me use this gaala like normal language, especially when you use it on a woman. They keep quiet and they start crying. So, there I feel I have won. I like to use benchod, maa di lun.

Gurmesh Singh: Nolah, when you sit with your type of people, we speak like this. We use randi and mostly bhenchod. We are boys.

Sunita Kaur: I have a lot of male friends. When we get together, they use bad language mostly female gala with each other like bhenchod. It's normal use.

Satvin Kaur: It is also common for women to use foul language when addressing another woman who has indulge in something sinful like beghairat, behaya kuti kemini.

Female Targets of Foul Language:

The use of swearing language is frequently directed towards both men and women, contingent upon the prevailing social context. Specifically, within familial relationships, there appears to be a notable tendency for the female gender, particularly mothers, to become the primary targets of such language.

Arveen Kaur: My father whenever angry and drunk, would abuse my mother with words like randi, kuti. Just because she used to stop him from drinking alcohol.

Jaspreet Kaur: I grew up hearing my grandfather and uncles scolding their wives with words like suri, haramdi.

Manmeet Kaur: My childhood was marred by the distressing sight of my father verbally abusing my mother with profanity. During that period, my mother, regrettably, did not retaliate. However, as the years passed, she found the strength to stand up for herself, countering my father's offensive language with similarly harsh words, specifically directed at his female relatives.

Women are subjected to a number of stereotypes and do not escape from derogatory terms either. Moreover, despite their diligent efforts in both career and household responsibilities, women still face language devaluation. Being addressed with derogatory terms goes beyond humiliation. As mentioned by Arveen Kaur, being subjected to abusive language is seems ordinary in the family. Jaspreet highlights the same phenomena in her households. in a daily conversation, merely addressing someone with “oi” or “hey” can be deemed impolite. Now, imagine the impact of being addressed with derogatory terms in the family in front of children and other family members. Conversely, in the public domain, the trend shifts, with foul language predominantly directed towards males. Instances of offensive language being directed at females are relatively rare and typically occur in specific circumstances such as conflicts between peers or instances of miscommunication and misunderstanding.

Surinder Kaur: It not a big deal. You can use the same gala in English and in any languages. The objective is to use gala because it is fun. I have used words like Maa ka phudda, Randi ka bacha...it is normal. Everyone uses it.

Tanya Kaur: No matter how advance we are, women are still subjected to a lot of terms. The best part no one tells the man anything but if it's a lady using foul language then they are further termed as rude, foul mouth, and bad upbringing.

Words like “suri” (pig), “haramdi” (bitch), “kutti” (bitch) and more have become a norm in daily conversation. The crucial aspect to consider here is the lack of guilt in employing such language which seems ordinary. The fact remains, society has set standards on the way a woman should behave to the language they use. Such constrictions are not only suffocating but also indirectly known as silent killing.

RQ3: What Implication Does The Foul Words Have On Malaysian Punjabi Women?

This research offers valuable perspectives on the diverse ramifications of foul language for Malaysian Punjabi women, informed by investigations into its effects on emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, cultural expectations, empowerment, identity, and community perception.

Emotional Impact:

The use of derogatory language towards Malaysian Punjabi women can have profound emotional consequences, often evoking feelings of hurt, humiliation, or distress. These repercussions vary depending on individual traits such as personality and resilience, as well as the dynamics within the relationship with the person uttering such language. The research underscores the depth of emotional impact caused by foul language on Malaysian Punjabi women. Nichols' (1983) study highlights how women, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, may experience heightened insult from such language compared to men. This emotional burden is compounded by societal expectations for women to endure such verbal abuse stoically, amplifying the distress they experience.

Interpersonal Relationships:

Foul language can strain interpersonal relationships within Malaysian Punjabi communities, potentially leading to conflicts, breakdowns in communication, or strained ties. Selnow's (1985) study on undergraduate students highlights the prevalence of foul language, especially among males, which may intensify tensions within familial or social circles. This normalization of derogatory language within relationships exacerbates existing conflicts and fosters a culture of disrespect. The use of derogatory language can create barriers to effective communication and erode trust and mutual respect among community members. Moreover, when foul language becomes ingrained in social interactions, it perpetuates a cycle of hostility and undermines the cohesion of Malaysian Punjabi communities. Thus, addressing the use of foul language is essential for nurturing healthy and harmonious interpersonal relationships within these communities.

Cultural Expectations:

Cultural expectations significantly shape the perceived severity of foul language, as highlighted by Suyanto's (2010) research on the Javanese community's norms of camaraderie and friendship, which can influence the frequency and acceptance of vulgar language within social circles. This dynamic is mirrored among Malaysian Punjabi women, who, deeply rooted in

their cultural heritage, often prioritize values of dignity, respect, and harmonious communication. For Malaysian Punjabi women, the use of foul language can pose a challenge to these deeply ingrained cultural values, leading to internal conflict and a sense of cultural dissonance. In the context of Malaysian Punjabi culture, women often play multifaceted roles within their families and communities, balancing traditional expectations with modern aspirations (Kaur & Gill, 2018; Kaur, & Kaur, 2015). They are often regarded as the custodians of family honor and are expected to embody virtues such as modesty, patience, and grace (Kaur & Gill, 2022; Kaur, et al., 2021a;2021b;2023a; Kaur & Kaur, 2022). Consequently, the use of foul language, particularly when directed at them, can be perceived as a direct affront to their dignity and the cultural values they uphold. Moreover, Malaysian Punjabi women are integral members of their social circles, where bonds of friendship and kinship are highly valued. Within these circles, language serves as a tool for bonding and expression, reflecting the shared values and norms of the community. When foul language permeates these social interactions, Malaysian Punjabi women may find themselves torn between loyalty to their cultural heritage and the pressure to conform to evolving societal norms.

Empowerment and Identity:

The use of foul language holds the potential to influence the empowerment and identity of Malaysian Punjabi women, presenting a challenge to their sense of agency and self-perception. While societal conventions often prescribe gender-specific language patterns, as evidenced by Kirk's (2013) findings indicating fewer sexual terms used by females in profanity, Malaysian Punjabi women may actively oppose or address such language to affirm their independence and fortify their self-image, as illustrated by Sukanto and Nicolau's (2014) exploration of linguistic politeness. Moreover, the impact of foul language extends beyond individual experiences, reflecting broader societal norms and expectations concerning gender roles and linguistic expression. Despite prevailing cultural standards that endorse male linguistic dominance, the resistance exhibited by Malaysian Punjabi women against derogatory language signifies a challenge to entrenched power structures. Through their defiance of linguistic subordination, these women assert their entitlement to dignity and respect, contributing to ongoing dialogues on gender parity and empowerment within their communities. This defiance not only signifies a rejection of linguistic oppression but also serves as a catalyst for reshaping cultural narratives and fostering a more inclusive and egalitarian society.

Community Perception:

The community's perception adds layers of complexity to the issue, as societal norms often dictate how women should respond to or tolerate foul language. These perceptions wield significant influence over the social standing of Malaysian Punjabi women within their community, potentially subjecting them to social exclusion or marginalization if they diverge from expected behavioral norms (Gill & Kaur, 2008; Kaur & Gill, 2018). Hindriks and van Hofwegen's (2014) study on offensive language in Dutch highlights the scrutiny or marginalization women may face for their language choices, emphasizing the impact of societal judgments on gendered linguistic behavior. Likewise, women who challenge or resist foul language may encounter reinforced gender stereotypes, leading to subsequent social exclusion. Moreover, Malaysian Punjabi women often navigate between diverse cultural identities, balancing their Punjabi heritage with the multicultural influences of Malaysian society (Hun & Kaur, 2014; Kaur & Gill, 2018; Kaur, et al, 2021; Kaur & Kaur, 2022; Kaur, et al, 2023a). This interplay of cultures adds another layer of complexity to their experiences with foul language, as they endeavor to maintain a sense of cultural belonging while adapting to the realities of their multicultural environment. In essence, the implications of foul language for

Malaysian Punjabi women extend beyond mere linguistic expression to encompass intricate socio-cultural dynamics. By acknowledging and addressing these implications, society can strive towards creating environments where Malaysian Punjabi women feel empowered to assert their cultural identity while navigating the challenges of modernity. Below is the summarised version of what have been discussed in detail above:

Table 4: Summary of the Findings

RQ 1: Is foul language most used by males or females in Punjabi language context?

Themes	Summary
<i>Machismo Attitude</i>	Male respondents acknowledged a "machismo" dynamic in family interactions and used profanity towards the opposite sex. They were unsurprised by this behaviour. Husbands lost their temper and used offensive language towards their wives to boost their ego and assert dominance. These families passed on derogatory language to their sons.

RQ 2: To whom are foul words primarily directed: males or females?

Themes	Summary
<i>Male Vernacular Language</i>	Abusive language directed at women is seen as a sign of victory. Men in the family adopt a dominant, vernacular attitude towards women.
<i>Female Targets of Foul Language</i>	Both men and women swear, but mothers are often the main targets in families. Women face stereotypes and derogatory terms, while public foul language is mostly directed at men and rarely involves women, usually due to conflicts or misunderstandings. Such language without guilt is normalised, and societal standards on women's behaviour and language are oppressive.

RQ3: What implication does the foul words have on Malaysian Punjabi women?

Themes	Summary
<i>Emotional Impact</i>	Derogatory language against Malaysian Punjabi women hurts, humiliates, and distresses. Research shows that the emotional toll is compounded by societal pressures on women to endure abuse.
<i>Interpersonal Relationships</i>	Foul language strains relationships in Malaysian Punjabi communities, leading to conflicts and poor communication. Normalizing derogatory language worsens conflicts, fosters disrespect, and erodes trust. Addressing foul language is essential for healthy, harmonious relationships.
<i>Cultural Expectations</i>	Foul language can challenge the cultural values of Malaysian Punjabi women, causing inner conflict. In their close-knit social circles, language is vital for bonding and reflecting shared values. When foul language enters these interactions, it pressures them to balance cultural loyalty with changing societal norms.

<i>Empowerment and Identity</i>	Foul language can affect the empowerment and identity of Malaysian Punjabi women, challenging their sense of agency. It reflects broader societal norms on gender roles and language. Their resistance to derogatory language challenges power structures, asserting their right to dignity. This defiance contributes to discussions on gender equality and empowerment. It also helps reshape cultural narratives towards inclusivity and equality.
<i>Community Perception</i>	Challenging foul language may reinforce gender stereotypes, leading to social exclusion. Malaysian Punjabi women balance their cultural identities amidst multicultural influences. This interplay adds complexity to their experiences with foul language, reflecting intricate socio-cultural dynamics. Creating empowering environments is essential for them to assert their cultural identity while adapting to modern challenges.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the usage of offensive language within the Punjabi-speaking community in Malaysia, specifically focusing on disparities between genders. The study effectively tackled three primary research inquiries: (1) Which gender, males or females, used profanity more frequently? (2) Was derogatory language primarily targeted towards males or females? (3) What was the effect of these offensive words on Malaysian Punjabi women? The prevalent use of foul language, predominantly by men, underscores the entrenched patriarchal structures that persist across generations. This linguistic phenomenon, often personalized to target women, highlights a deeply ingrained societal attitude towards the female gender. Whether directed at men or women, derogatory language consistently denigrates women and their bodies, perpetuating a culture of disrespect. As individuals belonging to intersecting minority groups, it is imperative that we strive for better conduct by demonstrating greater respect towards women. The principles of Sikhism, advocating for equality and respect regardless of gender, offer a stark contrast to the prevailing norms that perpetuate derogatory language. The paradoxical notion of women being revered as “*Ghar ki Izzat*” (the honor of the household) juxtaposed with the rampant sexualization of foul language reflects a disconcerting reality where women are simultaneously upheld and disgraced. This disparity underscores the effective application of dominance theory by male counterparts in normalizing and mastering derogatory language as a means of asserting power. It is high time to challenge the normalization of derogatory language and the complacency that accompanies it. The notion that such language is acceptable or inconsequential must be unequivocally rejected. It is imperative to dismantle the prevailing attitudes that perpetuate the degradation of women through language and strive towards fostering a culture of genuine respect and equality for all genders.

This study makes a significant and complex contribution. Firstly, it offers factual information on how gender influences the use of offensive language within a particular cultural and linguistic setting, thereby adding to the wider body of sociolinguistic research. Furthermore, it provides a comprehensive understanding of the societal and psychological consequences of offensive language on Punjabi women in Malaysia. This research offers valuable perspectives that can guide community leaders and policymakers in their efforts to tackle problems related to verbal mistreatment and gender bias. To better understand the lasting psychological impact of offensive language, future research should focus on investigating how it affects various

demographic groups within the Punjabi community. Furthermore, conducting comparative studies involving different linguistic and cultural groups in Malaysia could offer a more thorough comprehension of how the use of offensive language influences social interactions and gender dynamics. This has the potential to ultimately result in more efficient interventions and educational programmes targeted at decreasing the prevalence and consequences of offensive language in society.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to extend their heartfelt appreciation to all the respondents who generously shared their experiences and insights, thereby contributing to the depth and comprehension of this article. This work is dedicated to those who persist in their efforts to promote gender equality in diverse societies.

References

- Andersson, L.G., & Trudgill, P. (2007). Swearing. In Monaghan, L., Goodman, J. (Eds.), *A Cultural Approach to Interpersonal Communication* (pp. 195–199). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Bailey, L. A., & Timm, L. A. (1976). More on women's—and men's— expletives. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 18(9), 438-449.
- Baxter, L. A. (2011). *Voicing relationships: A dialogic perspective*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Bayard, D., & S. Krishnayya. (2001). Gender, expletive use and context: Male and female expletive use in structured and unstructured conversation among New Zealand university students. *Women and Language*, 24 (1), 1-15.
- Bendixen, M., & Gabriel, U. (2013). Social judgment of aggressive language: Effects of target and sender sex on the evaluation of slurs. *Scandinavian: Journal of Psychology*, 54(3), 236-242.
- Benwell, B., (2001). Male gossip and language play in the letters pages of men's lifestyle magazines. *Journal of Pop Culture*, 34, 19–33.
- Bijlstra, G., Holland, R. W., Dotsch, R., & Wigboldus, D. H. (2019). Stereotypes and prejudice affect the recognition of emotional body postures. *Emotion*, 19(2), 189.
- Bird, G.W., & Harris, R.L. (1990). A comparison of role strain and coping strategies by gender of family structure among early adolescents. *Journal of Early Adolescence* 10(2) 141–158.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Breda, T., Jouini, E., Napp, C., & Thebault, G. (2020). Gender stereotypes can explain the gender-equality paradox. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(49), 31063–31069.
- Brown D. E. 1991. *Human universals*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill
- Coates, J. (1986). *Women, men and language: A sociolinguistic account of sex differences in language*. London & New-York: Longman.
- Coates, J. (1993). *Women, men and language: A sociolinguistic account of sex difference in language* (2nd edition) London: Longman.
- Fischer, A. H., Rodriguez Mosquera, P. M., Van Vianen, A. E., & Manstead, A. S. (2004). Gender and culture differences in emotion. *Emotion*, 4(1), 87.
- Foote, R., & Woodward, J. (1973). A Preliminary Investigation of Obscene Language. *The Journal of psychology*, 83(2), 263–275.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.1973.9915614>

- Gauthier, M., Guille, A., Rico, F., & Deseille, A. (2015). Text mining and twitter to analyze British swearing habits. *Handbook of Twitter for Research*. Retrieved from chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://adrienguille.github.io/publications/twitter-handbook.pdf
- Ghani, N. A. A. A. (2018). Online animosity: Impoliteness strategies and triggers of hostility in a social networking site in Brunei. *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 18, 71–84.
- Ghani, K. (2016). Overlapping in Male and Female Speech in Brunei English Informal Conversations. *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 16, 120-128
- Gill, S. S., & Kaur, C. (2008). Gurdwara and Its Politics: Current Debate on Sikh Identity in Malaysia. *International Journal of the Malay World and Civilisation*, (ATMA), 26, 243-255.
- Guerin, B. (1992). Social behaviour as discriminative stimulus and consequence in social anthropology. *Behaviour analyst*, 15, 31-41.
- Güvendir, E. (2015). Why Are Males Inclined to Use Strong Swear Words More Than Females? An Evolutionary Explanation Based on Male Intergroup Aggressiveness. *Language Sciences*, 50, 133-139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2015.02.003>
- Goldstein J. 2003. *War and gender*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press
- Harris, M. B. (1993). How provoking: What makes men and women angry? *Aggressive Behavior*, 19(3), 199-211.
- Hindriks, I.M. & Hofwegen, R.H. van. (2014). *Godverdomme, ikzieeenhaai: A diachronic research on swearing habits in a Dutch reality TV show*. Leiden University: Department of linguistics.
- Hun, P. G., & Kaur, C. (2014). Identiti Etnik Minoriti di Malaysia: Antara Realiti Sosial Tafsiran Autoriti dan Tafsiran Harian. *Akademika*, 84 (1&2), 57-70. <https://doi.org/10.17576/akad-2014-8401n2-05>
- Hsu, N., Badura, K. L., Newman, D. A., & Speech, M. E. P. (2021). Gender, “masculinity”, and “femininity”: A meta-analytic review of gender differences in agency and communion. *Psychological Bulletin*, 147(10), 987.
- James, D. (1998). Gender-linked derogatory terms and their use by women and men. *American Speech*, 73(4), 399-420.
- Jasperson, O. (1922). *Language: Its nature origin and Development*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Jay, T.B. (1996). *What to Do When Your Students Talk Dirty*. San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, Inc.
- Jay, T., & Janschewitz, K. (2008). The pragmatics of swearing. *Journal of Politeness Research. Language, Behaviour, Culture*, 4(2), 267-288.
- Jing, S. Z. (2017). Cursing, taboo and euphemism. In *Routledge Handbook of Chinese Applied Linguistics* (1st ed.).London: Routledge.
- Johnson, D.I., & Lewis, N. (2010). Perceptions of swearing in the work setting: An expectancy violations theory perspective. *Communication Reports* 23, 106-118.
- Kaur, C., & Gill, S. S. (2018). Sikh Women Diaspora in Malaysia: The Reality of their Role and Status in the Religious Domain. *Millennial Asia*, 9(1), 40-65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0976399617753753>
- Kaur, C., & Gill, S. S. (2022). A Phenomenology of the Lives of Malaysian Sikh Women: Their Roles and Status in the Private Domain. In *A Kaleidoscope of Malaysian Indian Women's Lived Experiences: Gender-Ethnic Intersectionality and Cultural Socialisation* (pp. 241-265). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.

- Kaur, A., & Kaur, C. (2015). The Influence of Bollywood Films on Punjabi Sikh Youths' Perception Towards the Sikh Identity. *Malaysian Journal of Youth Studies*, 12, 173-185.
- Kaur, A., Kaur, C., & Kaur, P. (2021a). Awareness of Malaysian Family Law among the Sikh Married Couples. "Doing" Sustainable Development in The New Norm: Towards Gender Equality, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Unit for Research on Women and Gender (KANITA), School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 41-67.
- Kaur, C., Kaur, A., & Kaur, P. (2021b). The Good Woman: Invisible Construction of Gender Expectations among Malaysian Sikh Women. "Doing" Sustainable Development in The New Norm: Towards Gender Equality, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Unit for Research on Women and Gender (KANITA), School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1-24.
- Kaur, C., & Kaur, A. (2022). Malaysian Sikh Youths' Perception of Diverse Sexual Identities. *Millennial Asia*, 13(1), 83- 107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0976399620956289>
- Kaur, C., Kaur, A. & Kaur, P. (2023a). Sikh Parents' Perception on the Practice of Diverse Sexual Identities. *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture & Theory*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17448727.2023.2218795>
- Kaur, C., Kaur, A., & Kaur, P. (2023b, May). Panjabi Bolo: Endless Obstacles to Minority Language Survival. In CoMBInES-Conference on Management, Business, Innovation, Education and Social Sciences, 3(1), 321-332.
<https://journal.uib.ac.id/index.php/combines/article/view/7700>
- Kirk, C. (2013). The most popular swear words on Facebook. Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon_valley/2013/09/11/top_swear_words_most_popular_curse_words_on_facebook.html.
- Klerk, V. de. (1991). Expletives: Men Only?" *Communications Monographs*, 58 (2), 156– 169.
- Klerk, V. de. (1992). How taboo are taboo words for girls? *Language and Society*, 21, 277-289.
- Korb, S., Mikus, N., Massaccesi, C., Grey, J., Duggirala, S. X., Kotz, S. A., & Mehu, M. (2023). EmoSex: Emotion prevails over sex in implicit judgments of faces and voices. *Emotion*, 23(2), 569–588.
- Lakoff, R. (1975). *Language and Woman's Place*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Lettieri, G., Handjaras, G., Bucci, E., Pietrini, P., & Cecchetti, L. (2023). How Male and Female Literary Authors Write About Affect Across Cultures and Over Historical Periods. *Affective science*, 4(4), 770–780. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-023-00219-9>
- Ljung, M. (1984). *Om svordomar i svenskan, engelskan, ocharttonandraspråk*. Stockholm: Akademilitteratur.
- Ljung, M. (2011). *Swearing: a cross-cultural linguistic study* (1st ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Love, R. (2021). Swearing in informal spoken English: 1990s–2010s. *Text & Talk*, 41(5-6), 739-762. <https://doi.org/10.1515/text-2020-0051>
- Maldonado García, M.I. (2015). Spanish 'politically correct' movement: Reasons for failure. *Journal of Political Studies* 22(1), 237–252.
- Marzuki, A.H., & Alkaff, S.N.H. (2024). An Investigation on Perceptions of Street Remarks by Bruneian Men and Women. *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 24(1) 53-68.
- Maynard, S. K. (2002). *Japanese communication: Language and thought in context*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Univ. of Hawaii Press.
- McDonald, M. M., Navarrete, C. D., & Van Vugt, M. (2012). Evolution and the psychology of intergroup conflict: the male warrior hypothesis. *Philosophical transactions of the*

- Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological sciences, 367(1589), 670–679.
<https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2011.0301>
- McDuff, D., Girard, J. M., & Kaliouby, R. E. (2017). Large-scale observational evidence of cross-cultural differences in facial behavior. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 41, 1–19.
- McEnery, T. (2005). *Swearing in English: Bad language, purity and power from 1586 to the present*. New York: Routledge.
- Montagu, A. (2001). *The anatomy of swearing*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Navarrete, C. D., McDonald, M. M., Molina, L. E., & Sidanius, J. (2010). Prejudice at the nexus of race and gender: an out-group male target hypothesis. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 98, 933–945. <https://doi:10.1037/a0017931>
- Neel, R., Becker, D. V., Neuberg, S. L., & Kenrick, D. T. (2012). Who expressed what emotion? Men grab anger, women grab happiness. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(2), 583–586.
- Nichols, P., C. (1983). Linguistic Options and Choices for Black Women in the Rural South. In Thorne, K. & Henley, (Eds.), *Language, Gender and Society* (pp.54-68). Rowley: Newberry House Publications.
- Nicolau, M.S.F., & Sukamto, E.K. (2014). Male and Female Attitudes towards Swear Words: A Case Study at Binus International School. Institute of research and community Petra Christian University: *A biannual publication on the study of language and literature*, 16 (2).
- Rassin, E., & Muris, P. (2005). Why do women swear? An exploration of reasons for and perceived efficacy of swearing in Dutch female students. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 38(7), 1669-1674.
- Richardson, S. S., Reiches, M. W., Bruch, J., Boulicault, M., Noll, N. E., & Shattuck-Heidorn, H. (2020). Is there a gender-equality paradox in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)? Commentary on the study by Stoet and Geary (2018). *Psychological Science*, 31(3), 338–341.
- Selnow, W. (1985). Sex Differences in Uses and Perceptions of Profanity. *Sex Roles*, 12(3), 303–12.
- Spender, D. (1980). *Man made language*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Suyanto, A. (2010). Javanese swear words in a boarding house: The case of five Soegijapranata Catholic university students. Thesis. Soegijapranata Catholic University, Semarang.
- Sollid, H. (2009). Attitudes to swear words: gender differences among native and non-native speakers of English. Retrieved from <http://www.divaportal.org/smash/get/diva2:158456/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.
- Stoet, G., & Geary, D. C. (2018). The gender-equality paradox in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education. *Psychological Science*, 29(4), 581–593.
- Svensson, A. (2004). Gender Differences in Swearing: Who the Cares? Retrieved from Mid Sweden University
<http://dooku.miun.se/engelska/englishC/Cessay/HT03/Final/Annika%20Svensson.pdf>.
- Tooby J., & Cosmides, L. (1988). The evolution of war and its cognitive foundations. *Institute for Evolutionary Studies Technical Report no. 88-1*. Retrieved from <http://www.psych.ucsb.edu/research/cep/papers/EvolutionofWar.pdf>
- Van Oudenhoven, J. P., de Raad, B., Askevis-Leherpeux, F., Boski, P., Brunborg, G. S., Carmona, C., & Motti, F. (2008). Terms of abuse as expression and reinforcement of cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32(2), 174-185.

- West, C. & Zimmerman, D. H. (2009). Accounting for doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 23 (1), 112-122.
- Wrangham, R. W., & Peterson, D. (1996). *Demonic males: apes and the origins of human violence*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin