

## PROFANITY AMONG MALAYSIAN TEENAGERS

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the causes of profanity used in communication among Malaysian teenagers. It also examines whether the use of profanity influences Malaysian teenagers' communication skills. This quantitative study used Likert scale questionnaire to collect data from 100 teenagers at one of the high schools in Malaysia. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) in the form of mean, standard deviation, and variance. The findings of this research showed that there were seven major factors (friends, music videos, television shows, environment, parents, movies, and social networking sites such as: Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) that caused Malaysian teenagers to use profanity in their daily communications. The results of the study also proved that using profanity helps teenagers to dominate over a conversation and leads them to use at least one profane word in a day.

Keyword: profanity, teenagers, sociolinguistics, communication skills

### INTRODUCTION

Language is formed in the society. There is no language without society and there is no society without language. In other words, language and society are closely related and they are interdependent in the sense that they are mutually induced or affected; this is to say that at one time the society or social context determines or depends on language and at another time in its turn language determines or depends on the society or social context. Such a relation between language and society is known as construal-semiotic relation. Once the social context has determined and shaped the language, the realization becomes the property of society. Consequently, the speakers of language use language to perceive and interpret either natural or social realities.

The function of language is for communication.

In communication process, a sender encodes a message and then uses a medium to the receiver who decodes the language.

The emotive functions of language are to show one's expressions or feelings of anger, happiness, sadness, and loneliness. In expressing it, people have many ways of using

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language and one of them is by producing swearing words. Some people associate swear or profane words with nasty words, which are not allowed to be used in conversations. Profane words are contradictory for people in communication especially among teenagers. Profanity makes many people particularly teenagers upset, annoyed, insulted, mad or even angry. This invokes us as researchers to investigate the causes of profanity used among teenagers.

There are many studies carried out regarding the use of language and technology where many netizens use swear words or bad language on the Internet to communicate with their friends (Tayyebian, 2015). In the extend of that, some researchers focused on the use of abusive language and swear words in social networking sites such as Twitter (Rajeswari, 2016). According to Tagliamonte (2016), the use of profanity consists of double meaning of language crossing among teenagers. Shek and Yu (2016) stated that many Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong are prone to use swear words and foul language among their peers. There are very limited studies conducted on the use of profanity among Malaysian teenagers. Thus, this study has been carried out in Malaysia context to investigate the causes of profanity used in communication among Malaysian teenagers and to examine if the use of profanity influences their communication skills.

## METHODOLOGY

A quantitative method was used to investigate the causes of profanity used in communication Malaysian teenagers. The research instrument used for this research was a set of Likert scale questionnaire that comprised of two parts. Part one was set on the demographic information and the students' backgrounds (age, race, gender, and language used at school). Part two of the questionnaire comprised questions regarding the causes of profanity in the teenagers' daily communications.

The pilot study was conducted where students were given the questionnaire to answer carefully. They were asked some questions based on their experience and knowledge on the use of profanity. The students were given a time frame of 20 minutes to answer the questions. They were given five choices of answer: strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, strongly agree and agree. This provided them a good range of choices to select their answers accurately. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 100 students from a private high school in Klang, Malaysia.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The first research objective sought to identify the causes of using profanity while the second research objective examined whether the use of profanity influences Malaysian teenagers' communication skills. To achieve the answer to the first research question, the

respondents were given a set of Likert-scale questionnaire which consisted of 15 questions. A total of 100 students answered the questions. Most of them were between the ages of 14 to 16 years old. However, age and gender were not considered as significant factors in this study as they did not serve any purposes in answering the research questions.

STATEMENT	No	Minimum	Maximum	Mode	Mean
Q2. I learn to swear from social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etcetera.).	100	1.00	5.00	4.00	3.5700
Q3. I learn to use profane words from watching movies.	100	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.3300
Q4. I hear my parents use profane words all the time.	100	1.00	5.00	4.00	3.7700
Q5. I learn to use profane words from my friends at school.	100	1.00	5.00	4.00	3.7600
Q6. I watch television shows that use high use of profanity in their dialogues.	100	1.00	5.00	4.00	3.5800
Q7. I find myself always surrounded in an environment that people use profanity.	100	1.00	5.00	4.00	3.5500
Q8. I use profane words to bully my friends.	100	1.00	5.00	4.00	3.5700
Q9. I like to read story book that include profane words.	100	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.3300
Q10. I find myself constantly listening to music videos that involve profane words.	100	1.00	5.00	4.00	3.7600

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (Frequencies)

The above table displays the overall results for the causes that Malaysian students used profanity in their daily communications. As it can be seen in table 1, statements Q2, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, and Q10 scored the highest mode of 4 showing that these are the main seven causes for Malaysian students to use profanity in their daily communications. Each of these statements was analyzed individually. The findings of the study revealed that there were seven major aspects that caused Malaysian teenagers to use profanity in their communications: friends, music video, television shows, environment, parents, movies and using social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and etcetera. These seven aspects scored the highest mode as compared to the other causes through the data analysis via SPSS.

The findings of this study showed that the environment surrounding the teenagers has played an important role in causing them to use profanity in their communications. Holmes (1992) defines sociolinguistics as the study of “the relationship between language and society.” This is strongly supported based on the sociolinguistics theory where language and the environment comprehend one another. The environment that an individual is placed in, can cause an impact to the individual in every aspect especially in terms of the use of language. This evidently proves that if the society perceives profanity in daily life, teenagers being part of the society and environment will learn such words and will start using them in their daily communication.

On the other hand, the use of social media and language has been one of the most debatable issue in modern era. According to Rajeswari (2016), teenagers learn and use profanity on social networking sites such as Twitter. She concluded that the F\*-word is highly used as a verb to curse on Twitter. On the contrary, this study not only found that the use social networking sites as one of the causes that teenagers use profanity but also, from movies, music videos, their parents, and most importantly from their friends at school. In an average score, more than 40 respondents strongly agreed to the statement that learning profanity from their friends is one of the main causes that Malaysian teenagers use profanity in their communications. Based on the findings of this study it can be concluded that many Malaysian teenagers learn profane words from their friends at school. This is in line with the findings of a study by (Shek & Lin, 2017) in Hong Kong whereby the students learn swear words from their peers in the context of social competence. This showcases that friends are one of the prime causes for teenagers regardless of their identity to use profanity in their communication.

The second research objective was to examine the effects of profanity on Malaysian teenagers' communication skills. The findings of this study showed that profanity influences teenagers' communication in terms of their jokes, dominating over a conversation, and the frequency of using such words at least one in a day. The findings of

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this study also revealed that Malaysian teenagers are personally motivated to use profanity after learning them from their friends.

Sociolinguistics theory focuses on the interconnection between individual's language and society. It elaborates on how every person uses a language and speaks in a way as part of their socio-cultural act. According to the data collected in this study, 40 out of 100 respondents strongly agreed that they are influenced by their friends to use profanity in their jokes. They all agreed that they would curse differently based on the profane words that they have acquired from each other.

In addition, the results of this study demonstrated that due to the influence of profanity, Malaysian teenagers tend to dominate a particular conversation using profanity among their peers. According to Guvendir(2015) males tend to swear more than females. The researcher stated that males tend to swear using profanity more aggressively in a conversation than females. This is opposite with the findings of the study where teenagers equally (regardless of gender) tend to swear using profanity to dominate over a conversation.

Based on a study by Feldman; Lian; Kosinski; Stillwell (2017), people who tend to swear more are more honest. The findings of their study showed that people tend to use at least one or more profane words in their communication. This aligns with the findings of the present study as Malaysian teenagers use at least one profane word in a day due to the influence of learning profanity. This could aid a better understanding that teenagers use profanity as it helps them to be more honest and straightforward regarding their feelings in a conversation.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated the causes of profanity used in communication among Malaysian teenagers. It also investigated whether the use of profanity influences Malaysian teenagers' communication skills. In summary, the findings of this research showed that there were seven factors caused Malaysian teenagers to use profanity in their daily communication (friends, music videos, television shows, environment, movies and social networking sites such as: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram).

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