

YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWPOINTS TOWARD WOMEN'S SWEARING: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY IN DEPOK

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ABSTRACT

Although we often hear people use swearwords in daily conversation, swearing is generally perceived as improper or disgraceful conduct by society. Many studies on people's perceptions toward swearing have been conducted. They focus on whether men and women's swearing is perceived differently and which of the two groups use swearwords more frequently in daily life. Little is known about what young people think of this behavior, particularly when this taboo language is used by women. The aim of this study is to discover young people's opinion of women's swearing based on sociolinguistic perspectives. It also discusses the correlation between respondents' gender and education level and their perception towards this language behavior. Forty-two male and female students aged between 12-22 years old took part in this study. They were students of secondary schools and colleges who lived in Depok, a suburban district on the outskirts of Jakarta. The study was conducted by means of questionnaire. The respondents were asked to state their opinion about a number of situations in which swearwords are said by women. The students' perception was analyzed based on their gender and education level and the manually calculated data were converted into tables. The results show that female students are more skeptical, while male students are more tolerant toward this issue. Moreover, junior high school students are more averse than senior high school and college students.

Keywords: women's swearing, swearwords, young people's opinion, education level, Depok

INTRODUCTION

Language as a means of communication is used to express one's thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and feelings, which can be both positive or negative. In expressing negative feelings, some people may choose words that are neutral so that others will not feel offended, but sometimes others express their emotions by swearing. Swearing, which is defined as behavior or language that is prohibited or avoided by people at certain situations or time, is considered taboo (Allan and Burrige, 2006, p. 11). If people say swearwords at the wrong time or situations, it will violate the society's norm since swearwords are considered an offensive behavior in some culture. Therefore, swearing cannot be separated from the notion of politeness as it relates to context, situation, time, and subject matter, as well as solidarity and mutuality (Allan and Burrige, 2006; Goddard, 2015). It means that swearwords are sensitive communication tools. Therefore, people should consider the time of speaking. For example, one particular swearword can have many meanings depending on the context of speaking. The swearword "fuck" have at least twenty meanings, such as disbelief, surprise, dissatisfaction, etc. (Leigh & Lepin, 2005 as cited in Hagen, 2013). Goddard (2015) stated that the swearwords have its own use and functions and can be analyzed since it is ethnopragmatics. Indeed, swearing is a sociolinguistics phenomenon that can be analyzed from different perspectives (Beers Fagersten, 2012, p.15).

Previous studies on the subject reveal different results. Syalita (2012) and Hagen (2013) reported that men and women start to accept seeing people swear. Syalita (2012) in her thesis found that women and men now expressing their feeling using swearwords based on critical discourse analysis on Indonesian novels that she did. Hagen (2013) also found the same result based on quantitative research that women use as many swearwords as men do and also identified that young people are more familiar with swear words, while adults are more skeptical about it. Meanwhile, Nicolau and Sukanto (2014) reported that the respondents of their study still regarded swearing as negative behavior, which is reflected in their answer that they are not comfortable saying swearwords in front of strangers or the opposite sex. Baudin (2014) conducted a survey on women's attitude

towards swearing and concluded that swearing was perceived as a negative behavior. In her study, the respondents, who were all women, said that they tended to lower their volume when they swore.

Although many studies on people’s perception toward swearing have been undertaken, studies on people’s attitudes toward women’s swearing are rare. This research attempts to reveal young people’s perception, i.e. male and female students, toward women’s swearing. It also discusses the correlation between the students’ education level and their perception.

METHOD

This research was conducted in Depok with forty-two male and female students as respondents. The mean age of the respondents was 17 (SD=3.3; range 12-22). The respondents were chosen by random sampling based on their education level from first grade in junior high school until last semester in college as it was to examine teenagers and young adults’ view on taboo language. The respondents were divided into three groups, which were junior high school, senior high school, and college students. Each group had seven female and seven male students of three different educational levels.

The study used a quantitative method. A questionnaire consisting of ten questions with multiple choice and open-ended questions was used for asking respondents’ opinion of women’s swearing. The data collection took a month and, it was conducted by means of the online and conventional data collection method.

The ten questions in the questionnaire were divided into 3 parts. The first part asked about how often the respondent swear, the reasons for swearing or not swearing, and their feeling after swearing. The second part consisted of four questions asking about the respondents’ viewpoints toward women’s swearing of a particular swearword expressed in four different situations: when expressing positive emotions, expressing anger, insulting other person, and joking. The different intentions of swearing were chosen based on Goddard’s (2015) analysis on the meaning of swearing to express good and bad emotions. Following these questions, the respondent had to state their opinion whether they consider the act of swearing as the behavior of an uneducated woman, a childish woman, a normal behavior, or other opinion that they have to specify. The last part consisted of two open-ended questions asking the respondents’ opinion of swearing. The respondents were expected to write their honest opinions about the notion.

ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed according to two variables, gender and education level. Tables 1-4 show the perception of students toward women’s swearing in 4 different situations, i.e. women’s swearing to express positive emotion, to express anger, to insult other person, and women’s swearing when joking. The respondents were analyzed based on 3 levels of education: Junior High School (JHS), Senior High School (SHS), and College, and their toward women’s swearing.

It can be seen in Table 1 that female students are more intolerant than male students toward women’s swearing to express positive emotion.

Table 1: Gender and Education Comparison in Women’s Swearing to Express Positive Emotion

	JHS		SHS		College	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Uneducated	3	3	1	2	1	2
Childish	1	2	2	3	0	2
Normal	1	1	2	1	3	2
Others (positive/neutral)	1	0	1	0	2	0
Others (negative)	1	1	1	1	1	1

In total, the number of female and male students who consider women’s swearing uneducated, childish other negative thoughts is 18 (42.8%) and 11 (26.1%) respectively. Parallel to this is the number of male and female students who consider the behavior normal and positive/neutral. There are 10 male students in contrast to only 4 female students. From the educational level perspective, junior

high school students are more intolerant toward the behavior compared to senior high school and college students.

Table 2 shows the perception of students toward women’s swearing when expressing anger. The perception of students based on gender is similar to that of the first context, with 17 (40.4%) female students and 11 (26.1%) who perceive it as uneducated, childish or other negative thoughts. However, it is interesting to note that there are more female students of junior high school who think that such behavior is uneducated, compared to female students of the other two educational levels. Also, similar to the responses of the two sexes in the first context, there are 7 male students in contrast to 3 female students, who think that using the particular swearword to express anger is normal and positive/neutral. From the educational level perspective, college students remain the most tolerant. Meanwhile high school students are slightly more intolerant than their juniors.

Table 2: Gender and Education Comparison in Women’s Swearing to Express Anger

	JHS		SHS		College	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Uneducated	3	6	3	5	1	3
Childish	0	0	0	0	1	1
Normal	1	1	2	0	3	2
Others (positive/neutral)	1	0	0	0	1	0
Others (negative)	1	0	2	2	1	1

Table 3 shows how students perceive the use of the particular swear word by women to insult other people. The students’ perception toward the behavior is more disapproving compared to those of in the first and second situations. However, the number of female students who consider the behavior uneducated, childish or other negative thoughts remains higher than that of male students with 19 (45.2%) and 15 (35.7%) respectively. Meanwhile, only 6 male students and 2 female students think that the behavior is normal and positive/neutral. Despite the insignificant difference in number, junior high school students remain the least tolerant toward the behavior compared to high school and college students from the educational level perspective.

Table 3: Gender and Education Comparison in Women’s Swearing to Insult Other Person

	JHS		SHS		College	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Uneducated	5	3	3	2	1	2
Childish	0	4	2	3	3	3
Normal	1	0	2	1	2	1
Others (positive/neutral)	1	0	0	0	0	0
Others (negative)	0	0	0	1	1	1

Table 4 shows how students perceive swearwords used by women when joking. In contrast to the three situations previously discussed, the students of both sexes are more tolerant toward the behavior. Although there are still more female students than male students who consider it uneducated, childish or other negative thoughts, the difference in number between the two groups is insignificant, which is 11 (26.1%) and 9 (21.4) respectively. Parallel to this is the insignificant difference in number between male students (12) and female students (10) who consider it normal and positive/neutral. Interestingly, however, the number of junior high school students who think negatively of the behavior remains higher than their seniors as far as the educational level perspective is concerned. In fact, the number is the most distinctive and significant compared to the other situations, with 12 junior high school students, 5 high school students, and only 3 college students not supporting the behavior.

Table 4: Gender and Education Comparison in Women’s Swearing when Joking

	JHS		SHS		College	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Uneducated	3	4	0	0	1	0
Childish	2	2	1	2	0	1
Normal	1	1	4	3	6	4
Others (positive/neutral)	0	0	1	1	0	1
Others (negative)	1	0	1	1	0	1

The research findings show that female students are more skeptical than male students in every education category. They are more intolerant toward women’s swearing in every situation compared to their counterparts. However, based on the education category, most junior high school students perceive women’s swearing unacceptable. The study also shows that the higher the student’s education level is, the more tolerant they are toward women’s swearing. The respondents gave their opinions in the open-ended questions whether gender influenced their viewpoints on swearing or not. About 25% of the female respondents considered swearing improper conduct regardless the gender. However, 33.3% of the female respondents thought that it was more acceptable hearing swearwords from a man – not a woman, as it was more common to hear men swearing due to their nature. 12.5% of them thought that it was fine due to the fact nowadays people could freely express their feelings that it had been in the past. Most of the female respondents ended their answer with a statement that it was inappropriate for both men and women using swearwords since it is impolite.

In general, however, the male respondents’ perception toward women’s swearing seemed to be affected by who used the swearwords. More than 57 % of the male respondents thought that swearwords were more acceptable when used by men than by women. About 11% of the male respondents consider swearwords improper to be used by both men and women in public, and only around 7% of them accepted the behavior saying that swearing has now become a habit in society.

Interestingly, although the number of negative responses toward women’s swearing is high, only 2 female respondents said that they had never sworn at all, 23 of the 42 respondents used swear words if necessary, and 17 of the 42 respondents used swearwords regularly in daily conversation. In addition, 29 twenty-nine respondents said that they used swearwords to express their emotions. However, they still regarded women who swear as having bad behavior, which can be seen in their answers to the open-ended questions. Almost all respondents who said that they often used swearwords and did not consider women's swearing a problem still believed that women have to reduce using swearwords since it is against the norm and impolite. In other words, although swearwords are used frequently in their daily life, the act of swearing is still considered improper. This correlates with respondents’ answers when asked about their feeling after using swearwords. Twenty two respondents felt guilty after saying the swearword, and two respondents felt embarrassed. Ten others thought it was fine, and only eight respondents felt satisfied after using it. These findings support the idea that the respondents, which represent a small number of young people in Depok, still have a notion that swearing is bad, and it is worse if a woman uses it.

The results of this study seem to also support Holmes (2013) theory about woman’s role as the guardian of society’s value. The notion that women have to be the role model of the society, and therefore, they have to choose their words carefully, may still be well-preserved by the respondents of this study. The following excerpts taken from the questionnaire reflect the long-held perception:

iya karena wanita lebih memiliki sifat lembut dan tidak baik berbicara kasar
 A woman should behave and talk gracefully (Male, 17)

kalau wanita itu tidak pantas berbicara kasar karena wanita seharusnya lemah lembut dan menjaga omongannya
 It is inappropriate for a woman to swear since a woman should talk gently and control their statement (Male, 14)

banyak orang sering mengungkapkan pendapat mereka bahwa perempuan tidak boleh berkata kasar, kalau laki2 mah udah bias

Many people often say that women cannot use bad words, but it is more common for men to use swearwords (Female, 17)

The research findings also support Holmes' (2013) theory about changes in a person perception toward language as they grow older. As can be seen in the following excerpts, 3 students from of different groups of educational background express different opinions about the use of swearwords by women, which confirm the theory:

Itu merupakan hal yang tidak baik karena bicara kasar sifatnya lebih buruk dan lebih baik kurang bicara kasar walaupun saya sering berkata kasar

It is such a bad thing because swearing characterized as negative, and it is better if people reduce saying swear words although I often swear (Male, 15)

Sebenarnya tidak baik tp karna jaman sekarang udah banyak di expose dgn kata kata itu setiap harinya jdnya ya biasa aja dengernya juga

Actually, swearing is bad in any cases, but due to society that exposes swearing in daily life, the swearwords are commonly heard nowadays (Female, 17)

Menurut saya mengumpat adalah hal wajar, setiap orang memiliki cara menunjukkan emosi mereka. Selama dalam masih konteks kewajaran dan diucapkan kepada teman sebaya atau orang-orang terdekat yang lebih muda menurut saya tidak masalah.

In my opinion, swearing is acceptable since people have different ways to express their emotions as long as the usage of swear words is still within a context, and they concern with whom they talk, I think it is okay (Female, 22)

CONCLUSION

The goal of this research is to examine young people's attitude toward women's swearing based on their gender and education background. The data of the study are drawn from the answers to the questionnaires distributed to 42 male and female students of three different education levels in Depok. It can be seen from this study that even though young people frequently use swearwords, they generally have a bad notion of the behavior. It is only when joking do they find it acceptable. The research findings also show that female students are more skeptical than male students in all educational levels. They are more intolerant toward women's swearing in every situation compared to their counterparts. As far as educational level is concerned, this study reveals that junior high school students are less tolerant toward women's swearing than their seniors, even in the context when the swearword is used for joking.

For further research, it is suggested that the study involves a larger number of participants for each education level. This is important since more valid evidence is required to proof whether the widely held perception of women's role as "the guardian" of society is still relevant in this day and age, and whether this perception correlates with women's swearing habit. In addition to the questionnaire, a semi-structured interview can also be used to further explore the respondents' social background, other than education level, that may influence their perspective.

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