

Beyond the Surface: The Unseen Role of Cursing in Linguistic Expression

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Abstract: This article explores the reasons why cursing expressions have remained underexplored in linguistic and psychological theories, despite their prevalence in oral speech. It highlights that the taboo nature of such units often limits their inclusion in scientific research, even though they play a crucial role in expressing strong emotions. The study emphasizes that any comprehensive language theory must account for curses as an integral component of everyday linguistic practice. Each language exhibits unique forms and features of cursing, which are characterized by specific structural and pragmatic properties.

Keywords: Cursing, taboo language, offensive speech, linguistic theories, psychological perspectives, oral speech, strong emotions, language practice, expressive units, pragmatic features, anathematic units.

Introduction: Cursing expressions represent a significant yet often neglected aspect of language use. Despite their frequent occurrence in oral communication, these units have received limited attention in mainstream linguistic and psychological theories. Scholars have long acknowledged the presence of strong emotional language in everyday speech; however, the stigmatized and taboo nature of curses has hindered their systematic investigation. The reluctance to treat such expressions as legitimate objects of scientific inquiry stems from cultural sensitivities and traditional scholarly biases. Nevertheless, curses serve as powerful linguistic tools for conveying intense emotions such as anger, frustration, and contempt. Understanding their structure and function is essential for a comprehensive description of any language system.

METHOD

Discourse is evaluated as speech embedded in the communicative situation and having a clear social content (15). Moreover, discourse is also used in relation to various spheres of speech. In this case, social

discourse, artistic discourse, economic discourse, medical discourse, and similar types are distinguished. Although anathematic units are not the only means of expressing emotions, they are widely used in social and artistic discourse from the point of view of their consideration as one of the strong manifestations of emotional speech. Such linguistic units are sometimes assessed as "dangerous," as they can have a characteristic that violates social norms and negatively affect the reputation of the interlocutor. Curses are not limited to expressing only strong emotions; they are also important from a communicative point of view and can express individual characteristics of a person, social identity, and elements of humour (8). Although researchers are well aware of the frequent occurrence of anathematic units in oral speech, which is one of the important aspects of language use, cursing expressions have not been sufficiently studied in many language theories created by linguists and psychologists. However, according to T. Jay, the issue is not that scientists are unaware of this phenomenon, but that due to the taboo nature of curses, their consideration as an object of scientific research is often limited. In

language theories, the views on language will not be complete if the human emotions expressed through curses are not taken. Curses used to express strong emotions are also an integral part of language practice, and such units are part of offensive speech. In each language system, there are specific forms of cursing, and speech units of this type are characterized by specific signs and features (9). According to G. Horan, although proponents of keeping the language "clean" are often inclined to associate anathematic language units with laziness or speech disorders, in practice, curses are flexible and creative means of speech (8). Linguists L. G. Andersson and P. Trudgill describe this unit as one of the most interesting and colorful words in modern English (1). M. K. David, H. Kuang, N. Tayyebian believe that the term "curse" encompasses several types of offensive speech. This includes obscene language, swear words, religiously offensive phrases, nicknames, insults, disparaging units, slang elements, elements of rudeness or vulgarity, verbal aggression, and taboo words (4). S. Pinker, on the example of some curses, considers them one of the linguistic means of expressing human emotions (13).

When curse words are used, it allows people to verbally express strong emotions such as anger, disgust, depression, or amazement. S. Pinker divides anathematic units into five types: 1) dysphemistic units used to express anger or depression; 2) abated units aimed at insulting others; 3) idiomatic units used without referring to a specific problem; 4) emphatic units that perform the function of strengthening or emphasizing a thought; 5) cathartic units that arise in the event of an unexpected or unpleasant situation (13). R. Wajnryb developed a hierarchy of anatomical units. Curses are often associated with an appeal to divine power, have a ritual character, are spoken consciously, imply a future consequence, and do not always contain coarse language units (17). C. Goddard notes that in some languages, curse units are used in the form of interjections (6). They can be divided into four types: cognitive trigger (reaction), expressive, impulsive, and direct pronunciation of the word. If the cognitive trigger is associated with the process of realizing that an event has occurred, the reaction component expresses the speaker's emotional response. Expressive and impulsive components are characterized by the desire to immediately utter a

word. The direct pronunciation of a word implies the use of a specific unit in response to this situation. In English-speaking societies, such expressions are sometimes used together with positive adjectives or are added to the word. Some researchers interpret such situations not as rude or offensive speech, but as a means of strengthening social closeness. According to S. Ghassempur, such units can reduce social distance or indicate solidarity (5). D. Crystal sometimes evaluates them as signs of belonging to a certain group or expressions of love (2). The form, pronunciation, purpose of use of curse units, the frequency of their use in speech, society's attitude towards them, and the degree of their influence are closely related to national, regional, dialectal, and socio-cultural factors. Therefore, a lexical unit considered as a curse in one society may not perform the same function in another society. This indicates the cultural and linguistic diversity of the curse lexicon. Some units are used as a means of expressing humour or closeness within a certain group, while in another cultural environment it is perceived as a strong insult. According to E. Wiles, some curses used in literary works can change over time, become obsolete, and become inactive due to their frequent characteristics. The phenomenon of cursing is not a newly emerged linguistic element; it is believed that it has existed since the formation of human oral speech (18). M. Mohr's research shows that some words have been used as curses in ancient Rome since BC. In the Middle Ages, curses were often used in connection with religious concepts, while in the Renaissance, humorous and rude expressions related to everyday life became more widespread (12). Later, in the Victorian era, such units transitioned to a much softer form and began to be used in the form of euphemistic expressions. In the modern era, although they still belong to the category of units that can be negatively assessed, some curses have reached a relatively culturally acceptable level and are sometimes used as a means of humour or informal communication. Before determining the purpose and reasons for the use of swear words, it is important to study the contextual aspects of this phenomenon. According to T. Jay, the use of cursing speech units occurs under the influence of a number of pragmatic factors. Such factors include the topic of the conversation, social relations between the participants

in the dialogue, their sexual and social status, as well as the social and physical environment in which the dialogue takes place (10).

Therefore, when analyzing swear words, it is necessary to take into account in which situation, with whom, and under what conditions they are used. It is important to determine when, where, by whom, and for what reasons the units of anathem are used. In some cases, curses can serve to further enliven communication between friends or strengthen mutual closeness. According to Z. Masharipova, curses express the emotions and inner experiences of the speaker, and every creator uses examples of this genre as an important artistic tool to illuminate the emotional experiences and inner state of the characters (11). In literature, poets and writers skillfully use the possibilities of the curse genre in their works, achieving a more expressive influence of the emotional state of the characters. Usually, curse words are associated with informal spoken language, vulgar style, or "low culture." However, they are also found in such forms of high culture as classical literature and dramaturgy. Curses should be considered not only as an element of everyday emotional speech, but also as having cultural and literary significance. Studying anathematic units in literary works in connection with the communicative context, stylistic level, and social consequences helps to understand the experiences, mental state, and situation of the characters of the work. For example, in the works of W. Shakespeare, insulting phrases and vulgar elements are often used as a method of wordplay, humour, and verbal confrontation. For example, in the work "Romeo and Juliet," Mercutio portrays the family of Montague and Capulet "A plague o' both your houses!" (May misfortune befall both households!). Juliet told her nanny about Romeo: "O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face!" ("A serpent-heart hidden behind a flower-like face!"), "Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!" ("Beautiful tyrant! devil like an angel!") (16). The content of the curse is metaphorically expressed, in these descriptions Romeo's impudence is expressed by feelings of love and affection.

In the literature and poetry of American culture of the mid-20th century, anathematic language units were also used as a means of expressing discontent with society and the psychological state of the post-war

generation. To express the psychological tension, fear, and anger of soldiers during the war, writers widely used anathematic units such as "damn," "goddam," "Well, I'll be damned" in their works.

"I know that," Yossarian replied tersely, with a sudden surge of scowling annoyance. "Christ, Danby, I earned that medal I got, no matter what their reasons were for giving it to me. I've flown seventy goddam combat missions. Don't talk to me about fighting to save my country. I've been fighting all along to save my country. Now I'm going to fight a little to save myself. The country's not in danger any more, but I am". (7) The purpose of using this unit is to emphasize the speaker's emotions while criticizing the illogicality of war and the problem of personal security, while showing conflict and personal dissatisfaction between soldiers.

It can be seen that anathematic units were also used in the historical literature of the Uzbek language. In the work "Devonu lug'otit turk," created by the Turkologist Mahmud Kashgari, the form "qirg'a," associated with the root "qarg'ish," is interpreted as a unit expressing anger. In A. Navoi's tazods, one can see that the word and phenomenon of cursing are also described:

Ne turfa ishki, birav chun toriqti umridin,

Desa uzun yasha, qarg'ishdur anga bu alqish. (3)

In this poem by Alisher Navoi, the relativity of the concepts of praise and curse is interpreted philosophically and artistically. The poet shows that the same wish can have different meanings depending on a person's mental state and attitude towards life. If a person is tired of life and their life has become a heavy burden, the kind wish "long live" directed at them does not actually have a positive meaning, but rather is perceived as a curse. Thus, the poet's evaluation of the content of speech depends not only on the external form of the word, but also on its perception.

In the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, many songs dedicated to historical themes were created. Songs created in the territory of Khorezm, such as "Khan's Oppression," "Bevafo Zolim," "Ayrildim," "Olar bo'ldik bu xonlarning dastidan," "Xonavayron bo'lsin Xivaning xoni," "Boshing kesilsin, qoning to'kilsin," express the spiritual state of the oppressed people, their discontent with oppression and violence, lack of freedom, as well as the injustice of officials.

Isfandiyor, zolimliging bildirding,
Non o'rniga kunjarani yedirding,
Kambag'alni qiynab, boyni kuldirding,
Haddan oshding, zolim, yoning so'kilsin!
Boshing kesilsin-u, qoning to'kilsin! (14)

Through the cursing units in this poem, it is understood that due to the extreme greed of the ruler of that time, the people suffered from poverty and were forced to eat oilcake instead of bread, the poor became even more impoverished, the wealth of the rich increased, and they wished the ruler death, beheaded for such a policy.

While most songs created at the end of the 19th century reflected the heavy tragedies of the colonial period, protests against injustice, and the theme of double oppression, songs created at the beginning of the 20th century express the recruitment of labourers in 1916, as well as the people's rebellion and discontent against it.

Non tishlatdim bolamga,
Mardikordan qaytsin, deb,
Zolimlarni qarg'adim,
Ilohi, yer yutsin, deb (14)

In Uzbek culture, a person who embarked on a war or a long, dangerous journey was given a piece of bread and hung on the wall so that their sustenance would not be cut off from the house, and they would return for the sustenance left unfinished. The poem mentioned above also expresses dissatisfaction with the forced labour of young men and asks for harm to those who made this decision.

The sons of Uzbek people also took an active part in the Second World War, which took place in 1941-1945, and a large part of them perished on the battlefields. Folk works created during this period expressed boundless anger and hatred towards the German fascists who started the war, faith in victory, the heroism and patriotism of the soldiers, as well as the wishes and dreams of the people who worked in the country and supported the soldiers. In these works, the predominance of the spirit of preaching is especially noticeable.

Mening yorim qahramon,
Dushmanga bermas omon.

Bosqinchi fashistlami
Qilar yer bilan yakson. (14)

Most of the anathematic units used in English literature consist of sentences such as "damn," "damnation," "goddamn," "bastard," "hell," "bloody hell," "son of a bitch," which, along with expressing hatred, anger, dissatisfaction, are also used to show sincerity and closeness between friends.

Yossarian shuddered at the suggestion. Havermeyer was a lead bombardier who never took evasive action going in to the target and thereby increased the danger of all the men who flew in the same formation with him.

"Havermeyer, why the hell don't you ever take evasive action?" they would demand in a rage after the mission.

"Hey, you men leave Captain Havermeyer alone," Colonel Cathcart would order. "He's the best damned bombardier we've got.

In this scene, "why the hell don't you ever take evasive action?" is considered a rhetorical interrogative sentence, and the soldier's failure to try to escape enemy fire is criticized, reprimanded, and expressed dissatisfaction. The next unit in the text, "damned," goes beyond the context in the meanings of "curse," "damn," expressing a negative attitude, hatred, but in this scene this sentence is used not in an insulting sense, but in a positive sense, in order to enhance the abilities of Captain Havermeyer.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the marginalization of cursing in academic research is not due to a lack of awareness among scholars but rather stems from the taboo status associated with such expressions. This cultural and academic restriction has led to a fragmented understanding of how strong emotions are linguistically encoded. Each language possesses a distinct inventory of cursing units, which are characterized by unique phonological, morphological, and pragmatic features. These units often operate as expressive speech acts, fulfilling psychological functions such as emotional release and social bonding. Moreover, the use of offensive language is governed by specific contextual factors, including the relationship between interlocutors, the setting, and the intensity of

the emotion being expressed. The study confirms that curses are not merely peripheral elements of language but are deeply embedded in everyday communicative practice. A thorough analysis of these units contributes to a more holistic understanding of linguistic systems and human emotional expression.

CONCLUSION

Cursing expressions, despite their frequent presence in oral communication, have remained on the periphery of linguistic and psychological research largely due to their taboo nature rather than a lack of scholarly recognition. This oversight has resulted in an incomplete understanding of how language accommodates the full spectrum of human emotion. Each language possesses its own unique repertoire of cursing units, characterized by distinct phonological, morphological, and pragmatic features that serve essential expressive functions. These units operate as powerful speech acts, facilitating emotional release, reinforcing social bonds, and reflecting cultural values. The study underscores that excluding such elements from scientific inquiry compromises the integrity of language theories. A comprehensive framework of language must account for all its facets, including those considered offensive or stigmatized. Recognizing the legitimate place of cursing in linguistic research opens new avenues for understanding the intricate relationship between language, emotion, and society.

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