

**The Use of Swearing Words and Expressions
Among Iraqi Arabic Friends On Social Media**

Raafat Nazar M. Al-Heety

**Department of English,
College of Education for Humanities,
University Of Anbar, Iraq**

ed.raafat.alheety@uoanbar.edu.iq

Abstract

This research is concerned with the study of the use of swearing words and expressions used among Iraqi friends on social media. It tries to analyze and classify them according to the classifications presented by Ljung (2011). This model classifies the swearing words of English into three types. The current research tries to classify the swearing of Iraqi Arabic according to the proposed model. Data are collected from friends who were engaged in Facebook conversations, where extracts containing swearing are selected and analyzed. The research concludes that the abusive words used sometimes have no meaning or at least have no offensive meaning. What makes it abusive and insulting is the intended meaning the addresser has in mind. Also, some words are too offensive and insulting especially those words that have sexual references. Because of the sensitivity of sexual topics especially those related to the addressee's female relatives among friends, Name-callings and unfriendly suggestions are more used among them. Finally, all three classifications of insulting listed by Ljung are found in the studied conversations among Arabic (Iraqi) friends.

Keywords: Swearing, ritual insults, name-callings, unfriendly suggestions

1- Introduction

Swearing, as cited by Leigh and Lepine (2005:33) and Stapleton et al (2022: 7), is considered a way to relieve frustration and anger in a nonphysical way. It helps us to express our dislike of someone without physical violence. Throughout the twentieth century, there seems to have

been a dramatic escalation in the use and acceptance of offensive language in English, both verbally and in print (Wajnryb, 2005). Ljung (2011:114) believes that there are three types of swearing: name-calling, ritual insult, and unfriendly suggestions. They all belong to larger insult categories where each one is different enough to be treated separately. All of them are similar to the curses where they are all used by the first person (addresser) to target another person (the addressee) with negative feelings. They show the feelings of the addresser towards the addressee at the moment of presenting the swear. They are different from curses which are realizations said by the speaker as they wish something bad or evil should happen to the addressee in the future. Curses often include a wish for infernal or heavenly powers. An **insult** is presented by a statement (or sometimes behavior) or an expression. It refers to anything degrading, impolite, and offensive. Such statements or behaviors can be accidental or intentional. An insult can refer to something factual or pejorative.

Ethnic insults, according to Hughes (2006: 146), are the most apparent linguistic forms of prejudice against xenophobia and out-groups. They frequently rest on comic or ironic identity distortions or the "otherness" of the target group. To build and designate these identities, stereotypes, nicknames, and blasons populaires all play a significant role. Not the phrase itself, but the person who uses it, is what matters most in the creation of an abusive term. For instance, Blacks did not find the word "**nigger**" offensive until it was used by whites in an offensive way. The word field demonstrates periods of comparative status and significant expansion, but

it does not expand consistently. These typically correspond with periods of colonization, immigration, war, territorial expansion, and religious and political strife. Obviously, distinguishing characteristics like race or color play a significant effect.

2- Swearing

Although the term "swearing" originates from English and refers to a specific linguistic behavior, it is frequently used in other language studies to refer to a linguistic resource whose realizations and functions show similarities but appear to derive from a common source of emotive utterance types. Swearing is used as a term for the implementation of such emotive expressions in various languages. This is because the English term is a deep-rooted one and the basic cross-linguistic similarity. (Ljung, 2011:1).

Moreover, McEnery (2006: 2-3) adds that homophobic, blasphemous, sexist, and racist language can also offend people in our society. Swearing is only one form of bad language. Taboo language started to be seen as being related to a variety of things, including age, education, sex, and social status. Over the previous three centuries, the proliferation of terms that define taboo language appears to have had little to no impact on the stereotypes attached to its users. There are several relationships between taboo language and a variety of sociolinguistic factors. In the context of contemporary culture, it is particularly challenging to find a solution to the problem of widespread profanity. Swearing is currently a fairly popular

practice, and for a variety of people, this once socially undesirable conduct has become the standard. Unfortunately, it has become hard to escape hearing vulgar language regularly. In most public areas, including stores and bars, on public transportation, and just simply on the street, many individuals freely and routinely use expletives. Many individuals also openly use profanity inside the walls of their own homes, especially in the gardens, which frequently means that their neighbors may hear them. To fit in with their friends and occasionally as a kind of "kickback" against rules prohibiting cursing at home, young people commonly use profanity, especially when they are out and about in a group.

3- Types of Swearing

The feelings of the speaker against the other person (addressee) at the time of speech are expressed through unfriendly remarks, standard insults, and name-calling. The curses, on the other hand, frequently include invocations of heavenly or hellish forces and are vocal forms of the addresser's hope that a bad thing should happen in the future to the other person (addressee). The name-calling, ritual insults, and unfriendly suggestions vary in how they construct their negative message and in a number of other ways. Depending on culture, ritual insults may involve insulting the addressee's female family members, especially their moms, and provoking a verbal confrontation (Ljung, 2011: 114). All types have features governed by factors that are linguistically and socially interplayed (Ilie, 2004:48).

3-1 Ritual Insults

Labov (1972:297) presents the term 'ritual insults' to cover a variety of aggressive swearing forms. Ritual insults are a form of sexual abuse against women, and the term 'mother' or 'sister' is used to refer to somebody's alleged sexual exploits involving their mother or female relatives. Usually, they involve members of the same sex making fun of each other in a variety of ways. The ritual insults' regular nature has created several condensed variants, including *Your mother*, *Your mother's*, *your sister*, and *your sister's*, etc. Due to the ritual insults' predictability, shortened forms like "Your mother" and "Your mother's" have been created. Starting with their themes is probably the most effective point to investigate the abusive terms and the ritual insults exploited in name-calling. Both of these categories have particular common taboo topics, with the "mother-sister theme", and complaints about the addressee's mother, being the most prevalent one across all the languages investigated here (other female relatives) (Ljung, 2011).

3-2 Name-callings

Name-callings are mostly connected with teasing among friends. They, as Levy (2004:1) believes, are considered common social interactions, where friends often playfully use them. Name-calling is a form of offensive illocutionary act which resembles ritual insults in terms of the forbidden issues discussed as well as the fact that it is directed at persons who have

offended the speaker. Ritual insults are different from this form in a number of ways, chief among them being that they encompass a broader range of behaviors. Name-calling is quite likely a strong candidate to be recognized as a universal language category: languages all require structures that convey the speaker's perspective on others (and occasionally things). Also to do that, they require a collection of evaluative nouns, or nouns that indicate the speaker's positive or negative view. Various name-calling structures are displayed in the presentation of name-calling. The most common type of name-calling is the direct address ('vocative') exclamation, which can be used without or with the word 'You' to convey the negative attitude of the speaker toward the addressee. Testing various nouns in these utterances allows us to assume that some nouns, like traitor, snob, and fool, all are epithets (adjectives), whilst others, like judge, teacher, and father, are not. They can be demonstrated by the failure and success of the following instances, respectively:

- (1) You idiot/traitor/ snob!
- (2) /Idiot/Traitor/Snob!
- (3) * You judge/teacher/ parent!
- (4) * Judge!/Teacher!/ Parent!

There are, along with the three aforementioned forms of name-calling, two slot filler constructions: the epithets (used anaphorically) as in (a) and using epithets as noun supports, in (b)

- (a) Tom borrowed my car but the fool/idiot/ never told me about it.

(b) Have you met Tom? – Yes, he’s a clever chap/fellow/sort.

To show a negative attitude, swearing words like *bloody*, *damned*, *goddamned*, and *flipping* are also used as in *I can’t open the /bloody/ damned /goddamned/ bleeding /flipping/ door* (Ljung, 2011).

According to Allan and Burridge (2006: 252), there is a clear connection between hostility and using offensive language in insults, name-calling, and cursing. Especially when speaking against out-groupers, using taboo words might show solidarity within a group. There is what is so-called **dysphemism** which is an expression with connotations that are offensive. Expressions of dysphemism contain name-calling, curses, and any sort of belittling comments targeted toward others to wound or insult them. Also, dysphemism is a means of letting off steam; for instance, when exclamatory swearing lessens anger or frustration. A dysphemism, in a more technical sense, is a phrase or word with offensive connotations about the denotatum and/ or to the person addressed or overhearing the phrase.

3-3 Unfriendly Suggestions

Aggression directed at somebody is often expressed by unfriendly suggestions. They are used to express and are mostly used in conversations to show the reaction of the speaker to what is spoken. However, they are not true suggestions, although this interpretation can be supported by their literal meaning. The actual meanings extend from religious expressions *Go to hell!* to disgracing suggestions and different less or more impossible or at least implausible sexual behaviors. In principle, there is an infinite number of potential unfriendly suggestions, but, in reality, only a finite

number of plausible combinations are used. We may consider that because of the limitations our memory is characterized with. Addressees would not be able to keep track of the available unfriendly suggestions if the number of them was so large. This consequently would lead them to be not sure whether the speaker meant to insult them or not. However, the amount of various unfriendly suggestions which both the speaker and addressee have to store to be communicators of good proficiency in their language should be high to have a sort of organizing principle. Suggestions that start with verbs like *kiss*, *suck*, *lick*, and *bite* are used under this term (Ljung, 2011: 137).

In general, there are different themes of insulting which comprise the mother, the animal, the death, the disease, the ancestor, the minor theme, etc.

Insulting varies depending on gender. Consider the following examples:

Male

He's a real pro.

He's a tramp.

Female

She's a real pro.

She's a tramp.

In the first example (male), it refers to a person who is seen to have behaved in a professional manner or be a professional in the sense of a golf-pro. On the contrary, the same example for a woman may tell that she is either a promiscuous or a prostitute. As for the second sentence, 'tramp' is someone (male) who sleeps rough, while it can also refer to a woman who is promiscuous (Mills, 2005: 85).

4- Swearing and Impoliteness

The meaning of impoliteness, as believed by Norrick and Chiaro (2009:151), can only be construed by studying it in its context as it is

considered a judgment, not a result of any particular sentence. All linguistic behaviors which go beyond the boundaries of political behavior can be classified as polite, which comprise potential aggressiveness, irony, abuse, etc. Thus, it is a debatable matter. However, the politeness imputation to a linguistic structure is not automatically given a positive evaluation. On the contrary, the opposite may occur. Therefore, utterances distinguished as polite participate in the power exercise and acquisition to develop emergent networks in verbal interaction. The emergent networks theory assumes that any utterance presents a value of some kind and other kinds of value have to respond to it (Witts, 2003: 161).

According to Wikipedia, impoliteness is showing disrespect by not complying with the etiquette or social laws of a culture or group. Such laws are the essential bounds of commonly accepted behavior. To be unwilling or unable to set one's behavior with the laws that the general population is familiar with, i.e. what is acceptable socially and what is considered rude. While, impoliteness, according to Bousfield and Locher (2008:3), is a face-aggravating behavior in a specific context.

The aforementioned three constructions compose separate speech acts directed to make various effects. Nevertheless, they are, for all their variations, classified under the wider speech act category of insults. The verb *insult* can have different meanings. It could mean to treat others with offensive disrespect or scornful abuse; to offer disrespect; to assail offensively with contemptuous or dishonoring speech or action; to affront, to show outrage, and the corresponding nouns are defined along similar meanings. The larger category of insults, according to these definitions, has at least two principal characteristics: insulting is showing disrespect to others, and those who are exposed to insult– the targets –experience feelings of dishonor and shame. The descriptions in the dictionary, in terms of speech act definitions, stress both the perlocutionary and illocutionary

impacts of the speech act(s) of insulting. The respect concept is so related to politeness. The common assumption, although exceptions may be found, was that politeness was seen to minimize confrontation in discourse, while impoliteness simply, referred to the lack of positive politeness (Ljung, 2011: 116-7).

Allan and Burridge (2006: 1-2) point out that people constantly monitor the language they use. Linguists study impoliteness and politeness as they interact with euphemism (sweet talking), dysphemism (speaking offensively), and orthophemism (straight talking). They examine the motivations for and definitions of slang, insult, jargon, and polite and impolite uses of language when addressing, naming, and speaking about others, sexual activities, nourishment, death and killing, and our bodies and their functions. Linguistic prescription and political correctness are described as notions of tabooing behavior. They indicate that society's perception of a 'dirty' word's tainted denotatum (the actual object a word is commonly used to refer to) contaminates the word used itself. They also show how dysphemism and obscenity make the description of strong language particularly appropriate. This does not mean that the offensive win over the inoffensive, dysphemism over euphemism, impoliteness over politeness. The impolite, the offensive, and the dysphemistic only seem as powerful forces as each one determines the marked behavior. By default we are euphemistic, polite, inoffensive, and orthophemistic; and we watch our language use to avoid taboo topics in search of well-being for ourselves and for others. In such studies, five different kinds of impoliteness are distinguished: positive impoliteness, baldon- record impoliteness, sarcasm, negative impoliteness, and the withholding of politeness (Ljung, 2011: 116-7). Finally, as Dynel (2012:32) claims, the addresser's intended meaning determines impoliteness, not the linguistic forms or expressions.

5- Data Collection and Analysis

This is a qualitative study that investigates the use of swearing words among friends on social media and classifies them depending on the classification presented by (Ljung, 2011). Real conversations that contain swearing words are collected from different Facebook and Whatsapp users. It is worth noting that users had no idea about the current study when they were involved in the conversations. This gives authenticity and naturality to the data collected. Such words are chosen depending on the criteria of swearing words. To be considered swearing, the meaning of the word must be non-literal and the word has to be emotive where it expresses the speaker's feelings and attitudes. It is to be noted that obscene expressions will be excluded. The data collected are analyzed and classified according to the following:

5-1 Ritual Insults

This includes different themes of swearing words used especially by males. One of them is امك “your mother” theme but, according to the data collected, it is less common among friends. This is due to the value of mothers to Arabs in general and Muslims in particular. We can say a mother represents the red line to them. Yet, it is used among so-close friends when they tease each other or joke and the meaning is not literal. It is so strong that friends, as the conversations show, try to use words or expressions other than the direct expression ‘your mother’, like ماميتك, ماما ‘your mother and mama’.

The other theme is the use of ‘your sister’. Again this is also sensitive and friends are always careful when they use such expressions. They know when to use it and with whom as not all friends accept it. Among close friends, the data show that friends use the direct word اختك ‘your sister, and the indirect one الرضيعة ‘milk sister’. Another form of this type is the use of the word الصغيرة ‘the little one’ as an indication of the little sister. The latter two expressions are used to avoid using the strong and direct expressions that Arabs and Muslims find too offensive even among friends.

The last type of this classification found in the conversations is the ‘maternal aunt’ theme. It is amazingly noted that the conversations studied show no use of any ‘paternal aunt’ expressions at all. This includes expressions like خالتك الصغيرة and خالتك الشجرة ‘your blonde aunt’ and ‘your young aunt’. Such expressions are seen to be less offensive than the above two themes as they show more obscenity references. As in the following extract:

ا- وين جنت؟ صار ساعة من راسلتك

ب- جنت يم خالتك الشجرة

جان عندي شغل ليش؟

A- Where have you been?
It's been an hour since I texted
you

B- With your blonde aunt.
I had work to do. Why?

It is worth mentioning that the intended meaning is not literal, i.e. it does not refer in any way to obscenity. Most of the expressions above are

used to serve certain functions like disagreement, as in the following extract:

- ا- اتوقع اليوم الريال يفوز
 ب- من خالتك الشكرة شيفوزهم
 وهمة مابقى عدهم احد يلعب
- A- I think Real (Madrid)
 will win today
 B- From your blonde
 aunt.
 How can they win? they
 have no one plays (well).

This shows that the second person does not agree with the first one. So, he uses the ‘aunt’ theme to show his strong disagreement.

5-2 Name-callings

This type is mostly used for teasing. Both teasing and name-calling are interlinked among friends. Name-callings could be the most common among friends as it has so many themes and expressions. According to the conversations studied, friends use many name-callings using negative adjectives and names like fool ارعن, dumb غبي, carefree فطير, loser فاشل, تافه, silly حقير, despicable حقير, etc. There are names used among friends that have no specific English equivalents like اغم and اغبر where their meanings could only be interpreted by the context. In most cases, such taboo words might show solidarity within a group, especially among close friends. Because they know each other well, friends can say them to each other but not to those whom they are not their friends. If said to strangers, they are received as offensive expressions. As J Holmes (2009:721) illustrates, swearing can serve different functions such as showing solidarity, rather than functioning as an insult. Following are examples from the conversations studied:

‘why don’t you shut up? Don’t make me insult you and him. ليش ماتسكت لاتخليني اسبك واسبه

Although the verb اسكت could mean ‘keep quiet’, it is received here as ‘shut up’ as the intention of the speaker or the writer determines this strong meaning and the addressee can easily interpret the intended meaning of this suggestion. Another extract shows that the person uses the colloquial verb انجب ‘shut up’.

‘why don’t you shut up? I don’t want to talk about them’ ليش ماتنجب يول ماريد احجي وانفتح عليهم

Sometimes, these suggestions come as imperative sentences where the words ليش, ما, or both can be deleted as in the following extracts:

‘Walk away, I am fed up!’ ما تولي منا ترا بز عانة روعي

‘go play away! These are matters of big people that do not benefit you, (laughter). روح العب بعيد هاي سالف كبار ماتفيدك هههه

Another group of suggestions can be started with the prefix ÷ (not standard), and followed by the same colloquial verbs mentioned above. The meaning is still the same as that of the above suggestions starting with ليش or with imperative verbs. Thus, the sentence that starts with this prefix can be considered an imperative sentence as in the following extract:

‘Fly! (sarcastic), are you really a teacher? دطيرانت هم استاذ ما عندك نت بالسنة حسنة

You don’t have a connection to the internet only once a year!

‘Go away! Your posts are of a widow! دروح انت منشوراتك منشورات وحدة ارملة!

It is important to mention that many verbs come in such suggestions that cannot be all listed in this research as it will be long. But, the ways they are

formed are limited to the above-mentioned three ways. As they are used among friends, the above words are just used to show an attitude towards the addressee. Although it seems offensive but still has no great effect.

6- Conclusion

To sum up, insulting language is widely spread throughout the whole world. Just like other speech acts, insulting language differs from one culture to culture. It is based on how speakers use their realizations and what meaning they express. This research concludes that:

- 1- The abusive word used sometimes has no meaning or at least has no offensive meaning. What makes it abusive and insulting is the intended meaning the addresser has in mind. For instance, the words ‘sister, mother, and aunt’ have no at least abusive or insulting meaning. But since the addresser’s intention is known by the addressee depending on the context, then they are seen as insulting. This of course depends on different factors that may be political, religious, cultural, etc.
- 2- Some words are too offensive and insulting especially those words that have sexual references as it is with ritual insults where the reference is implicit. This is because it is targeted to the addressee’s female relatives such as his mother and sister.
- 3- Unfriendly suggestions and name-calling seem to have less effect although all are abusive and insulting.

- 4- Name-calls and unfriendly suggestions are more used among friends than ritual insults. This is because of the sensitivity of sexual topics especially those related to the addressee's female relatives among friends.
- 5- Finally, all three classifications of insulting listed by Ljung are found in the studied conversations among Arabic (Iraqi) friends. But, the themes are more varied in Iraqi Arabic than that in English. For instance, in English, there is no use of the maternal aunt theme as it is in Iraqi Arabic. Moreover, in Iraqi Arabic, the unfriendly suggestions embrace more themes than that in English.

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