

Attitudes towards the Use of Foul Language

A Comparison of Native and Non-Native English Speakers' Attitudes

Jenna Lundström

Pro gradu-avhandling i Engelska språket och litteraturen

Handledare: Brita Wårvik

Fakulteten för humaniora, psykologi och teologi

Åbo Akademi

2019

**ÅBO AKADEMI – FAKULTETEN FÖR HUMANIORA, PSYKOLOGI OCH
TEOLOGI**

Abstrakt för avhandling pro gradu

Subject: English Language and Literature	
Author: Jenna Lundström	
Title: Attitudes towards the Use of Foul Language – A Comparison of Native and Non-Native English Speakers' Attitudes	
Supervisor: Brita Wårvik	
<p>Abstract:</p> <p>The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of and general attitudes towards foul language, comparing two nationalities: American and (Finland) Swedish. Different background variables such as age, gender and education are considered and included. The aim lies in finding out how different so-called bad words are perceived and which words are generally considered to be the worst and why.</p> <p>The data for the study was gathered through an online questionnaire where the respondents answered a fixed number of questions about ten words chosen to represent different categories of foul language. A total of 196 answers were collected and the analysis is quantitative.</p> <p>According to the results, <i>shit</i> and <i>goddamnit</i> are the most common and inoffensive words, while <i>shit</i> and <i>fuck</i> are most frequently used. Racial slurs and gender-coded words are considered most offensive and generally Americans appear to tolerate less religion-based words than their Swedish counterparts. Respondents report using foul language for evoking different kinds of feelings, such as anger or surprise, but also using it spontaneously. My study supports the hypothesis of a narrowing gap between men's and women's language as no marked difference in gender and foul language was found and the words appeared equally offensive for both genders. Code-switching using foul words among Swedish speakers is rather common, especially among the youth. These findings suggest that although foul language may not be socially desirable, people generally recognize it as a valuable source for communication purposes.</p>	
Key words: taboo words, bad language, swearing, gender, emotion, code-switching	
Date: 04.03.2019	Pages: 94

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1. Introduction

Swearing, cursing, blasphemy, slang, taboo, vulgarity, obscenity and even *code-switching* are all terms for language uses that have been labeled bad, considered as unacceptable language and should be avoided at all costs. Swear words in written form date back to ancient Egypt, where gods were the primary source of bad language. Curses and oaths tied to the gods continued in ancient Greek and Rome. Similarly, in Christianity, the Christian God became the source of swearing. During this time, using such language was considered a severe crime due to the fear and belief that God could punish the whole society (Byrne, 2017: 6). Penalties such as hanging, branding and cutting off the tongue of the person uttering Gods name in vain were nothing unusual (Mohr, 2013: 8, Pinker, 2007).

Prostitution and words representing *animal themes* came post-reformation and were used mostly in catholic countries (Mohr, 2013: 253). In protestant countries, on the other hand, *diabolic themes*, involving the devil, came to replace the ones involving God. These are, according to Ljung (2006), the most common ones even today. However, according to Maynard (2002), most of the bad words that are used in the contemporary age arose in the Middle Ages, specifically in Medieval Europe.

During the 17th and beginning of 18th century *scatological* words, referring to human waste products, as well as sex organs came to be used, which during the 19th century were considered extremely taboo. As the upper class chose to distance themselves from bad language such as the subject of sexuality, the use of euphemisms arose to take their place (Mohr, 2013:173-177). Over the centuries of using bad language, the two main categories from which most words have derived are religion and the human body (Mohr, 2013: 253).

Today, the result of using bad language can vary from country to country and one continent to another. In the Western world, swearing and slang are examples of bad language and may contribute to the impression others make of you (Lantto, 2014). The modern punishment for using what is considered bad language, is perhaps the label of being sloppy and uneducated, in other words considered less sophisticated than those who

avoid using language that may offend others. According to Mohr (2013: 10), this is to some extent still a common belief.

Researchers within the sociolinguistic field have mostly focused on answering questions regarding whom and what groups of society use bad language, what type and how often. Many have limited their research to one kind of bad language, for instance, swearing (Ljung, 2011). Furthermore, they have also focused on the kind of people that swear the most and which groups in society are strongly opposed to bad language. Conclusions drawn are, for instance, that men swear more than women (among others Andersson 1977: 7-9, Andersson 1985: 74, Ljung 2006: 92-93, Byrne, 2017: 148-149), younger individuals more than the elderly (Andersson 1977: 7-9, Ljung 2006: 92) and that there are differences between bad language use and education level, namely parallels with low education and more frequent use of bad language as opposed to a higher education and lower usage (Andersson 1977: 7-9). Naturally, people who use bad language frequently have a more positive attitude towards it as well. These studies have focused on general attitudes towards bad language, while preferences and dislikes concerning bad language have been less explored. This is, to some extent, what I want to investigate in my study.

1.1 Research questions

The purpose of this study is to find out about the different attitudes toward provocative and offensive language. My intent is to compare the attitudes and views of Americans with Swedish speakers from Sweden and Finland. To do so, I use survey material that is quantitatively analyzed, where a selected group of words are presented.

The research questions can be formulated as follows:

1. What are the general attitudes towards the use of foul language? Which words/expressions are considered most offensive?
2. Are there differences in the perceived offensiveness, caused by using foul language, between genders? Is it more offensive when one or the other gender uses foul language?

3. Is there a language preference when using bad language? What are some reasons for choosing to swear in one's mother tongue or in a foreign language (Swedish or English)?

Changes in language, social values and attitudes have had the consequence that words that were previously considered strongly offensive, such as religious and sexual words, are now less so, and replaced with other ones. For instance, Bergen (2016) points out a rise in the sensitivity towards ethnical slurs. My hypothesis is that we have become more tolerant towards religious words and that reasons such as exploring our identity and the need for acceptance contribute to the offense taken from ethnical and political incorrectness. To find this out the words are divided into two categories that aim to test this hypothesis by including words representing those that I hypothesize have become/are considered less offensive in comparison to the other group of words that, instead, represents words that offer greater offense today. The first group includes themes such as *religion, scatology, sexual acts, and intimate body parts*, whereas the second group includes themes that can be tied to political correctness, such as *racial, ethnic and gender slurs*.

Another hypothesis related to the two groups of words is that there will be a greater gap between the groups in the Nordic countries, than in the United States, where religion perhaps plays a bigger role in everyday life. Thus, I hypothesize that words that are connected to the religious theme will offend people from the United States more than those from Finland and Sweden.

2. Foul Language

Most will agree that humankind is dependent on language as the main means for communication like expressing will and intention. We also use memes, gestures and other types of body language to help get our point across. However, language is what separates us from animals and is in a constant circle of change. New words emerge, old ones change meaning or even become more acceptable in their use as they enter fashion stages or become considered *cool* or *hip*. As language reinvents itself from generation to generation

as taboo shift, bad language proves an astonishingly flexible part of our linguistic repertoire (Byrne, 2017).

Nonetheless, there will undoubtedly always be words or topics considered worse than others. Certain dialects, for instance, are considered more pleasant than others and in the same spirit, some words are classified as non-acceptable or taboo in certain contexts and cultures (Battistella, 2005: 3-5). What classifies as foul language is hard to define and there are different circumstances that influence whether we consider something bad or not. Perhaps most people think of swearing while hitting a toe with a hammer and that may be justifiable to some. On the other hand, casual swearing may instantly result in the belief of a connection to poor language skills and use. Throughout time, and to some extent today, dialects, accents, code-switching, to mention a few, all contribute to what some consider impure or incorrect language.

Foul language or bad language stands as an umbrella term for language that for one or another reason classifies as potentially offensive, very unpleasant and to be avoided. Profanity, vulgarity, obscenity, epithets, slang, swearing, cursing and taboo all fall under this category (Battistella, 2005: 72). Throughout this study the terms bad language and foul language will be used interchangeably and may cover any of the categories above. Offensive language has been studied from many perspectives and it has intrigued psychologists, brain scientists, linguists as well as sociologists (Mohr, 2013: 248). Byrne (2017) points out that bad language has, historically, consisted of swearing, oaths and curses. The power invested in oaths and curses has ceased to exist, or at least become less common. Instead, foul language has been replaced with, for instance, secretion, body parts, sexual encounters, which, in turn, have their own subcategories.

Battistella (2005: 72-78) points out that experienced offensiveness and the objection to it in public language often focus on protecting some of the population from bad language. Women and children have, stereotypically, been assumed in need of such protection. The idea of protection can be argued to persist even today, as we can witness censorship in a wide part of controlled social media. Some argue that censorships are unnecessary because language in some verbal arts such as fiction and film require language that reflects the way people truly talk. Furthermore, Battistella (2005) suggests that objection

to offensive language is related to the idea that such language promotes disrespect towards the authority.

As we have entered the 21st century with more liberal thoughts and views than ever before, the question of why offensive language persists arises. Those who argue for such language simply mean that words are words and the offensiveness therefore lies in the listeners' attitude toward certain topics, rather than the words. This argument often refers to certain types of languages such as body parts, excrement and sexual epithets. Others have tried to connect the way words sound to their potential offense. Research about dialects has explored the phonetic aesthetics in different dialects (Leeman, Kolly and Nolan, 2015), in order to show that some dialects sound more unpleasant to our ears and similar thoughts on bad words have occurred. However, Pinker (2007) disqualifies this hypothesis and claims that many words have respectable homonyms, for instance, in names for animals, actions as well as for people.

2.1 Emotionally motivated use of language

To understand bad language and how it affects us, it is important to understand the cognitive neuroscience behind it. In other words, what happens in the brain when a person says or hears such language. This is also vital information when considering two of the main research questions: what triggers negative emotions and why do people want to trigger negative emotions in their listeners. According to Pinker (2008) taboo language activates certain brain areas, whether it is spoken or written, which, in turn, light up (shows greater metabolic activity in brain scans) when we encounter bad language. For instance, the right hemisphere, the basal ganglia and the amygdala are all associated with negative emotions.

The right hemisphere oversees our emotions and the ability to understand non-literal ways of speaking. According to Byrne (2017: 33-37), individuals suffering damage to the hemisphere may, for instance, experience issues with understanding jokes, metaphors, and often give up on using bad language. She suggests it may be the result of a loss of ability to model the fictional emotional states of the characters in the joke, which is tied to the ability to process emotions. Furthermore, this has helped understanding the

importance of emotional response when considering the questions of why and how we use bad language. According to Mohr (2013), words considered offensive and foul are the most powerful words we have to express emotions with, whether they are positive or negative.

The basal ganglia are involved in the production of taboo words and are responsible for packaging and inhibiting sequences of behavior. Pinker (2008) mentions that it is also the part where we find the malfunction that leads to Tourette's Syndrome, in which people will involuntarily blurt out indecent expressions. Finally, in the perception of bad language, the amygdala, the organ which ordinarily responds to threatening stimuli, dangerous animals or angry faces, lights up.

The processing of taboo words is an involuntary action (Pinker, 2008, MacKay and Ahmetzanov, 2005). Pinker (2008) states that one cannot hear or read a taboo word without registering what it means and reacting to the content, including the negative emotion associated with it. For instance, our brains cannot treat the word *shit* as a buzz of sound or treat the printed version as a cluster of scribbles. Propositional and non-propositional swearing refers to the awareness of uttering bad language, where the first is a voluntary planned outburst chosen for a certain effect strived for, while the latter is unintended and unplanned and often caused when surprised or hurt (Jay, 2000: 21-22, Byrne, 2017:16-17, Finn, 2017: 19).

By using the technique of the Stroop Test, psychologists show involuntary processes in the brain. The test presents different words printed in different colors, where you are supposed to name the color in which each word is printed.

Example 1: color and word match

RED
GREEN
BLUE
YELLOW
PURPLE

Example 2: color and word do not match

YELLOW
PURPLE
GREEN
RED
BLUE

Example 3: color and taboo words

FUCK
SHIT
CUNT
PISS
ASSHOLE

Figure 1: Stroop test

(Adapted from Pinker, 2008)

The color of the words in example 1 (see figure 3) causes no difficulty for people to master when the color and the word agree with each other. In example 2, the color and the word do not agree, making it difficult to complete the task as the brain automatically makes the association between learned knowledge and what is written. Although it is not an impossible task, the speed at which we complete it is reduced. This proposes that we cannot turn off the circuit in the brain and just read the words and ignore the colors. The test shows that the brain slows down almost as much with taboo words (see example 3, figure 1) as when reading the wrong color. Pinker (2008) draws the conclusion that we, thus, can think of taboo words as a weapon to force a listener to think unpleasant and emotionally charged thoughts.

Words and phrases are taboo because they arouse negative emotions among listeners. Ljung (2011) presents this as one key component when detecting bad language and claims

that it always reflects the state of the speaker's mind. Pinker (2008) mentions, for instance, that all the taboo words that fall under the category supernatural, such as *damn*, *hell* and *Jesus Christ* evoke the emotion of awe and fear of the power these supernatural presences may possess. Similarly, Pinker (2008) suggests that bodily effluvia evoke an emotion of disgust because they are associated with spreading disease. He claims that epidemiologists inform us that infectious bacteria and parasites are found in the excreta of humans and animals, and by evolving the emotion of disgust towards the subject in question we are in fact protecting our well-being.

In many languages, sexuality is a major source for expressing a variety of emotions. As there are many takes on sexuality, positive and negative associations, we need to compare the positive mutual pleasure in two individuals engaging in sexual consent with situations of rape, harassment and incest, which, in turn, have led to people having strong reactions towards sexuality. Thus, Pinker (2008) claims that we evoke the emotion of revulsion of sexual depravity. Words triggering hatred and contempt are those of abusive words concerning people and groups of a minority such as disabled individuals, race minorities and infidels. Other categories and emotions triggered involve the taboo topics of disease and death, which have resulted in many ways in which people talk around the subject. These sensitive subjects contribute to the emotions of dread at death and disease.

2.2 Why do we use bad language?

Researchers have investigated the different functions of swearing and reasons why we continue to swear despite the knowledge that it may offend others. Abuse is one function and perhaps the first thing that comes to some people's minds. Another one is the contributing fact that explains the somewhat outdated belief that those who use bad language have a lacking vocabulary and choose questionable expressions due to not being able to think of more suitable ones. This is a rather old-fashioned view and has been criticized by many. A more recent, popular and well-known explanation is that it is a means of letting off some steam or easing the pressure by expressing feelings of irritation and impatience (Ljung, 2006: 84). One frequently used example is the cry, in form of a swearword, let out when someone harms themselves by accident, for instance, hitting

body parts against various objects. In that case the use of foul language is often completely reflexive and is a way to deal with the pain caused.

As discussed in the previous chapter, emotions are vital when using bad language. Pinker (2008) lists five ways and/or reasons for which people use bad language and continue to do so:

1. Dysphemistic use
2. Abusive use
3. Idiomatic use
4. Emphatic use
5. Cathartic use

(Adapted from Pinker, 2008)

All uses listed above, except cathartic use, can be classified as propositional uses of bad language, that is, they are uttered intentionally. Pinker (2008) explains that when offensive words are used in a dysphemistic way, they are used in their literal sense to refer to objects or activities. We can compare, for instance, *shit* and *feces*, *fuck* and *copulating*, *cunt* and *vagina*. According to Pinker (2008) occasions where strong, often negative, feelings need to be expressed trigger this way of using bad language. For instance, *will you pick up your dog shit!* and *while I have been taking care of the kids, you have been fucking your secretary!* There is a need to express the awfulness of a situation.

According to Bergen (2016), the use of bad language can trigger the fight or flight reaction usually experienced in a dangerous situation. He claims that uttering, also writing, profane language has an emotional effect on people and can result in the symptoms people experience in unsafe situations, such as an increased heart rate, dilated pupils and sweating. Correspondingly, when someone uses foul language people in the surroundings are warned of the state of the speaker, their behavior thus, working as a signal of potential threat for others. As Rassin and Muris (2005) point out, verbal and physical aggression often go hand in hand.

In contrast to a literal use, using bad language in an abusive way is mainly done metaphorically with the intention to intimidate and humiliate. An example is comparing someone to bodily effluvia and their associated organs as in *piece of shit, cunt, dickhead*. Pinker (2008) further argues that it may be an unconscious thought that by using bad language one can have a stronger impact on listeners. The idiomatic use represents and expresses situations of informality. It may contribute to establishing or showing off status of being macho and cool by attracting the attention of the listener. The emphatic use, as the name suggests, emphasizes emotions in their utterances and context, such as *this is fucking genius* and *he thinks he owns the fucking place*.

Finally, Pinker (2008) explains cathartic use of bad language, which includes the hydraulic theory usually known as letting off some steam, for instance, when we injure ourselves. The rage circuit theory also falls in this category and is explained by the behavior of animalistic instincts. It refers to the reflex of letting out an angry noise to intimidate an attacker evolved by mammals when injured or confined. This reflex is linked to human behavior where the angry noise turns into aggressive language as we have the ability to articulate. The purpose of the non-propositional cathartic use is explained to be used to relieve tension and to increase pain tolerance. Because of the involuntary nature of this use, it is usually considered neither polite nor rude. The catharsis effect may also explain why swearing might be an alternative for physical aggression. According to Jay (2009: 155), the cathartic use may reduce outcomes of physical aggression by releasing feelings of anger verbally and thus prevent more severe consequences.

Bad language is occasionally considered unnecessary, yet these words and expressions can also be used to express other, positive feelings. Ljung (2006) further explains that the exclamation *shit!* for example, can represent astonishment and happiness as well as irritation and the feeling of being fed up. While the unfavorable side of bad language is often the first one that comes to mind, more recent research and studies show a wide range of ways to use bad language depending on the purpose. In contrast to letting off steam and negative emotions, there is also the opposite. In other words, so called bad language is also used to express feelings of surprise and happiness all depending on the context.

Anderson and Hirsch (1985: 1-9) also contributed to the research on reasons and motives for using foul language and much like Pinker’s (2008) uses, Anderson and Hirsch keep in mind the emotions of the speaker. However, while Pinker (2008) points out the different ways in which bad language is used, Anderson and Hirsch (1985) additionally focus on the different levels of goals the speaker may want to achieve. In a cross-cultural study on the functions of swearing they summarized their findings by dividing the motives into two essential groups as seen in figure 2.

Motives

Expressive functions

Functional	}	Violation of expectations and norms
Ethical		
Aesthetic		
Religious		

Pain	}	Emotional and psychological states
Fear		
Grief		

Evocative functions

Contract	}	Social goals
Group identity/solidarity		
Dominance		
Intimacy		

Arousal/ interest	}	Psychological goals
Interpersonal attitudes		

Figure 2: Motives of bad language use

(Adapted from Anderson and Hirsch, 1985: 8)

The motives are divided into the expressive language function “because of” and the evocative language function “in order to”. The former, they explain, is caused by other people’s behavior or their own emotional state. The latter represent different goals one might want to achieve, such as establishing a position, contact or intimacy as well as evoking psychological effects in others. The evocative functions correspond with Pinker’s (2008) motives, while the expressive functions are not greatly discussed. It is essential to note that overlaps between the two are bound to exist and that the diagram is merely a proposal.

2.3 Sources of foul language

The word *taboo* is an English word borrowed from Tongan *tabu*, a language spoken by Polynesians in the Pacific archipelago, where things considered sacred are forbidden to touch or even to talk about (Hughes, 1991:8-9). Taboo refers to this phenomenon and means holy or untouchable. According to the OED (2018), *taboo* is explained as “A total or partial prohibition of the use of certain words, expressions, topics, etc., esp. in social intercourse”. Wardhaugh (2006) adds that *taboo* was believed damaging to the members of a society because it had the potential to cause anxiety, embarrassment and shame. Taboo words, topics and behavior existed in English long before the word was introduced into the language in 1777 (Hughes, 1991:8).

Andersson and Trudgill (1990: 55-57) point out that what is considered taboo differs depending on the culture. In the Western societies, they further suggest sex, religion, bodily functions, ethnic groups and death as taboo topics. They clarify that it is important to establish that not all categories mentioned above are altogether forbidden. Instead, they are regulated by norms. In other words, there is a time and place for the examples above. For instance, sex is neither forbidden nor improper given the right time and place. However, taboo behavior related to sex, such as incest, has contributed to taboo swearwords such as *motherfucker*. In other words, when forced to talk about a taboo subject there are rules of which expressions are considered proper to use. *Urine* and *faces* and *piss* and *shit* can be used to illustrate this.

Taboo topics exist in every culture; however, the topics differ. In many religions, such as Judaism and Islam, the direct mention of the name of god is taboo (Hughes, 1991:7-9). Death, for example, is something we can talk about freely when it is distant. When it becomes close to our family, on the other hand, we may suddenly feel the need to use euphemisms, such as *he passed away*, *he has moved on* or *he has met his maker* (Andersson and Trudgill 1990, Hughes, 1991). In contrast, taboo areas have the exact opposite reactions to euphemisms, namely *dysphemism*, where the process where the most judgmental traits of the taboo are highlighted with an offensive aim to the addressee (Fernández, 2008: 96). In the field of death, Hughes (1991:10) mentions examples like *pushing up daisies*, *croak* and *snuff it*. When a word becomes too personal and direct,

such as *dying*, it shows that there is a linguistic taboo attached to the word. Many taboo words have lost their power with time and new ones take their place. Religious terms have in many cases become milder than they were and in recent times, many people have a growing tendency to be sensitive to sexist and racist language.

Euphemisms can be said to be one way of swearing in a less offensive matter. “Snälla svordomar” or “kind swearing” as Ljung (2006: 78) chooses to describe them. The OED defines euphemism as follows:

That figure of speech which consists in the substitution of a word or expression of comparatively favorable implication or less unpleasant associations, instead of the harsher or more offensive one that would more precisely designate what is intended

(OED, s.v. euphemism)

The use of euphemisms became fashionable in the 18th and 19th century and also reached its peak in these years (Mohr, 2013: 205). Instead of the actual harsh words or expressions, milder ones that may or may not sound or look similar to the actual word are substituted. Euphemisms are often useful because they allow the speaker to replace the *trigger word* by another word that expresses the same or similar idea and therefore allows the relevant message to be communicated without triggering the emotional response. This in turn allows speakers as well as listeners to think about issues that might otherwise be avoided (Bowers and Pleydell-Pearce, 2011). For instance, the words *death*, *urine* and *feces* are often replaced with *passed away*, *number-1*, and *number-2* without any attempt to deceive or leave any ambiguity in the minds of the speakers or listeners. Thus, an offensive word and its euphemism have different emotional impact simply because they mean different things.

Reasons for the use of euphemisms may be compassion, courtesy or modesty. They can also be used as a means of empowerment to create acceptance for controversial matters through name swaps and rewritings. Lakoff (1973: 10, 55) also believes that women are the experts on euphemisms. According to her, women do use the weaker words, while stronger words are reserved for men. Expletives that Lakoff (1973) considers more likely

to be used by women: *darn!* and *Heavens!* can be compared to those men are prone to utter: *Shit! Bastard!* and *Son-of-a-bitch!*

The following words all fall under the category of taboo language as they are in one way or another a part of language in need of an extra thought before used in conversation.

Blasphemy was present in classical Greek and Roman societies, where it was associated with acts of treason against the state. Nash (2007: 2) states that the Bible clearly identified the offense as taking the name of the Lord in vain, and that blasphemers were considered to have betrayed the covenant between God and his people by setting themselves above God. Even now blasphemy means speaking evil of sacred matters and is therefore taboo wherever organized religion exists. Blasphemic utterances are a typical form of swearing in our society today as the English vocabulary contains plenty of taboo words as well as euphemisms of religious words, for example *Jesus Christ –crickey* and *God – gosh*.

Due to their similar nature, blasphemy is commonly confused with profanity as they are wrongly understood to be the same thing. While blasphemy appears as a direct attack on religious figures, religious authority and/or directly at the church, profanity does not necessarily attack the church and its supporters, but rather religion in general. It does, however, show a lack of interest and respect towards religious matters (Jay, 1992: 4-5). Blasphemic expressions may come off as humorous to the non-believer, while they are particularly offensive to those with great devotion. Jay (1992: 4) gives the example *screw the pope!* and *the church can stick their new fund drive!* According to Jay (1992) this form of bad language has lost its power to offend the average American, but there are locations within the United States where blasphemy is not tolerated.

One of the strongest providers of taboo words is the topic of sexuality and intimate body parts. *Fuck* is perhaps the most commonly used swearword within the English vocabulary. Starting out as a very coarse word, it is today somewhat less loaded as it is even allowed in some media (Ljung: 2006: 67). It has become a very interesting word due to the wide variety of ways in which it can be used. For instance, it can be used as an expletive *fuck!* and as an insult *fucker* and *motherfucker*. Further it is used as an adjective in *fucking great* and as a derogatory term in *you stupid fuck*. Beyond this, it is also used in diverse expressions such as *fuck off*, *I don't give a fuck* and *fuck something up*.

The theme of the mother and in some cases other, most often female, relatives refers to a sexual accessibility. The most common way to use the mother theme is when insulting someone by uttering expressions such as *your mother is a whore*, often shortened to *your mother*. Moreover, the abbreviated format *your mother*, is found in many languages, as ancestors play a crucial role in several cultures. The mother is in most cultures associated with the gift of life and looked upon with sensitivity and honor, thus, according to Ljung (2006: 68), making it a great source for offense. Insults such as *motherfucker* is another example that shows the way the mother is used in a derogatory manner. The famous expression *son of a bitch* also originates from this theme, where the mother is once more attacked and addressed with the dishonorable title of being a whore or prostitute and the person receiving the insult is supposedly worth less because of his mother's status in society.

The mother theme can be used and classified as ritual insults, name calling, and unfriendly suggestions, but the most popular way of describing it is in ritual insults, according to Ljung (2006). The insult of the mother is also famously found in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (IV: 2: 76), where Aaron utters "Villain, I have done thy mother". This theme is, however, less related to languages than to cultures. In other words, two languages belonging to the same language family, for instance the Finno-Ugric languages Finnish and Hungarian, do not necessarily treat the mother theme in the same way. Yet, due to immigration, linguistic and cultural boundaries are sometimes undistinguishable. Some words that were entirely absent in certain languages or cultures have begun to surface due to the impact of linguistic and/or cultural contacts. He further stated that utterances such as *your mother!* have not before existed in Swedish nor in any other Nordic countries and suggests that it is an example of impact from other languages. In Russian, however, the mother theme is one of the major insults with numerous variations (Byrne, 2017: 7).

Bad language often utilizes *scatological* theme. The word *scatology* derives from the Greek term *scat*, which refers to human waste products and processes (Ljung 2006: 63, Jay 1992: 9). Bad language deriving from this theme therefore include words connected to anything to do with excretion, for example, *shit, crap, ass, fart and asshole*. In Britain, different versions referring to urine, such as *piss*, are often used as well. According to Jay and Janschewitz's (2008: 270) scatology became the most common form of bad language in the twenty-first century. Jay (1992: 9) observes that Americans have a fondness for

creating and using childish terms rather than the standardized words or those of scientific origin. These scatological terms include for instance *poop*, *turd*, *poo*, *do-do*, *shit* and *fart*.

Many offensive terms today involve degrading words for disfavored people. They can be based on ethnicity, race, gender among others. *Politically correct* or PC and its opposite term *politically incorrect*, defined by OED (s.v. politically) as: “[a] flouting liberal convention; discriminatory, have, in recent years, become a popular label to use”. The term was first used among the Left and mainly spoken in an ironic way of self-mockery. It came to America as early as the 1960’s and was used within the Black Power Movement as well as the New Left (Battistella 2005: 90). In the 1980’s the term became associated with speech codes, in other words, acceptable and appropriate speech.

Politically correct language is language that avoids offending or excluding groups of people. In other words, it has developed certain speech-codes for both professional and more private settings. The purpose is to replace historically condescending terms, offensive music and art, and controversial educational content with more positive and less-offending references. For instance, the word *homosexual* is the politically correct version of the word *fag* or *faggot*. Similarly, the word *retard* along with *handicapped* and *crippled* all represent terminology for people with one or another disability and nowadays the accepted, preferred politically correct term is *disabled* (Battistella, 2005: 98-100).

3. Bad language in the media

With the rapid growth of social media, users, especially adolescents, are spending notably more time online to connect with others, share information and pursue common interests than earlier. Media plays an essential part in people’s lives. From the moment we get up we are submerged in the media-centric world. The mass media provide people with a great number of linguistic models. They can be considered one of the largest language influences simply because they can reach out to a great number of people so effectively (Andersson and Trudgill, 1990: 41-45). Thus, they have the chance to influence millions of people and the total effect may be massive. Battistella (2005) refers to this as one reason for the entertainment industry to think twice about their use of language and censorship.

Mass media's greatest concern is, as previously mentioned, teenagers and young adults, where the media may "deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences." (Battistella, 2005: 69). Language control in social media has initially focused on the idea of protecting some listeners from bad and/or offensive language. Stereotypically women and children are the ones assumed to need protection from such, according to Battistella (2005). She mentions, for instance, a case in the United States in 1999 where a fine of 100 dollars was assigned to a man accused of breaking the law, which at the time prohibited swearing in the presence of women and children. Germany and the Netherlands distribute fines for some abusive use of language towards authorities (Byrne, 2017: 7-9). Today, we see traces of language objections and control in various kinds of censorships, for instance, in teaching materials.

Different media have different levels of tolerance concerning foul language. What is offensive in one situation and to some people may not be offensive in another or to others. In literature the aim is promoting realism in the language and the storyline. Battistella (2005: 76-77) says that one argument for tolerating rough language is to be able to include realistic features in certain types of verbal art (fiction, poetry, film noir) that, in turn, require language that reflects the way that people talk and express themselves.

4. Language and gender

Gender is one of many factors that may play a role when choosing language forms, vocabulary and how to express oneself. Research has for a long period of time had an interest in finding gender-based differences. When it comes to bad language, factors such as age, education and social position influence language choices. Ljung (2006: 94) among others claims that it is no secret that swear words are more common and accepted in the working class and the lower educated people. However, in this chapter the focus will be put solely on gender differences.

Over the last twenty years there has been an explosion of research in the field of language and gender (Coates, 2016). Researchers have for a long period of time claimed that there are differences in the ways men and women use language and interact. "Individual studies and meta-analytic reviews have found evidence for gender-linked language features, such

as words, phrases, and sentence length, that are used consistently more by one gender than the other” (Park et al. 2016: 2). Over time many have explained the observed differences as a natural result and reflection of the female subordination throughout history.

Lakoff (1973) set up for a long-lasting criticism and trend in investigating as well as proving her hypothesis wrong. She found women’s speech to be more unassertive than men’s. The reason, she believed, could be found in the different roles women and men have had in society throughout time, where women appear inferior and powerless. According to Lakoff’s work, women’s language is characterized by excessive politeness, a lack of confidence as well as the eagerness to please (Talbot, 1998: 36). Lakoff’s work has, nevertheless, obtained the label as the ”single most influential text in introducing language and gender issues”, as stated by Bucholz and Hall (2012: 5), due to all criticism it has attracted and the great disapproval of her statements.

Later, according to Talbot (1998: 222), the word *parenting* has replaced *mothering* in many contexts to break the norm and expectation that child care is a mother’s duty. She further explains how some women, in protest to the unfair treatment of sexually active women as compared to men, have started using the word *slag* as an equivalent to the word *slut*. Thus, she suggests that the power of words not only reflects the society and its progression, but is also actively used to maintain current norms or eradicate them.

Language and the choice of speech forms may depend on different contributing factors. Gender is one widely discussed one. Stereotypically women have been said to use more prestige forms than men. According to Hughes (1992) women are expected to include less slang and swearing in their language. He explains that women are unfortunate of being “judged according to their sex” (Hughes, 1992: 291). Similarly to Lakoff (1973), Hughes (1992) draws parallels between social division and language use as follows:

The idea of distinct female and male swearwords, and differing amounts of usage for the sexes, is still one that is widely held, and it is still considered as aggressive and unfeminine for women to swear

(Hughes, 1992: 292)

What Lakoff and other researchers fail to take into consideration is the great importance of context, as the degree of offensiveness depends on the situation the words are uttered in. Grauthier and Guille (2017:137-139) point out that numerous surveys have shown that the general difference between women's and men's use of bad language does not come down to the rate at which they are used, but rather the context in which they are used. Thus, certain situations may cause women to use words considered strong. One suggested situation is on social media in social network sites.

The feminist movement is without doubt one factor that has influenced thinking in social sciences and humanities, such as linguistics, over the past 30-40 years. Hughes's (1992) quote that used to represent a generally believed and accepted truth has become less relevant as society and its values have evolved over time. According to McEnery (2006: 29) the likelihood of using bad language is the same among men and women; but, he points out that some words or expressions may generally be more used by one group than the other.

Research has also focused on when and where bad language by men and women occurs. Findings suggest that women tend to swear more in same sex conversations than in mixed-sex conversations (Jay, 1992: 162, Jay and Janschewitz, 2008: 274, Baruch and Jenkins, 2007). Likewise, Hughes (1992: 294) confirms this by observing that women tend to use fewer swear words in the presence of an interviewer of the opposite sex than in front of an interviewer of the same sex. However, he could observe the same reaction among men and their language depending on the sex of the interviewer. According to Jay (1992: 123), the setting makes a difference and he further states that women often use bad language among friends and in private settings. Additionally, the level of comfort to use bad language increases when the individuals have similar backgrounds.

Sexuality as well as intimate body parts, are the provider of many frequently used swearwords today, for instance, *fuck* and its numerous offspring. As sexual intercourse is something completely natural, it is somewhat interesting that a synonym would become such a loaded word. A natural thought is that the word would prompt positive and happy connotations. Pinker (2007) argues for several reasons why sex is tabooed, even to this day.

Has everyone had fun? Not necessarily. One partner might see the act as the beginning of a lifelong relationship, the other as a one-night stand. One may be infecting the other with a disease. A baby may have been conceived, whose welfare was not planned for in the heat of passion. If the couple is related the baby may (...) be susceptible to a genetic defect.

(Pinker, 2007:347)

Pinker also claims that there are massive differences between attitudes to sex between men and women, especially when considering the consequences. Pinker (2007) further states that the potential consequences in the act of reproduction differ greatly among the two. While men have the option to leave without taking any further responsibility, women may have to endure the physical and mental changes of a pregnancy. Thus, men are prone to pursue casual sex much more frequently than females. Connecting this to bad language, Pinker (2007) addresses this as one reason why males swear more than females and that sexual talk might therefore be more offensive for women.

5. Code-switching and bad language

Gumperz (1982: 59) defines *Code-switching* as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems”, in other words, the practice of alternating between two or more languages or varieties of language in conversation. Code-switching as a branch of the field of linguistics, has not been studied for a very long period. It dates back to the late 1960’s and early 1970’s (Hamers and Blanc, 2000). The main reason for the lack of interest was the idea of an ideal homogenous speech community, where monolingualism is preferred. In other words, the speaker and the hearer should, in the idealized situation, know their language flawlessly and the use of different languages in one and same conversation was considered as “signs of incompetence” (Hamers and Blanc, 2000: 258).

Early research concerning code-switching and borrowing has focused on various aspects. When code-switching was in the early process of being subjected to research, the focus was mostly directed towards its social significance. Further on, other aspects by different scholars were taken into consideration as well, such as grammatical features. For instance, Auer (1998: 3) states that the research can be divided into grammatical and sociolinguistic

branches. The increasing interest in code-switching only dates back approximately forty years and was a task for only a few specialists in 1950's and 1960's. Hamers and Blanc (2000) mention researchers like Poplack and Myers-Scotton as those who have studied code-switching and borrowing from a grammatical point of view and tried to figure out theories for how and why they are used. Other researchers include Gumperz (1982), who has approached code-switching from a sociolinguistic perspective.

Hamers and Blanc (2000) consider it to be Blom and Gumperz, whom we should thank for the increase in interest in code-switching and the reconsideration of whether it is a negative phenomenon. Code-switching was for a long time considered a sign of linguistic incompetence. Today, however, the view has changed, and it is no longer looked upon as a deficiency, rather the opposite, according to Hamers and Blanc (2000). It is now generally accepted that code-switching indicates a highly developed linguistic consciousness. Therefore, analyzing code-switching does not mean that one is pointing out errors and correct uses but instead, one is recognizing a creative mind and language ability (Gumperz 1982: 65, Romaine, 1989:111).

Code-switching has also been studied in several studies of bilingualism, because it has been a phenomenon thought to only exist in the speech of bilingual or multilingual speakers. Altarriba and Heredia (2008:86-87) have focused on code-switching from a psycholinguistic perspective. They refer to Meuter and Alloport who have investigated code-switching cost, in other words the time and effort it takes for the brain to switch between languages. Romaine (1989) also focused on the psycholinguistic and neurolinguistics aspects. Her research included Panjabi/English bilinguals in Britain and bilingual children in Papua New Guinea, focusing on the societal and cognitive aspects of code-switching.

Similarly to the definitions, attitudes and judgments about bad language, these also vary for the use of code-switching. For instance, Gumperz (1982: 62-63) lists a number of different opinions expressed concerning code-switching. Some consider it to reflect a bad or total lack of education, while others simply view it as a genuine and acceptable form of informal conversation, much like any other form of bad language discussed in this study. Furthermore, Gumperz (1982:62-63) gives an example of how the negative attitudes are alive and present in the USA. In Texas and the American Southwest, the

term Tex-Mex has been adopted. It refers to the large number of people who have come into the country from Mexico and other Spanish speaking countries, and who switch between the two languages when speaking. The term has derogatory connotations which reveal the view of the users. The equivalent term *joual* can be found in parts of Canada where French is dominating, referring to code-switching between French and English.

What happens when we learn another language or include it in our first language conversations? Research continues to focus on the subject's emotions and attachments, and the common ground is that individuals usually feel less emotionally attached to a second or third language. Beers Fägersten (2012) states that bilingual individuals or those acquainted with a second language normally find it easier to utter strong language in the second language, as they are less emotionally attached to it. Apparently, this is because other languages feel 'disembodied', while a native language feels intimate. Topics that would be taboo in the native language do not feel as upsetting in other languages. Important to note is also the effect and meaning of a word and how it may be lost in translation.

Cultural and social norms of politeness, which are often rules we learn as children, are followed much more thoroughly in the native language. Byrne (2017: 171) and Dewaele (2004: 87) propose that we primarily learn and adapt the links between language and emotion, as well as the emotional resonance, in childhood. Therefore, we experience and evoke stronger feelings in our mother tongue, even those who are fluent in other languages. Lantto (2014: 2) suggests that bad language and its relation to emotions might be one of the factors explaining the susceptibility of such language to code-switching. For instance, swear words are often and easily brought into a language because they function as pragmatic markers. Moreover, she explains that discourse functions of code-switching and swearing tend to overlap as both can be used for stylistic functions, such as denoting distance from or emphasis on the message, signaling changes and conveying humor or emotions.

Lantto (2014: 2-3) reports results from her own study on the relation between code-switching, swearing and slang and claims that code-switching is often found in joyful situations such as when making jokes. Both psycholinguistic explorations and psychoanalytic case studies suggest that the emotional impact of two languages may

differ depending on when they are learned. For instance, if a second language is learned after puberty the personal involvement is weaker (Pavlenko, 2002: 47).

Byrne (2017: 170-172) points out that there is something special with taboo language that captures the interest of not only children, but likewise adolescents and adults. Many of my respondents in this study took time to personally contact me and mention their interest for the topic. For children, the reactions of those in their surroundings teach them, as well as sparks their interest, about the power invested in certain words. According to Dewaele (2004) adults, often tourists, tend to pick up bad words through interactions with native speakers. Yet, because they are considered taboo and offensive, these words are rarely encountered in textbooks and are never heard in a classroom. As a result, Dewaele (2004: 101-103) claims that “instructed language learners have a restricted general knowledge of these words and use them infrequently”. The lack of complete understanding concerning the force of these words, he says, also make people avoid them.

6. Materials and methods

The primary aim of this study is to examine the attitudes towards and the use of bad language of Americans and Nordic, more specific Swedish and Finland-Swedish people and compare the two. To the latter I include both Finland-Swedish speakers and native Swedish speakers. My aim is to examine general thoughts and attitudes concerning bad language and to find out if there are words or expressions that stand out as considerably worse than others. I want to find out if there are differences in the attitudes towards the ten words selected to represent bad language. The questionnaire also includes questions aimed at examining differences between bad language used by men and women, for instance, if there are certain words perceived as more offensive depending on the gender of the speaker.

The terms *bad language* and *foul language* are in this study used interchangeably and should be interpreted as an umbrella term for any kind of swearing, cursing, vulgar or taboo language. There is also a part examining the use of foul language as code-switching, where I want to find out if the idea that a second or other language than the mother tongue is considered less emotional and therefore easier to express stronger feelings in.

The study consists of an online questionnaire (see appendix) made with the program E-lomake, accessed through Åbo Akademi University. E-lomake is a browser-based application by Eduix Oy that can be used to define and publish diverse e-forms and to handle their responses in various ways. The questionnaire was sent out on 24 September 2018, and it was open to access until 19 October 2018. To retain some control over the individuals receiving the survey, I distributed the link to the questionnaire online via Facebook messenger to friends and acquaintances in my personal friend list instead of posting it openly to the public to answer. The recipients were encouraged to forward it to their contacts as well. To what extent they forwarded it or how it was spread from there on was out of my control. The questionnaire was also sent to a contact person at the Pittsburg State University, Kansas USA, who was asked to forward the link to the questionnaire to students of the University.

Data from the questionnaires was analyzed in Microsoft Excel 2010. Frequency, age and gender were determined and a comparison was made between the tendencies of bad language use in the United States and in Sweden and Finland. Similarities and differences were also analyzed according to the responses to the open questions.

The questionnaire is divided into three parts. The first part covers background information on the respondents. In the second part, which is also the main part of the survey, the respondents are presented with ten different words representing foul language, each without a specific context. Each word is accompanied by six questions dealing with the respondents' subjective opinion of the offensiveness of the word, frequency of use, context and assumed gender differences. The respondents are encouraged and given a chance to further elaborate their opinion and thoughts on the different words in an open question before moving on to the next word.

The third part of the survey is where code-switching enters the center of attention. It consists of an optional follow-up aimed for those with Swedish as their mother tongue. The follow-up consists of four questions, where the first provides the respondents with a Swedish translation of the words used previously and they are asked to choose in which language they find the word more offensive – English or Swedish, their mother tongue. we may assume that some respondents would have preferred an alternative where both languages are equally offensive, but by not providing that option I hope that they were

forced to think twice and consider their answer. The second question asks them to reveal their preferred language to use bad language in, followed by a request to motivate their choice and finally end with an open question. The open questions give the informants the chance to express and elaborate what they think of foul language overall, how much they use it themselves and so on. They are also asked to motivate why they think it is good or bad, as well as to comment on the content and design of the questionnaire.

To narrow this study down I have chosen to research the attitudes towards words from a popularity rather than geographical perspective. The transfer of political, economic and cultural power from Great Britain to the United States has progressed gradually over the course of more than half a century, with World War II being the final stepping stone in the establishment of American supremacy. Geographically Great Britain is within a closer range of the surveyed people and teaching materials are still dominated by British English in our Nordic countries. However, today, American English dominates informal registers and is, to a great extent, favored by younger generations. The influence of American English can be explained with the growing influence of the United States in media, television and communication. Finn (2017: 19) expresses that bad language is nowadays unavoidable for students due to the popular culture. Therefore, all the words investigated in the questionnaire are originally American or most often used in American contexts. The words selected are: *fuck, shit, motherfucker, cunt, whore, nigger, goddamnit, Jesus Christ, retard and fag*.

I suspect that a great majority of people will be familiar with these words as they are used everywhere, and I suspect that many use these words in the form of code-switching in their everyday language. However, the United States and Europe, more specifically Scandinavia, perhaps have somewhat different cultural values that influence the extent of offense caused by the use of these swearwords. For instance, the majority of the States in America are to this day quite conservative and, in comparison to Scandinavia, religion may play a bigger role in their society.

As context is very important when studying offensive language, the questionnaire gives the option to answer when and where the words could be viewed as an acceptable way of speech or writing.

Studies on linguistic attitudes can be divided into three main categories including the analysis of how something, for example, a linguistic variety or trait is treated in a community: these are known as social treatment, indirect and direct methods (Garrett, Coupland and Williams 2003, 14-15). The direct methods are characterized by informants, in different ways, responding to direct questions on the topics investigated, usually through surveys or interviews. The survey in the present study is conducted by direct methods, which is also consistent with the folk-linguistic principle that the informants' own perceptions of language should be in focus.

The words used in the questionnaire have been divided into two groups consisting of five words. Words in the first group represent what I call *old offensive words*, while the second group represents *new offensive words*. The labels *old* and *new* do not refer to how long the words have been around and seen as offensive, but rather the ever-evolving language and the shift of taboo subjects. For instance, the word *fuck* is an old word that is still today seen as offensive. However, *fuck* has become more acceptable and compared to other themes it may even be considered quite harmless. The old offensive words include themes like religion, sexuality and intimate parts of the body, sexual acts and scatology. The new offensive words are based on current trigger themes. As mentioned above, identity, acceptance and equality have risen to the surface in our modern world. Therefore, the old offensive themes have to some extent been replaced by themes connected to political correctness, which include ethnical and racial slurs, gender themes, attacks on intellect and those different from the norm.

A big part of the analysis consists of open questions, which serve the purpose of leaving space and encourage respondents to make their own personal reflections. The idea is here to minimize the risk of governing the answer in any particular direction through the questions. In the analysis of the material I have categorized the arguments stated by the informants in arguments for and against the investigated taboos. I have identified the arguments used to justify why some words are offensive and inoffensive and divided them into categories.

7. Results

The aim of this study is to investigate the attitudes and use of bad language among Americans and Swedish speakers in the Nordic countries Finland and Sweden. A total of 196 responses to a questionnaire (see appendix) were collected and analyzed. Of the respondents, 110 (56%) are women and 85 (43%) are men. One informant had ticked the box of not wanting or being able to state their gender. Because only one informant belongs to this group, I have chosen to exclude this informant in the parts of the analysis where gender differences are explored or distinguished. However, in any other parts of the analysis the answers of this individual are included. Furthermore, 124 (63%) of the respondents are Swedish speakers from Finland and Sweden and 72 (37%) are American.

The ages of the respondents vary, but the distribution is not ideal as the majority are born in the 1990's. The age distribution is shown in figure 3 and divided into decades showing how many respondents are born in each.

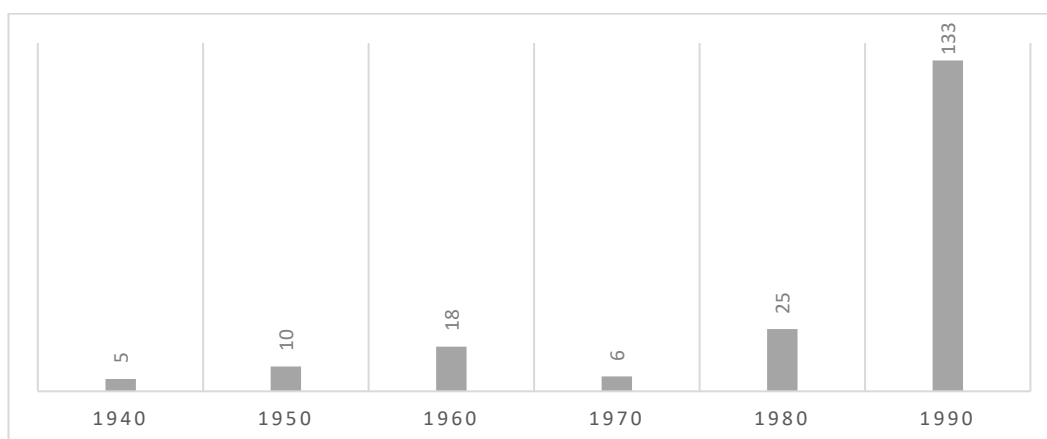


Figure 3: Age distribution of respondents

The oldest respondent is born in 1942 and the youngest 1999. Due to the nature of the words in the survey, I chose to apply an age limit of 18 for inclusion in the survey. The degree to which this was actually followed was not possible for me to control. In the age part of the analysis I have divided the respondents into three groups consisting of young adults, ranging from age 18-34, middle age, ranging from 35-59 and lastly, seniors from 60 and onwards. The results are presented in the following chapter.

7.1 Open questions and general thoughts

Even words considered to be the most vulgar and inappropriate can still be used and occasionally evoke positive feelings in the right circumstances. For instance, one respondent reported that his friends use the word in a comic way. Comic effect is an argument for many of the words, although it still requires the right circumstances and situation.

Even though some words are considered harsh, some claim that if the word is directed at a thing or situation rather than a person it becomes more acceptable. Furthermore, *motherfucker* is described to be accurate, for instance, when describing someone sneaky as *that motherfucker* exclaimed in anger in *that motherfucker just cut me off!* and humorously used "in a joke including Samuel L Jackson". Others claim that *motherfucker* evokes a more visceral mental image and therefore it cannot be compared to a word as vague as *fuck*. Furthermore, the word is used in lyrics in music, such as hip hop.

Shit is considered one of the milder words and, like *fuck*, usable in almost every sentence and context, according to some respondents. Both *fuck* and *shit* are also commonly used in expressions such as the following example:

What is all this shit on the carpet?

Are you shitting me!?

Susan is being a little shit head.

Cunt, *whore* and *nigger* are the words where most of the respondents felt the same way – extremely inappropriate and derogatory. The cultural differences play a role in the perceived harshness of the word. It is pointed out by the respondents that *cunt* is very uncommon in the United States, while it can be more common in other parts of the world. Some of my respondents claim that the word is more acceptable and used more frequently in Great Britain and Australia. Similarly, *nigger* is described acceptable when an African American is talking to another African American. Nevertheless, most describe the words

as repulsive and disrespectful. Similar thoughts can be found about the word *whore*, where the offensiveness and ugliness are said to come from the word being gender-coded and derogatory towards women and often shaming them for having sex. Due to the strong feelings these words evoke, the fact that these words can be used for disgust and shock value is brought forth and given as a reason why one might use them. In the end, *whore* comes nowhere near the word *cunt* and it is considered acceptable in joking uses and as a synonym for prostitutes. If a person is cheated on by their spouse is one example where it is appropriate to use the word abusively as an emotional outburst.

One of the most common arguments for whether a word is offensive or not is the perceived experience of the audience. What makes, for instance, the word *nigger* offensive and unacceptable is the awareness that others take offense. The older generation have grown up learning that the word in question describes a black person, yet, many have stopped using it because they have re-learned that many blacks find it extremely derogatory. As *nigger* has become one of the most provoking and debated words in modern times, even white people express their unease and offense towards the word. It is commonly acceptable and widely known that people belonging to this group may use the words among themselves, but when someone outside the community utters the word it becomes offensive. Oftentimes this is an immediate reaction by people despite the person's intention behind the utterance. Because of this, some respondents feel rather confused and unsure, which results in avoidance of the word. The dialectal version *nigga* as in *my nigga* is by some thought to be slightly less offensive and often implying a humorous undertone. Among the responses in my study only two examples of when and where this word is acceptable to use were given, specifically in hip hop music and when discussing historical events (preferably in an academic context).

Finnish male 28: One might use *nigger* or *nigga* as a reference to african-american culture or rap culture, as a kind of joke. For example "my nigga"

Words belonging to the religious category such as *goddamnit* and *Jesus Christ* divide the opinions of the respondents. The disapproval of those believing in God and belonging to a religious community is clearly motivated. Those not believing, naturally, find it less offensive and find them as mild as *shit* and *fuck*. They state that they often use them when

something is not going the intended way or in combination with a funny and serious manner. Despite not finding *goddamnit* or *Jesus Christ* offensive as exclamatives, awareness that they are considered inappropriate among religious groups is stated. Both are explained to be used to express a variety of emotions, such as shock, misfortune, anger, surprise, frustration, irritation as well as in casual conversations and in jokes.

Finnish female 26: "Goddamnit" is one of those words that have kind of lost their literal meaning over time. Hence, I would imagine that it hardly even registers as foul language, except for those who are deeply religious.

Swedish female 24: Yes, when you are a bit angry about something. like "Goddamnit Karen! I asked you to give me the report yesterday" (It's the fourth time Karen missed the report)

American male 27: Absolutely inappropriate. No, there is no reason to ever need to use such a vulgar word when there are many other clean, appropriate words that express the same thing, to take its place. On a side note, above all other words you should NEVER take Gods name in vain

Another factor contributing to the offense is whether *God* is present in the word. Whenever left out it is slightly more acceptable according to both religious and non-religious individuals.

American female 24: I typically will say damn it when I messed up but I don't ever put God in front of it.

Finnish female 24: I use damn it instead, which I think is okay to use. However, the god in front might not be okay because of the religious aspect. God is a holy word for some people and should not be used as a foul word.

The main problem that the respondents found concerning the word *retard* was that it is used to describe a person with mental disabilities. Because of this, many felt that by

comparing someone to a person with disabilities they also end up insulting those with disabilities. Use among friends is rather common, according to the motivations given. Another context in which the word is said to be used frequently is in online gaming. As most of the words, *retard* is also justified when used in a non-serious comic way.

Finnish female 28: Mainly not. Sometimes it is used in a fun way in movies/tv series though, e.g. when a man, who did not know English very well, tried to explain that he was a retired seacaptain, he accidentally told that he was a retarded seacaptain instead.

As the word *fag* is used to describe homosexual people, it stands as another example of the words that are acceptable to be used by those belonging to the group, while it becomes demeaning when others use it. *Fag*, *nigger* and *retard* are all described as politically incorrect and the need of using alternative terms is essential. Cultural context becomes relevant again, as the British sense of the word, ‘cigarette’, is presented as a reasonable situation for it to be used. Likewise, respondents reported the use in reference to the etymological meaning “bundle of sticks” as acceptable.

Finnish female 24: I feel like this word might have been more frequently used in the past, but with the LGBTQ community being more accepted today, the situation might have gotten better. I feel that if a person who identifies as part of the LGBTQ group uses the term themselves to try to rid the word of its original, negative meaning, that's ok.

According to the responses of the questionnaire, the words most respondents considered most offensive are as shown in figure 4.

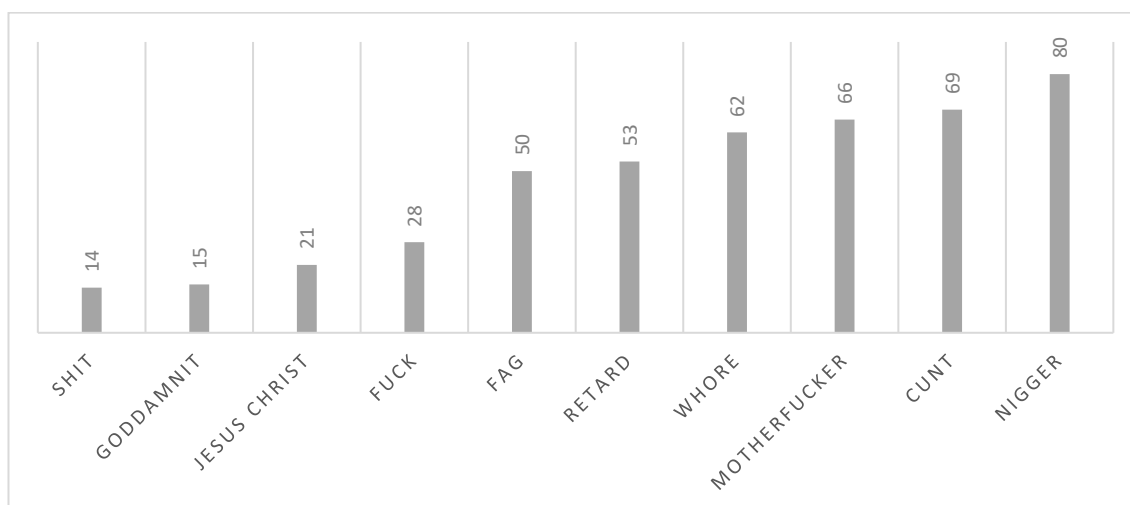


Figure 4: Proportion of respondents finding the word offensive

Out of the words represented, disfavored people and minorities (*nigger*, *retard*) and words referring to sexuality and sexual organs (*cunt*, *motherfucker*, *whore*) belong to the most offensive ones. Groups mentioned in general thoughts about foul language include the ones mentioned above and religious words, specifically when God is involved. Worth mentioning is that, for some respondents, these words are even too offensive to write out and are censored, for instance by being referred to as the *n-word*, *f-word* or written as *c*nt* and *God *****.

The estimated use of the words by the respondents (figure 5) corresponds with the offensiveness expressed in (figure 4), The least offensive words are most frequently used, while the offensive words are restricted in their use. However, *whore*, which is the fourth most offensive word has zero percentage claiming they use it frequently or very frequently. *Motherfucker*, *cunt* and *nigger* are generally considered worse than *whore*, yet they still have slightly more occurrences of being used frequently or very frequently by some. All words are used sometimes and according to the open questions most are used in a friendly way among friends rather than as aggressive outbursts.

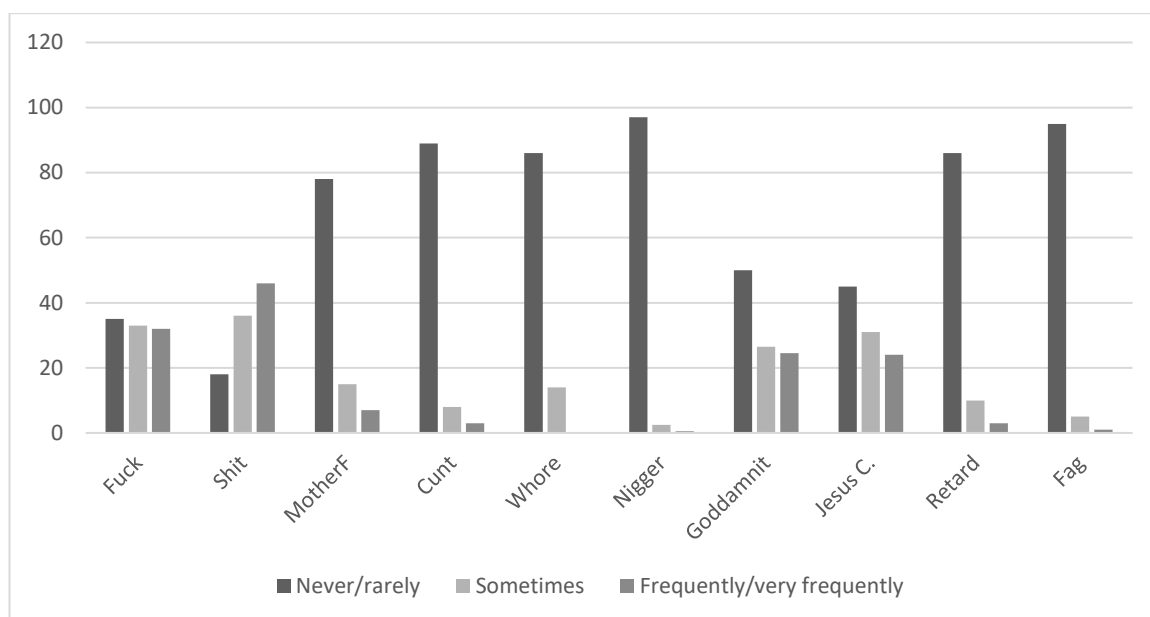


Figure 5: Frequency of use of the words

7.2 Offensiveness according to nationality and gender

This chapter examines differences according to nationality and gender. I will begin by comparing nationalities and then discuss gender differences. I will report on the results of the comparison between the Swedish and the American attitudes to the offensiveness of the ten words included in this study. Those with English as their mother tongue are likely to have another stance on the words than those who have learned English as a foreign language.

Table 1: Evaluation of offensiveness according to nationality and gender

		American				Swedish			
		Male		Female		Male		Female	
		(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)
<i>Fuck</i>	Strong	25	8	43	17	13	7	34	24
	Moderate	12	4	14	6	38	20	30	21
	Mild	63	20	43	17	49	26	36	25
<i>Shit</i>	Strong	6	2	10	4	0	0	0	0
	Moderate	12	4	10	4	6	3	73	51
	Mild	80	26	80	32	94	50	27	19
<i>Motherfucker</i>	Strong	38	12	58	23	70	37	81	57
	Moderate	24	8	15	6	13	7	12	8
	Mild	38	12	27	11	17	9	6	4
<i>Cunt</i>	Strong	59	19	77	31	64	34	72	50
	Moderate	13	4	15	6	15	8	11	8
	Mild	28	9	8	3	15	8	1	1
<i>Whore</i>	Strong	16	5	37	15	83	44	83	58
	Moderate	25	8	30	12	8	4	10	7
	Mild	59	19	30	12	9	5	4	10
<i>Nigger</i>	Strong	66	21	88	35	74	39	89	62
	Moderate	12	4	10	4	18	10	7	5
	Mild	22	7	2	1	8	4	4	3
<i>Goddamnit</i>	Strong	15	5	50	20	4	2	4	3
	Moderate	3	1	12	5	5	3	16	11
	Mild	82	26	38	15	87	34	77	54
<i>Jesus Christ</i>	Strong	22	7	32	20	1	1	6	4
	Moderate	13	2	20	3	15	8	16	12
	Mild	72	23	41	16	84	44	77	54
<i>Retard</i>	Strong	34	11	68	27	35	19	66	46
	Moderate	28	9	10	4	30	16	20	14
	Mild	38	12	22	9	27	14	11	8
<i>Fag</i>	Strong	18	6	52	21	42	22	68	48
	Moderate	31	10	25	10	28	15	14	11
	Mild	51	16	23	9	25	13	11	8

With the total of 90% of the Swedish speakers and 81% of the Americans finding the word *shit* very mild, it is the least offensive word among both groups. Only 2% of the Swedish speakers and 8 % of the Americans found the word strong or very strong. The last 8% of the Swedish answers and 11% of the Americans found the word moderately offensive. Similarly, both groups found the word *fuck* rather mild. Half of the Americans, 51%, found it mild or very mild and 41% of the Swedish speakers found it mild or very mild. However, 35% of the Americans and 25% of the Swedish speakers perceived *fuck* as strong or very strong. There is a greater division among the Americans than the

Swedish speakers in their opinion on whether the word is offensive. However, twice as many of the Swedish speakers reported that they found *fuck* a moderately offensive word. *Motherfucker*, one of the many versions of *fuck*, was described as a slightly more offensive word and the results show that it was in fact considered quite harsh by the many respondents, and more so by the non-native speakers. While there is a division among the native speakers, with 48% finding the word strong or very strong and 33% reporting that they find it very mild or mild, the gap is greater for the non-native speakers. As many as 77% reported that *motherfucker* is strong or very strong and only 10 % that it is very mild or mild.

The most notable difference to be observed concerns the religious words *goddamnit* and *Jesus Christ*. While the Swedish speakers viewed these as mild as *shit* and *fuck*, the Americans expressed a stricter view. Of the Swedish speakers, 80 % found *goddamnit* very mild or mild and only 4% found it strong. *Jesus Christ* received almost identical responses among the Swedish speakers, with 80% very mild or mild and 4% strong or very strong. The offensiveness reported by the Americans on the two words are also quite similar. While 58% found *goddamnit* very mild or mild and 54% felt the same about *Jesus Christ*, there was a higher proportion who believed these to be strong or very strong: 35% and 38%, respectively. This is explained and motivated as follows:

American male 32: [goddamnit] No context, as bad if not worse then the "F" word because it takes the Lord's name in vain.

Finnish female 24: [goddamnit] Since I don't believe in God I don't feel like it is that bad to say Goddamnit.

American female 57: [Jesus Christ] I am offended most by this word...it degrades the name of my Lord and Savior

Finnish female 23: [Jesus Christ] Well best would be in church. But as a bad word it's very mild so I feel like you can throw it in wherever you like. Like you can do with Shit

Whore and *cunt*, the first referring to the profession of prostitution and the second to the female vagina, were reported very offensive among the Swedish speakers and slightly less by the Americans. Strong or very strong covers 83% of the Swedish speakers' opinions of the word *whore*, whereas the same applies to 28% of the Americans. Those who perceived *whore* as a very mild or mild word comprise 6% and respectively 43% of the Americans. It appears that the Americans find the word less offensive than the non-native speakers. The crucial decision appears to be the way it is used and the closeness to the people around when uttering it. The word can in the right situations function as a group strengthener as well as a way to express the level of comfort with another person.

American female 38: It's a pretty "light" swearword to me. My husbands old truck can be a whore if it won't start for me. My sisters can be whores if they leave me out of a group text. It's a common word for me lol

American female 53: My mother and I will tease each other but it is all in fun. I never call anyone this

The same goes for *cunt* as it quickly becomes one of the most unacceptable words of abuse, but it can also be a way of expressing closeness and trust when the speaker is certain that the other person will find it humorous and unserious. The majority of both the Americans and the Swedish speakers found this word strong or very strong, both adding up to 69%. Only 17% classified it as a very mild or mild word in the United States, while as few as 7% of the Swedish speakers felt the same. However, among the Swedish speakers, 14 individuals (11%) declared that they did not know the word. Of these 14, 12 belong to the middle age and senior age groups. The cultural differences become important concerning this word. Some of the respondents provided their opinions on how the word is perceived and explained that they believed the word is more offensive outside the United States, especially in the United Kingdom. As an abusive word, it is, however, extremely offensive and the given explanation is because it is gender-coded and downgrading towards women.

Finnish male 28: The usage of cunt differs in cultures. As I understand it it's quite frequently used in UK / Australian English, but a NO-NO in American. Again useful in friendly banter

American female 52: In British slang this is more common and not as bad as in US. It is appropriate in GB as popular slang, but not in US.

Nigger, *retard* and *fag* describe groups that for one or another reason are more vulnerable than the norm. While all three words have once been neutrally used to describe an ethnic group, race, a disability or a sexual orientation, history and fear of what is different has contributed to people using them in an abusive way. All these words were reported as offensive and inappropriate among the respondents. *Nigger* was considered as offensive as *whore* among the non-native speakers, where 82% reported that the word is strong or very strong. Similar to *whore*, only 6% found *nigger* a mild word. Of the native speakers 78% found it offensive and 11% found it very mild or mild. There is no notable difference when compared to the native speakers' opinions on the word's offensiveness. Of them 78% found it strong or very strong and 11% answered very mild or mild. The serious negative connotations of this word were expressed as so offensive that one cannot even utter the word when discussing its use.

American male 23: When you are a black person. Otherwise, you can't even say it when discussing the word itself.

Retard and *fag* turned out to be equally offensive to the non-native speakers. *Retard* was considered strong or very strong by 55% and *fag* by 57%. According to the native speakers, on the other hand, *fag* is less offensive than *retard*. While 47% found *retard* strong or very strong, the percentage is reduced by half concerning *fag*, namely to 27%. About the same proportion reported that the word appears very mild or mild to them. Only 17% of the non-native speakers found *fag* a very mild or mild word and 18% responded so for *retard*.

Table 1 shows the offensiveness expressed by male and female respondents in the language groups. Studying the distributions, it becomes clear that there are some

differences between gender belonging to one nationality as well as in comparison to each other.

Most words were perceived stronger and more offensive by the female respondents in both nationalities. While all words appeared stronger to the American females compared to the males of the same group, a few words among the Swedish sample appeared with less of a gap than the rest. For *shit*, none of either males or females in the Swedish speaking group report it as a strong or very strong word. In comparison, a small percentage of both the American males and females report the word as strong or very strong, namely 6% and 10%. *Whore* and *goddamnit* are another couple of words of which the Swedish males and females shared an opinion. *Whore* was considered strong or very strong by 83% and *goddamnit* by 4%.

Whore, categorized in the top of the most offensive words in the survey among the Swedish speakers, was considered equally offensive among both males and females. However, when viewing the proportion of mild and moderate opinions, males still found the words milder than the females. *Goddamnit* demonstrated a great contrast among the Swedish and American females. Only 4% of the Swedish females, same percentage as the males, found the word strong or very strong. In contrast 50% of the American females reported it strong or very strong. With 15% answering strong or very strong, the American males found it somewhat more offensive than the Swedish males and females, though far less than the American females.

7.3 Context and contributing factors

This part of the analysis looks at a few of the factors that may contribute to subjective evaluations of and thoughts on bad language. Age and education were included in the background questions of the survey, which aimed to explore the role of the respondents' backgrounds. The questions concerning context had the purpose to reveal when and where the respondents considered bad language as acceptable or not. Unlike the previous chapter, the following four sections will not include a comparison of nationalities as some groups become too small if further divided into nationalities.

7.3.1 Age

To be able to compare and draw conclusions about possible connections between the opinions and age, the respondents were divided into three age groups. Of the respondents, 133 (68%) are adults (18-34), 49 (25%) middle aged (35-59) and 14 (7%) senior (60-). The division is not ideal as the groups are far from equal, but I hope the analysis will contribute to a glimpse into any connections between the two. DKW appears in table 2, where the distributions are presented and stands for the option 'do not know word'.

Table 2: Evaluation of offensiveness according to age

		<i>Adults</i>		<i>Middle-aged</i>		<i>Senior</i>	
		<i>(%)</i>	<i>(N)</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>(N)</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>(N)</i>
<i>Fuck</i>	Strong	21	29	47	23	29	4
	Moderate	29	38	14	7	50	7
	Mild	50	66	39	19	21	3
<i>Shit</i>	Strong	2	3	10	5	7	1
	Moderate	8	11	10	5	14	2
	Mild	90	119	80	39	79	11
<i>Motherfucker</i>	Strong	63	84	76	37	64	9
	Moderate	15	20	12	6	22	3
	Mild	22	29	12	6	7	1
	DKW	0	0	0	0	7	1
<i>Cunt</i>	Strong	68	90	75	37	57	8
	Moderate	17	23	6	3	0	0
	Mild	14	18	6	3	0	0
	DKW	1	2	13	6	43	2
<i>Whore</i>	Strong	65	87	59	29	50	7
	Moderate	13	17	24	12	14	2
	Mild	22	29	15	7	22	3
	DKW	0	0	2	1	14	2
<i>Nigger</i>	Strong	80	107	84	41	71	10
	Moderate	12	16	8	4	22	3
	Mild	8	10	8	4	7	1
<i>Goddamnit</i>	Strong	9	12	26	13	36	5
	Moderate	8	11	12	6	21	3
	Mild	83	110	58	28	29	4
	DKW	0	0	4	2	14	2
<i>Jesus Christ</i>	Strong	10	13	30	15	29	4
	Moderate	14	19	8	4	14	2
	Mild	76	101	62	30	50	7
	DKW	0	0	0	0	7	1
<i>Retard</i>	Strong	47	63	68	33	58	8
	Moderate	27	36	12	6	7	1
	Mild	25	33	16	8	14	2
	DKW	1	1	4	2	21	3
<i>Fag</i>	Strong	53	70	47	23	36	5
	Moderate	22	29	27	13	21	3
	Mild	24	32	24	12	14	2
	DKW	1	2	2	1	29	4

In general, as seen in table 2 the adults had a more accepting view on bad language. They are the group with the highest proportion finding the words very mild or mild. Among the words considered the mildest are by 199 (90%) informants the words *shit*, 110 informants (83%) *goddamnit* and 101 informants (76%) *Jesus Christ*. Seniors have the highest proportion of words unknown, but they are not the group who are most reluctant to use the words, as one may have thought. Instead, the middle-aged individuals represent the group with the highest proportion of words viewed as strong. *Fuck*, *shit*, *motherfucker*, *cunt*, *nigger*, *retard* and *Jesus Christ* were all found strongest among the middle aged.

Even though 14% of the seniors did know the word *goddamnit*, it was still judged strongest by 10 percentage points more of them than by the middle-aged group. *Nigger* is a word known by every individual who answered the questionnaire. While the adults and middle-aged group reach above 80% on agreeing that the word is strong, 71% of the seniors felt the same. Because some of the older generation expressed that they have been raised with the word being just another one in their vocabulary to describe a race, they also do not view it as a foul word.

Finnish male 62: äldre personer är uppfostrade med att neger inte är ett fult ord.

'Older people are not raised with nigger being a bad word.'

7.3.2 Contexts of use

It has been stated that context is vital when deciding the acceptability of bad words and their level of offense (Kapoor, 2016). Some may not feel it matters when and where bad language is used and will themselves use it anywhere. Others feel somewhat insecure and they can name instances and situations when they feel it is most inappropriate. And even though some may not particularly enjoy listening or using bad language, when in a specific situation or surrounded by people they feel secure around, they admit to using bad language as well.

Table 3: Frequency of use of bad language according to relations

	Alone		With friends		With family		With colleagues		With strangers	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
Never	13	7	13	6	39	20	56	28,5	83	42
Rarely	40	20	37	19	82	42	74	38	82	42
Sometimes	80	41	74	38	54	27	51	26	25	13
Frequently	41	21	47	24	13	7	9	4,5	3	1,5
Very frequently	22	11	25	13	8	4	6	3	3	1,5
Total	196		196		196		196		196	

The results show that most respondents tend to use bad language when they are either alone or with friends. In the responses, 32% admit to using bad language frequently or very frequently when alone and 37% when with a group of friends. However, 27% report that they rarely or never use bad language alone, and 25% rarely use it or do not at all use it with friends. Nevertheless, the majority admit to using bad language sometimes when alone (41%) and with friends (38%).

When around family it is somewhat less common to use bad language. Thus, 62% state that they rarely or never use such language with family and only 11% do so frequently or very frequently, yet 26% do it sometimes. The informants tend to use bad language the least with colleagues and with strangers. Those who avoid bad language with their colleagues reach 66.5% and those who avoid it around stranger 84%. With only 3% using bad language frequently or very frequently around strangers, and 7.5% with colleagues, these, as well as a situation where the family is present is the least common and perhaps least acceptable situation to use bad language according to the responses. According to Dewaele and Wei (2014: 239) those who have a low emotional stability tend to use foul language significantly more in interactions with family and strangers.

To get an idea of the respondents' thoughts on bad language, one question in the survey asked them to fill in who might use the words examined. The professions believed to contain the most and the least instances of bad language are listed below in tables 4 and 5. The respondents also filled in which of these they believed would use bad language outside of their professional role.

Table 4: Most frequent occurrences of bad language according to professional and private roles

	<i>Profession/private</i>		<i>Profession/private</i>		<i>Profession/private</i>		<i>Profession/private</i>		<i>Profession/private</i>	
	<i>Truck driver</i>		<i>Bouncer</i>		<i>Janitor</i>		<i>Policeman</i>		<i>Lawyer</i>	
<i>Fuck</i>	123	152	111	155	66	162	62	166	32	168
<i>Shit</i>	139	150	133	148	118	152	105	162	75	167
<i>MotherF</i>	78	131	70	133	30	122	43	120	11	122
<i>Cunt</i>	39	111	33	105	19	94	12	91	8	89
<i>Whore</i>	40	114	31	104	15	96	22	91	22	88
<i>Nigger</i>	31	72	21	59	12	59	18	60	10	49
<i>Goddamnit</i>	111	131	97	128	87	128	92	135	69	141
<i>Jesus</i>	107	130	107	137	94	125	96	139	77	145
<i>Retard</i>	52	97	33	92	26	93	19	80	21	80
<i>Fag</i>	52	98	46	94	29	81	23	74	12	76

Truck drivers stand for the profession believed to use the bad language and the words presented the most. Bouncers, janitors, police officers and lawyers follow close behind as professions where bad language is considered to occur most frequently. In the respondents' view, the least frequent users are those working in service-oriented professions, such as cashiers and child care workers as well as education professions, such as teachers and priests. Interestingly, Stone and Hazelton (2008) claim there is evidence of more aggression and bad language towards workers in service-oriented jobs such as the police and aid workers.

Table 5: Least frequent occurrences of bad language according to professional and private roles

	<i>Profession</i> <i>/private</i> <i>Teacher</i>		<i>Profession</i> <i>/private</i> <i>Priest</i>		<i>Profession</i> <i>/private</i> <i>Cashier</i>		<i>Profession</i> <i>/private</i> <i>Child-care</i> <i>worker</i>		<i>Profession</i> <i>/private</i> <i>Waiter</i>		<i>Profession</i> <i>/private</i> <i>Doctor</i>	
<i>Fuck</i>	10	174	3	94	17	177	4	159	17	180	13	172
<i>Shit</i>	67	166	17	134	62	167	37	168	72	167	59	168
<i>MotherF</i>	0	101	0	55	6	117	2	97	6	120	0	106
<i>Cunt</i>	3	77	0	47	3	89	4	74	6	94	2	75
<i>Whore</i>	9	75	20	57	5	90	5	73	6	93	8	77
<i>Nigger</i>	9	42	2	37	4	46	3	41	5	47	3	45
<i>Goddam</i>	54	136	17	68	54	136	37	136	66	138	53	140
<i>nit</i>												
<i>Jesus</i>	70	139	66	83	73	139	56	137	72	141	65	146
<i>Retard</i>	10	65	2	45	12	82	10	65	15	90	22	65
<i>Fag</i>	7	59	11	54	9	71	4	57	11	75	6	62

It is well-known that the more formal the situation the more careful people are when expressing themselves. Likewise, the higher educated the more formally people are expected to express themselves and therefore highly educated people can be expected to use bad language less frequently. Truck drivers, janitors and bouncers all have in common a less formal working context and conditions, while, for instance, a lawyer and members of the police force may be considered working in a more formal context. Thus, authorities and those with a more formal profession may have higher expectations on behaving in a certain way. However, in some cases foul language may help get a point across, for instance in a good cop/bad cop interrogation. Likewise, a lawyer may, for instance, try to win over the jury by using emotional arguments, while a policeman might use it to effectively strengthen an argument.

A clear distinction between the way in which the words are used can be observed between the more formal and the informal occupations. Those with less formal professional settings were considered to use these words in a more careless way and more often in a cathartic or abusive sense. Occupations with higher prestige and working conditions, on

the other hand, were mainly believed to use strong words for educational purposes or in their intended meaning. For instance, teachers informing their students of the meaning of various bad words and priests mentioning *Jesus Christ* and *whore* when retelling bible stories. However, the milder the word the more acceptable for people to use despite their occupation.

The general belief is that everybody uses foul language at some point and most often in their private life. Even so, priests and child care workers stand out as groups thought to use slightly less foul language even in their private life. Interestingly enough, the occupations in which the workers need to keep bad language to a minimum tend to balance it out by using foul language in their private life as frequently as those who use bad language both in private life and in their profession. Parents and grandparents can be observed to belong to the group thought to use less foul language in their professional role, in this case raising and socializing with children. However, they are thought to use as much foul language as any other person when in private.

Shit, *fuck* and *Jesus* appear as the words where people are most certain that others use them, both in public and in private. Words like *nigger*, *whore* and *cunt* contribute to some uncertainty and the average 50% are unsure of the use. Among these, friends and truck drivers are in all cases the top choices for the likeliest to use bad language. We can speculate that as respondents report being alone as a frequent context for using foul language, a reason for considering truck drivers as more likely to use foul language is that they spend most of their days alone.

7.3.3 Education

Figure 6 shows a cross-tabulation between the level of education and the attitudes towards foul language. Nine people were left out due to unspecified answers regarding their education. The remaining 187 informants are divided as follows: 53 secondary school (28%), 74 with a Bachelor's degree (40%), 53 with a Master's degree (28%) and 7 with a PhD (4%). The columns represent the percentages in each group according to their attitude towards foul language.

The positive and negative groups include only those answers where the respondents stated only one kind of attitude with no modifications. Those belonging to the neutral/depending group include those who point out specific contexts and situations, both those who lean toward having a general negative attitude but find contexts where it could be useful and the other way around, those with a general positive attitude but also see situations where it should not be used.

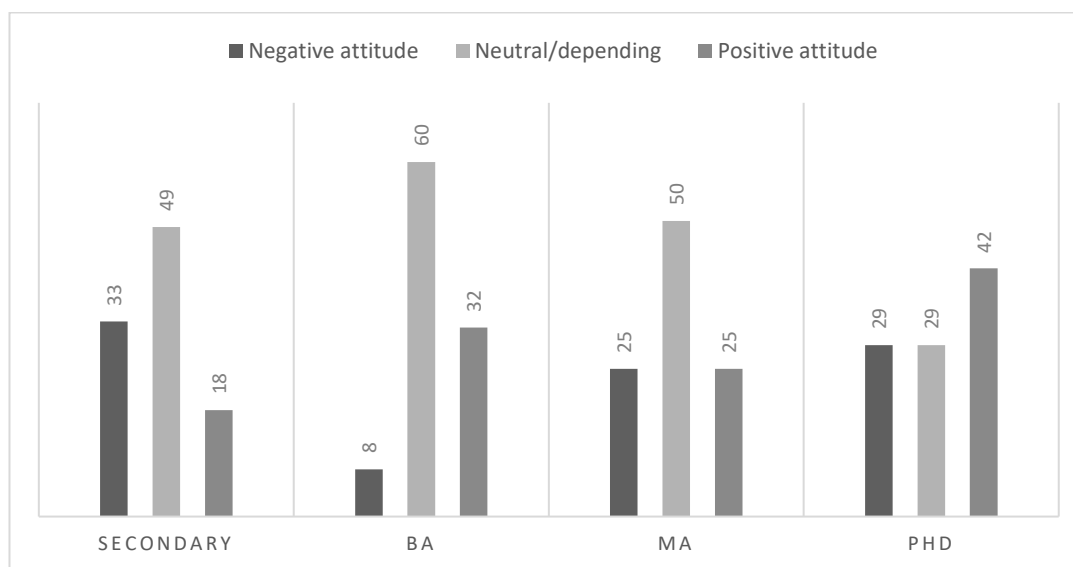


Figure 6: Attitudes to foul language according to educational level

As can be observed there are those who clearly state that they are for or against the use of foul language. For all groups except those with a PhD the majority are either neutral or find that foul language can be useful in some situations. Those with a degree from secondary school have the highest proportion (33%) of informants with a negative stance to foul language and the lowest proportion (18%) of those with a positive attitude in comparison to the other groups. This is reversed in the results from those with a bachelor's degree, where the proportion of those positively and negatively set are switched. The proportion of informants with indifferent or neutral attitudes also reaches the highest percent (60%) here.

At the higher levels of education, we can observe a leveling of attitudes as both positive and negative attitudes reach 25% among those with a master's degree and the proportion of neutral attitudes drops 10% in comparison to the BA group. The informants holding a

PhD have the most favorable view on foul language with 42% with positive attitudes argue for the use. However, this group also has the second highest proportion (29%) of those negatively set.

7.3.4 Gender

Gender has been included in many surveys examining language use. In the questionnaire used for this survey two questions were asked to find out more on gender and bad language. The first question asked whether the words are more likely to be used by men or women and the second question whether they find the words more offensive when used by a man or woman. Both questions offered the alternative of no difference between the two.

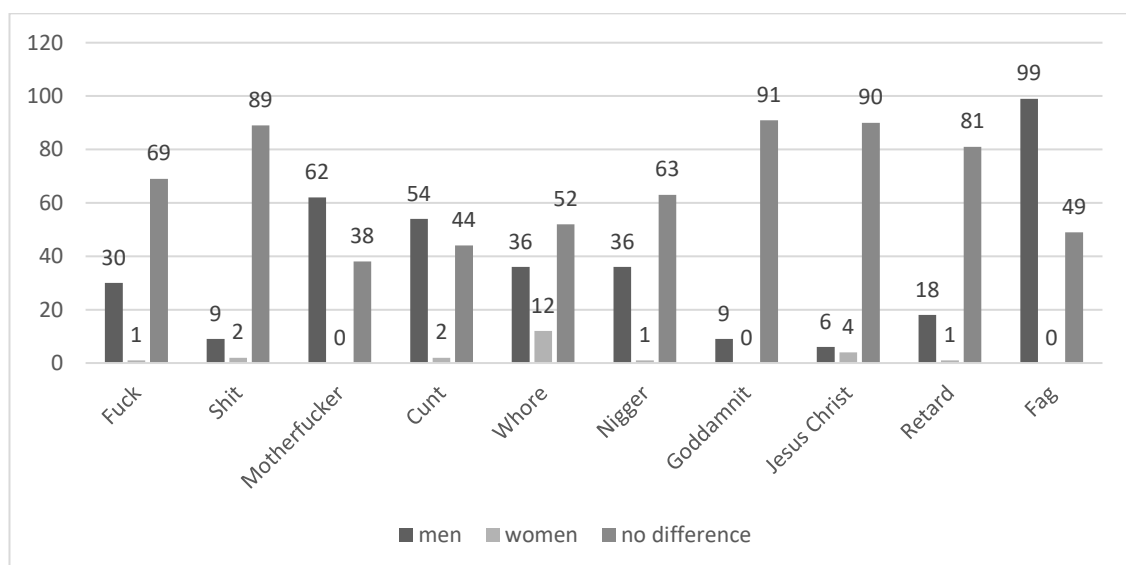


Figure 7: The words most likely used by gender

Figure 7 shows that in most cases gender did not matter, and the respondents felt that both men and women are equally likely to use many of the words. Among the exceptions, men were considered more likely to use most of the words, while none of the words were thought as more likely used by women. *Motherfucker* was by 62% considered more likely used by men and no one thought women are more likely to use it. The remaining 38% thought that both female and males are equally likely to utter the word. Similarly, the majority, over 50 % of the respondents, answered that *cunt* and *fag* are more likely to be

used by men. As to the mildest words *fuck*, *shit*, *Jesus Christ* and *goddamnit*, the respondents felt least difference concerning which the gender might be using them more.

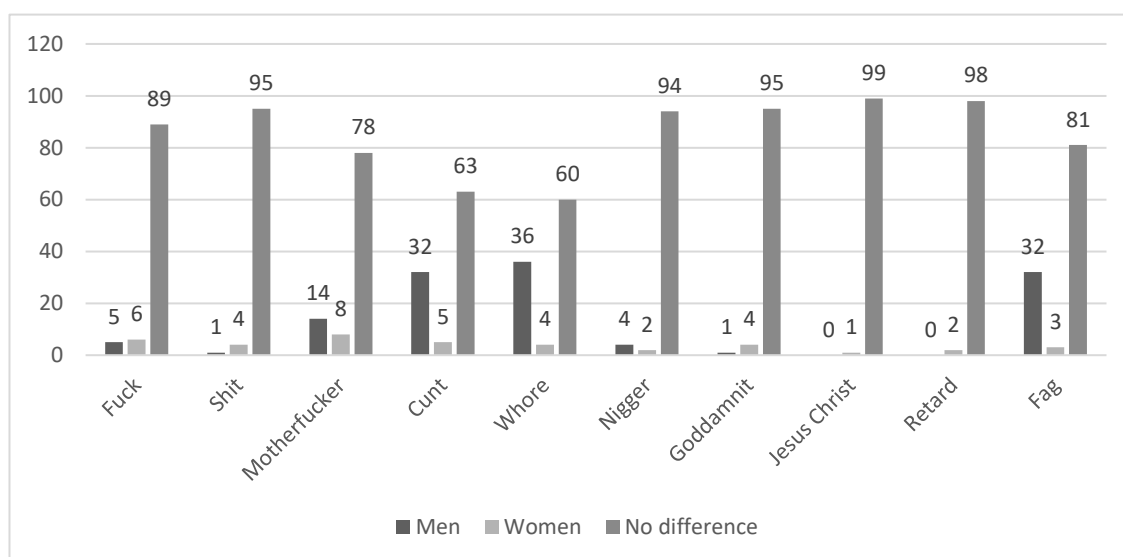


Figure 8: Perceived offensiveness according to gender uttering the words

The same tendencies are found in the second question, whether the words are more offensive when uttered by men or women. As many as 86% believed that there is no difference, 11 % believed that bad words are more offensive when men say them and 3 % find it more offensive when a woman speaks them. Five out of ten words are, although with a small difference, considered more offensive when uttered by women. *Cunt* and *whore* are words experienced more offensive when used by women.

7.4 Swedish follow-up and code-switching

In the follow-up I was interested in finding out how often English appears in the Swedish informants' everyday language, hence, as a form of code-switching. As English has grown to become a lingua franca and with the power of the media, it is not far-fetched to think that the English language affects the vocabulary of bad language, even though it does not appear as one's mother tongue. My hypothesis is that the majority of the younger generation would use bad language mainly in English, as the common belief is that a second or foreign language will not reach the same emotional effect for the speaker as that of the mother tongue.

According to the distributions shown in Figure 9, the majority found the English words more offensive than their equivalent in Swedish. However, the Swedish translations of three words were viewed as more offensive, namely *jävlar* (*fuck*), *skit* (*shit*) and *gud förbannat* (*goddamnit*). Because these words are very common in movies, song lyrics and other media in English and considered rather harmless, a plausible reason is that they are more often uttered in English and therefore come to mind effortlessly, thus making the Swedish word less familiar and more offensive. The greatest contrast among the words mentioned above is found in *fuck* and *jävlar*, where the difference between the two reaches 62 percentage points. In contrast, *whore* and *hora* show the same percentages the other way around: 81% found the English version more offensive, while 19% reported Swedish *hora* more offensive.

Motherfucker, *nigger* and *retard* were considered more offensive than their equivalents *mammaknullare*, *neger* och *CP*. *Fag* is the only word where the languages received 50% each, which suggests that the derogatory term to describe a homosexual is as offensive in both languages. *Jesus Christ* was by 4% considered more offensive in English.

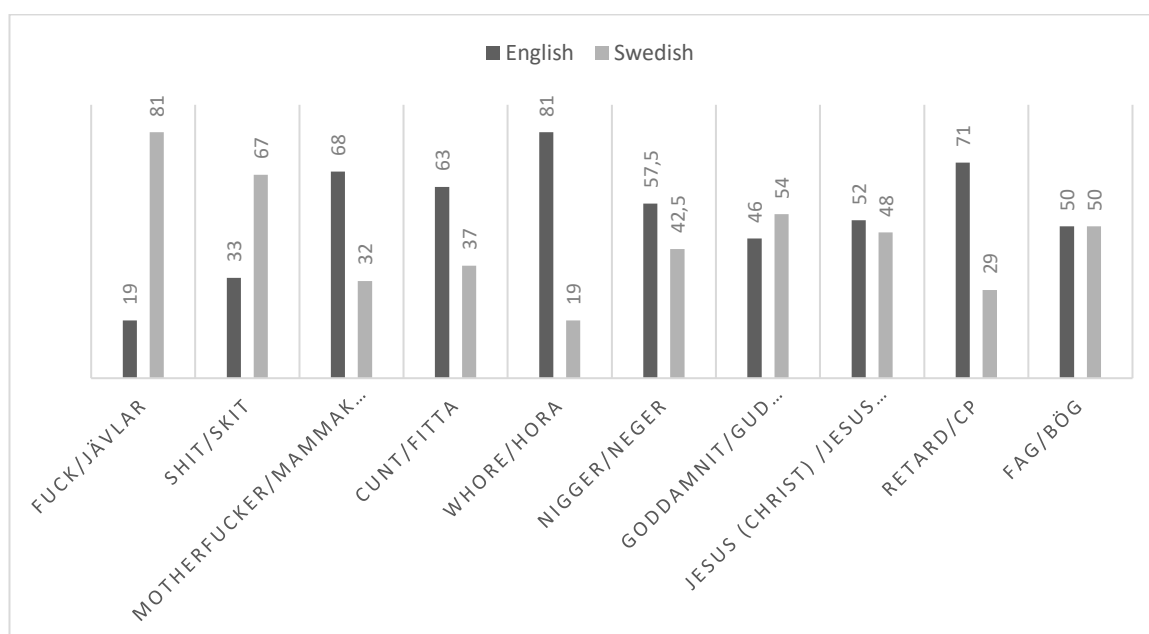


Figure 9: Offensiveness of words according to language

Looking only at Figure 10, my hypothesis was not entirely confirmed as those who chose English as the source of bad language cover the smallest percent, namely 22%. Yet those

using Swedish as their preferred language constitute only one percentage point more than those who reporting that they use both languages equally much. The former reach 38% and the latter 37%. Lastly there are 3% who claimed that they never use bad language.

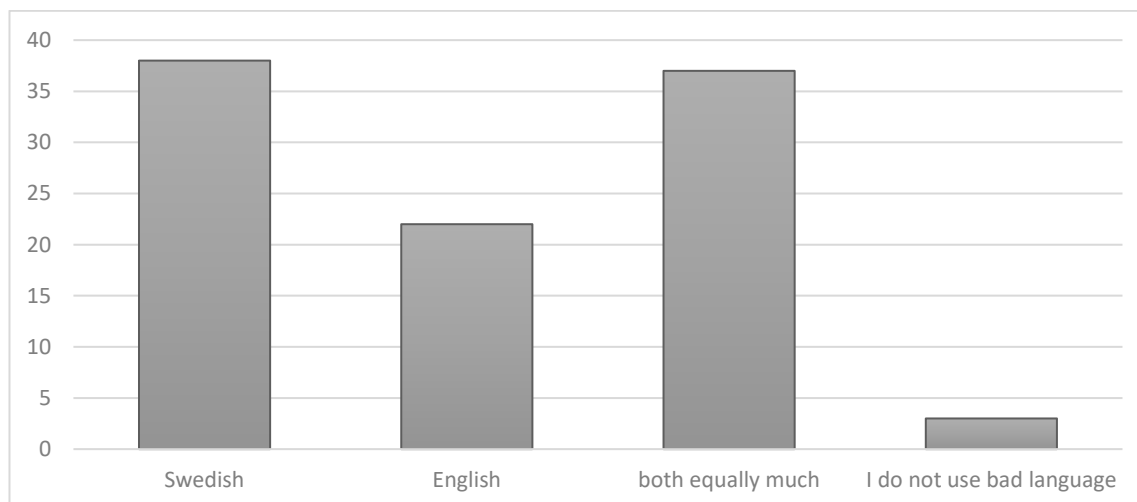


Figure 10: Language more likely used for expressing bad language

A more significant observation can be made when looking at the responses and the divisions into the different age groups, more specifically the groups of adults and middle-agers. As the senior group of Swedish speakers is represented only by one person, it is rather hard to draw a fair conclusion. However, the groups of adults and middle-aged show a wider distribution (see figure 11). We can draw a tentative conclusion that it is more common in the younger groups to switch and use a mixture of foul words from the two languages. The majority of the adults (37%) claim to use both languages equally much. The majority of the middle-aged group state Swedish (48%) as their go to language, followed by using both equally much (28%). The results also show a larger portion of middle-agers (14%) claiming not to use bad language than the adults (3%).

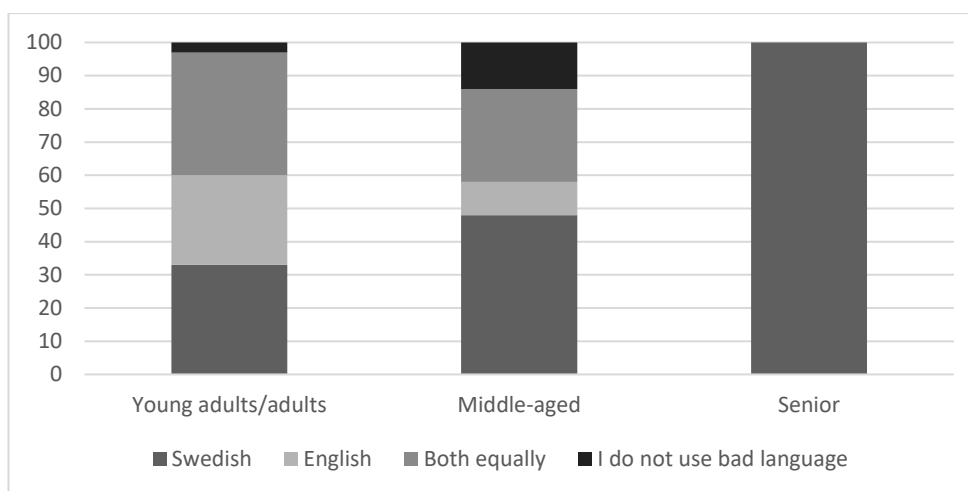


Figure 11: Preferred choice of bad language according to age

The informants were asked to motivate their answers on the previous question. They were requested to reflect on if and why they tend to use one or the other language more frequently. In the same way, they were asked to motivate their response if they answered that they use the words equally much.

For those who answered that they use Swedish as their go to language for expressing so called bad language, the most common explanation is that they have a better understanding of the words as well as the level of offensiveness the word may cause. In other words, they find it easier to adapt the appropriate language to a given situation in their first language, which then appears as a more natural choice. One respondent explains that it feels somewhat weird to speak one language and swear in another and therefore he interprets situations where people do so as an attempt to act tough.

It is clear that a few of those who chose the alternative of using bad language in both Swedish and English encounter English in their daily life. For instance, some point out their close friend circle consists of mainly English speakers or it is the language required for their jobs. Therefore, it becomes natural for these people to use both languages. While some imply that they use bad language in English with their English-speaking friends and Swedish with their Swedish-speaking friends, others point out how English often sneaks its way into their everyday Swedish conversations as well.

Finnish female 26: Jag brukar blanda ihop både svenska och engelska svordomar i samma mening

'I mix both Swedish and English swear words in the same sentence'

Finnish female 26: de engelska svordomarna blir allt vanligare och de har på så sätt fäst sig i det språk som man dagligen använder sig av, och vissa engelska svordomar känns "lättare" att använda

'The English swear words are becoming more common and have settled in the everyday language we use, and some English swear words feel "easier" to use'

As code-switching is defined as mixing two languages when speaking, those who declared that English is the language in which they express bad language and those who answered that they use of both languages equally are considered examples of where bad language and swearing are used as a form of code-switching. One reason why some use English words is because they have many English-speaking friends and the language they use has an impact when speaking in Swedish as well. The most frequent reasoning behind the code-switching is the effect of the media. One respondent explains that one uses words that they hear more often, and because of the media, English is the language closest to us.

Swedish male 25: Since english is not my mother language I see the english swear words as less meaningful. They become just expressions from movies and other sources. For example will the word "knulla" will always be worse than "Fuck".

Contrary to the reasoning that a second language is less emotional, some informants explain the exact opposite. They find that bad language in Swedish appears milder than bad language in English, which is why they feel they can express their feelings clearer when using English.

Finnish female 22: Engelska svordomar "slår" hårdare, tycker jag. Svenska svordomar låter ganska svaga i jämförelse så jag föredrar att använda engelska svordomar för att få fram mina känslor tydligare.

'English swear words "hit harder", I believe. Swedish swear words sound quite mild in comparison so I prefer using English swear words in order to express my feelings more clearly.'

Swedish male 27: Är inte helt säker på varför. Kanske för att jag skulle svära även på engelska fastän jag pratade svenska med nån. Kanske det kommer från att det finns så mycket Engelskspråkig media med så mycket svordomar.

'Not entirely sure why. Maybe because I would swear in English even though I was speaking in Swedish to somebody. Maybe it derives from the English media, which in turn contain so many swear words.'

Today there are many online (computer) games available for people to play. These games involve people, often friends, playing and talking to each other at the same time. One respondent points out that bad language is frequently used in these forums among the players and, as English is a global language, they are mainly in English.

Additionally, using Finnish as a source of bad language is pointed out by 15 Finland-Swedish respondents. A few respondents mention that Finnish bad words occur frequently in their everyday language in combination with either Swedish or both Swedish and English depending on who they socialize with. Among the Finnish swear words is *vittu* the one explained to be one of the most commonly used in everyday life. According to Hjort (2017:233-234) *vittu* (*cunt*) among others like *saatana* (*satan*), *jumalauta* (*God help*) and *perkele* (*hell*) have been considered belonging to the standard vocabulary of Finnish swearing. It is further explained by another respondent that it is only natural to make use of all languages one has access to. In the same spirit, it is pointed out that some words may have a stronger effect in another language and therefore the situation decides which language one chooses to use.

Swedish male 28: Ibland använder man språket man just talar. Andra gånger passar ett specifikt ord från ett visst språk. t.ex finskans vittu*

'Sometimes you use the language you're speaking in. Other times a specific word from another language is more suitable e.g. the Finnish word vittu (cunt)'

Swedish male 27: För att svenska är mitt modersmål. Men finska svordomar kan användas när tyngre ord behövs.

'Because Swedish is my mother tongue. But Finnish swear words can be used when heavier words are needed.'

Swedish female 32: Blandar svordomar på svenska, finska och engelska men främst svenska eftersom det är mitt modersmål

'I mix swear words in Swedish, Finnish and English, but mostly Swedish because it is my mother tongue'

8. Discussion

The primary aim of this study has been to explore the attitudes towards and the use of foul language mainly as a comparison between English-speaking Americans and Swedish speakers from Finland and Sweden. The relations between gender, age, education, code-switching and foul language have also been touched upon. An online questionnaire was analyzed with the research questions as the starting point. In the beginning I presented the research questions I planned to answer:

1. What are the general attitudes towards the use of foul language? Which words/expressions are considered most offensive?

2. Are there differences between the perceived offensiveness, caused by using foul language, and gender? Is it more offensive when one or the other use foul language?
3. Is there a language preference when using bad language? What are some reasons for choosing to swear in one or the other language (Swedish or English)?

The common and perhaps the first thought that comes to mind when discussing foul language is the function of expressing strong emotions and attitudes. As Jay (2000:10) defines it: “[swearing] is the utterance of emotionally powerful, offensive words (*fuck, shit*) or emotionally harmful expressions (*Kiss my ass, up yours*)”. It can similarly refer to something that is taboo or stigmatized in the culture and should not be interpreted literally (Andersson and Trudgill, 1990: 53). Characterizations like these have been made because bad language and taboo have proven to be universal. Sometimes foul language appears as insults directed at someone specific. In other cases, it is not used as an insult but instead used to highlight the message or produce an emotional impact on the listener as in “I didn’t know where the fuck I was going”. The impact can be positive or negative. Examples of a positive impact are jokes/joking and sexual enticement, whereas insults/name calling, and sexual harassment belong to the negative impact (Jay, 2000: 10).

Naturally, the results from this study also show evidence of how the attitudes and the use of foul language vary from one person to another. The major and most apparent arguments used to motivate the offensiveness of a word are presented below. The categories agree with the results from Biström’s (2017) study on taboo language among Finland-Swedish speakers.

1. The content/ meaning of the word
2. The intention of the speaker
3. How the word is perceived by the listener
4. The commonness of the word

The meaning of words plays a big role in how they are perceived. A word can be offensive because of the meaning, for instance, *motherfucker*, which is explained as very vulgar because of its implications. Some find *cunt* ugly simply because of how it sounds and

prefer other terms to express the same thing. However, a word can also classify as offensive for the opposite reason. For instance, some respondents pointed out that they refrain from using a word because they find the meaning likeable or descriptive in a way which should remain positive. The opinions about *nigger* by the older generation is one example, because they feel that it only describes a race and do not want to acknowledge the taboo associated with the word. Likewise, a female respondent explains that she refers to her female organ as her *cunt*, only to bring back the meaning of the word, rather than it being used as a foul word. *Fag* and *retard* work in the same way. What makes these words offensive is that by using them one is comparing someone to a homosexual or a disabled person. Some of those who find nothing wrong with homosexuality may dislike the use of the word in an abusive way, as it loses its status as a neutral word. In contrast, there are those who object to homosexuality and therefore find the offensiveness comparable to those of its euphemisms. *Whore* and *cunt*, in the same manner as *fag* and *retard*, degrade women and a profession stereotypically performed by women.

The intention of the speaker becomes important as bad language can possess different functions. When used in an abusive way or to intentionally harm another person, it becomes offensive. One respondent expresses how he believes foul language can become a valuable tool but reckons how it, sadly, has become more of a way of hurting others. When the words are uttered as a reflex or if it becomes clear that the speaker's intention is not to cause offense it is seen as less of a problem. Some respondents regard words like *nigger* and *fag* inoffensive because they know their intention is not to cause offense and they explain that they do not use it in an aggressive way. Respondents in the older generation explain that they originally did not find *nigger* offensive, as the word was not as stigmatized in their youth and they have in later days had to adapt to the public offensiveness of the word. Nevertheless, without doubt most informants found it highly offensive when these words are purposely used to inflict pain on another individual. Similarly, words are perceived less offensive when aimed at material objects.

When words have become common due to overuse, their high frequency has resulted in a more relaxed attitude. They are viewed as less offensive and ugly because people are exposed to them on a regular basis. However, the underlying reason why these words appear more harmless is that they in turn make other words seem more powerful and aggressive. Goddard (2015) states that the relative acceptability of certain words creates

a special context for other stronger words. Some express a dislike for this phenomenon, while others seem to appreciate the fact that some words are more acceptable because they are more susceptible to using words they find rather mild. As Byrne (2017: 5) puts it “swearing needs to maintain its emotional impact in order to be effective”.

The commonness of a word can be viewed as working in a circular way, where people are more likely to use words that are not perceived as offensive, and thus these become more common, while at the same time experiencing words as less offensive when surrounded and being exposed to them. One informant explains that no matter the mildness of the word, if it appears several times within a sentence or in message it loses potential positive features and becomes annoying. The use of foul language as a filler word is a frequent example of misuse by many respondents. In the same way, *mammaknullare* is experienced more offensive than the English equivalent *motherfucker*, even though they carry the same content. The explanation can perhaps be traced back to the media where *motherfucker* is presumably a word people hear more often than the Swedish equivalent.

The divided opinions and attitudes also contribute to an exploration of the positive and acceptable uses of foul language, which every word in the list possesses. A study by Jay, King, and Duncan (2006) reveals anger and frustration as the most frequent emotions mentioned (53%), followed by humor (9%), and pain (6%), again, showing that foul language can involve both positive and negative emotions. In my study, the most common and acceptable uses for foul language can be summarized as follows:

1. Expressing emotions
2. Solidarity
3. Humor
4. Original meaning

There are different ways for evoking and expressing emotions. Using bad language to express feelings and make oneself heard is often brought up as a positive characteristic. While the message the speaker wants to forward may be positive or negative, the act of using foul language as a tool is nevertheless rather acceptable. While the younger generation in general accept foul language in combination with any emotion, among the

older respondents the most acceptable motivation is to deal with pain. Some still find it inappropriate but at the same time understandable. Dissimilar to a few studies mentioned by Beers Fägersten and Stapleton (2017: 4), bad language in situations like these are considered highly offensive. Additionally, some words are more associated with a negative tone. One informant states that *fuck* with a negative message such as *fuck that hurt!* is more acceptable than expressing positive feelings *fuck that felt good!*

Research has shown that using foul language in the work place may contribute to an improved team spirit. It may help co-workers to bond and show solidarity (Byrne, 2017: 93-95). Places where customer service is essential may result in feelings of frustration. Letting off steam by venting to colleagues about insufferable customers can help the speaker through the day as well as strengthen the bonds to other co-workers. While many simply find it appropriate to use foul language in a working environment, others make the distinction between who the foul language is shared with. When around those holding a superior rank, foul language is inadvisable, whereas in situations where everybody belongs to the same rank it is considered more tolerable. Many informants (123) state that they tend to use more vulgar words such as *cunt* and *motherfucker* when ventilating to their colleagues.

The contribution to solidarity occurs in other places than the workplace. Some respondents explained that sport events stand as contributors to indulge in bad language, because they bring out strong emotions in people. Research by Rainey and Granito (2010) confirms the common and frequent occurrence of bad language in sport context. In these situations, bad language uttered in exaltation or despair both create a feeling of unity. Jay et al. (2008), Pinker (2007) and Daly et al. (2004), state that the use of bad language can work as an indication of the relationship between the people engaging in a conversation. In other words, it may be a way to signal how comfortable they are in their relationship and whether they include each other in their intimate social group. Online gaming is another example of where the feeling of belonging to a group can increase by the use of a bad word or two. Online gaming also makes a plausible reason to why boys in general begin to swear at earlier ages than girls (Johnson and Lewis, 2010: 108).

Arguments for using foul language in a comedic sense include both a personal level within a social group and individuals performing for a living. Adding emphasis to the

language is smoothly done by using foul language. This is well adapted in the industry of entertainment and in different kinds of media. Many comedians use foul language as a device to achieve different and genuine emotions, such as surprise and shock. In music genres, such as hip hop and rap, it is also a frequently used tool, oftentimes to bring emphasis to a personal story or to make a statement (Rathje, 2017: 33) . Worth to point out is that solidarity and humor go hand in hand and causality is arguable. In other words, bad language can occur within a group of friends where they already feel comfortable enough to use bad language in their jokes, resulting in a strengthened group spirit, or the other way around, where the same sense of, for instance, vulgar, humor contributes to bringing individuals closer together.

Foul language is a source in communicative language just like any other words. While they may offend and seem appropriate in some contexts, in others they have valuable qualities. The words in the list presented in the questionnaire belong to certain taboo subjects and are often used metaphorically, but, when used as any other word they become acceptable, but not always appropriate. The idea of using these words in their literal meaning is rather divisive among the respondents. Uttering bad words in an educational or enlightening situation is defensible, except for *nigger*, which is supposedly never appropriate, according to some respondents. Nevertheless, many elaborate and feel that even though this is somewhat acceptable, there are still more appropriate words available.

The results and explanations given by the respondents support Pinker's (2008) and Anderson and Hirsch's (1985) ways and motives for using foul language. All five of Pinker's uses are found within the data analyzed, but, cathartic use, emphatic use and abusive use are the most frequently mentioned. Cathartic and emphatic uses are also considered the most acceptable among the respondents, while the abusive is considered the least acceptable. Furthermore, in most cases, reasons for using foul language are motivated by social (evocative functions) and emotional and psychological states (expressive functions). In other words, the ways in which bad language is used mirrors back on emotions such as pain, fear, happiness as well as expressing solidarity and intimacy. Violation of expectations and norms go hand in hand with the abusive use of foul language and is in general looked down upon.

In this study, as predicted, racial slurs, for instance, *nigger*, *retard*, *fag* and sexual words such as *cunt* and *motherfucker* belong to the strongest language, with the potential to cause most offense. According to Mohr (2013: 252), sexual obscenities started to lose power to racial slurs in the mid-20th century. According to Bergen (2016) these are the group-based words rated as the most offensive in studies of Americans.

Context is the key to using foul language and the ability to analyze situations become vital. Besides what has been discussed above on when and where bad language is acceptable and appropriate, the most frequent concern among the informants is bad language in the presence of children. They reason that children will mimic adults in their surroundings and therefore bad language needs to be avoided in their company. No further explanation is given, other than the knowledge of them “learning anyway” as they grow older. However, people seem to want to slow this process down, which corresponds with the early thought of wanting to protect women and children, who were seen as more fragile to the exposure of bad language. The general population seem to believe children should be protected from bad language and that such language is typically not tolerated in the presence of children. Fägersten (2012), for instance, found that men and women alike claim to avoid swearing around children. Byrne (2017), on the other hand, expresses the belief that parents should teach their children how to use foul language effectively and rightly instead of trying to ban it.

Context also becomes evident when analyzing the results on whether people swear in their work place and in private. The general idea among the respondents seem to be that the higher ranked the job a person has, the less likely the person is to use bad language in their profession. Also extending to their private life, where, in contrast, those with a lower paying job are expected to use more bad language both in their professional role as well as in private. Perhaps there are still some traces left of this kind of reasoning. Besides this, people in jobs involving children and teenagers, such as teachers and social workers, are believed to use only appropriate and clean words.

In the responses in my study it is evident that the more formal the situation the less acceptable bad language is thought to be. As a part of people’s private life, it is a common, understandable and useful tool. While this should mean that everybody can and may use

bad language out of office, results show somewhat prejudiced thoughts on how people with a higher status in the hierarchy of work use such language to a lesser extent.

Traditionally and primarily, bad language has been an expected trait of those belonging to a lower socio-economic class, simply because they “do not run the risk of a diminished social status”. (Vingerhoets et al. 2013: 297). The traditional association between education level and foul language where those with a lower education tolerate foul language more than those with a higher education is not entirely confirmed within my study. Those with the lowest degree (secondary) are the most negatively set towards foul language despite the majority claiming that the context is essential to the use. One thought is that those with a secondary degree keep with them the values learned from their childhood and from lower education schools, where foul language is often prohibited and spoken badly about. The higher one climbs on the education ladder the higher the tolerance for bad language gets. The most positive towards the use of foul language are those with a PhD and apart from the traditional association mentioned, it is possible that some people take for granted that the context is essential.

The results concerning the general opinions on gender and bad language reveal little differences in the use. The outcome of the study shows no marked distinction or association between bad language and gender and the respondents appear to generally believe that gender does not matter. Similarly, Hjort (2017: 241-242) conducted a study of Swearing in Finnish where folk definitions and perceptions were examined. In her study, over 50% percent believed both groups swear equally. The result is also supported by other recent research which suggests that there are now no gender differences in the frequency of foul language (Johnson and Lewis, 2010, Stone and Hazelton, 2008, Bayard and Krishnayya, 2001). Furthermore, the responses support my hypothesis that we have moved past Lakoff's belief and the stereotypical view on women, which supports the existence of central differences in the way men and women speak. Previously women have, in contrast to men, been believed to strive for politeness and more formal language (Lakoff, 1973). My hypothesis concerning gender and bad language is that the attitude gap between foul language and gender would have reduced. In other words, the hypothesis that the attitude has switched from common belief that men use bad language more often to a more equal usage and that words possess the same potential to cause offense despite the gender of the person uttering it.

Nevertheless, the respondents mention no situation where a female is more likely than a male to use a word, while the opposite occurs where males are thought more likely than females to utter bad words. The perceived offensiveness deriving from the words used by males and females show the same results. The great majority consider the words equally offensive despite the gender of the speaker. Although, the results of comparing nationalities suggest that females of both nationalities perceive the words stronger than their counterpart. A few instances stand out where the words are considered more offensive when uttered by males: these include the words *whore*, *cunt* and *fag*. The first two are words intended to degrade women when used in an abusive way. Pinker (2007) describes *cunt* as “the most offensive epithet for a woman in America”, and it may therefore appear stronger when uttered by the other sex. *Fag*, on the other hand, has been described as a word most likely used by homophobic men.

Four out of ten words appear, by a small difference between 1 to 5 percentage points, as more offensive when uttered by women. The small percentage shown in this study may reflect the older generation and their view on bad language and gender, which can appear somewhat less liberal than the young adults. With a larger number of respondents there might have been stronger conclusions to draw, for instance, that women are still to some extent not believed to be frequent users of bad language. As society has evolved and other activists have turned our attention away from a male-dominated society, the outcomes of this study can still be interpreted as showing us a glimpse of the old days and the attitude that once was.

Many respondents express confused thoughts on how some words have acquired ugly connotations and a degrading meaning. Even though there are more appealing words present in our language, words like *fuck* and *cunt* express two completely natural things: the act of repopulating and the female organ making it possible to do so. As mentioned before, this is a reoccurring argument for the unwanted offensiveness associated with the words. The negative connotations of the words usually have an explanation going way back. As mentioned in chapter six, *fuck* is a sensitive subject due to the negative aspects that lack of consent leads to. Similarly, the puzzle of why *cunt* is taboo derives from the age before regular bathing, toilet paper, tampons, and antifungal drugs (Pinker, 2007). Mohr (2013:10) states that *fuck* and *cunt* are examples of words which must be concealed in clothing or in privacy. Likewise, racial slurs such as *nigger* and *paki* (short for

Pakistani and used in a derogatory meaning) represent what must be concealed in the mind.

It is worth adding that similarly to using foul language around children, some point out that one should also restrain from using foul language around the elderly, which potentially reflects a thought that older people take more offense.

With a subtle marginal of 1 percentage point (two respondents), the results show that the mother tongue, in this case Swedish, is the preferred source of foul language. Similar results are found in other studies where the preferred choice of foul language lies in the dominant language (Agarwal et al, 2017). While English is rarely preferred over Swedish, the mixing of the two languages, in other words code-switching, appear as popular as Swedish alone. This means that the distinction is rather irrelevant. On the other hand, a clear distinction concerning the age and the preferred language can be observed.

According to my study, the younger generation is clearly more prone to using bad words in both Swedish and English (equally much), while the older generation prefer to swear in their mother tongue. My hypothesis is therefore not entirely confirmed, as I predicted more use of English to take distance from the emotional aspect. However, for those stating their preference of English, this still occurred as the most frequent explanation. A natural and possible reason is that the younger generation is more exposed to the popular culture of today. Additionally, they have grown up in the middle of it, contrary to the older generation.

The geographical location also contributes to a wider selection of languages for the speaker. The Finland-Swedish respondents are exposed to Finnish as it is a mandatory school subject as well as the language of the majority of the population. Therefore, it is only natural that Finnish is a close language to some respondents and another well-used source for bad language. The ability to use all languages known to a person is explained as a resource and specifically Finnish is said to contain very strong and heavy bad words in comparison to English.

The reasons for a preference also derive from context. The majority of those who claimed Swedish as their main choice of source for bad language, found it more emotional and

explained that it reflected their emotional state clearer. On the other hand, those who claimed English as their main language explained that they use it for the same reason, as it feels less serious and vulgar, as well as less emotionally loaded. In conclusion, the choice of language depends on what effect a person wants to convey, as those finding themselves using both languages equally pointed out. It gives them the possibility to choose the effect they seek.

Speculations about the influence of media are reoccurring and a reasonable explanation for code-switching. The ones using both languages tend to claim that they use both languages in their everyday lives and therefore it comes naturally to use words in both languages and to switch between the two. Moreover, the middle-aged group represent those with the most frequent claim to avoid bad language. The main concern and argument for avoiding foul language appears to be protecting children from hearing it. This may be a plausible reason why middle-aged people stand out as most reluctant and avoidant towards it as this is the age in which many raise children.

9. Conclusion

This study has sought to examine the attitudes towards and the use of foul language, as well as contributing factors, among English-speaking Americans and a group of non-native speakers (Swedish speakers) from Finland and Sweden. Additionally, factors which may impact the use of bad language such as age, gender and education were examined. Lastly, I looked at the Swedish speakers and the susceptibility of foul language to code-switching.

The findings present different opinions on the matter, yet the majority admit to using foul language at times despite not approving of or liking it. What makes a difference is whether the situation is considered appropriate and the avoidance of foul language has more to do with choosing appropriate language, which is a skill most people learn with experience. Nevertheless, there is a great difference depending on which word is used and what the intention behind the utterance is. Some words are less appropriate even though the context is considered suitable. In this study, *nigger* and *cunt* are examples of words which, for most respondents, are never appropriate. *Goddamnit* and *Jesus Christ* are considered

equally bad or worse by those practicing religions and they are therefore examples of how our values and beliefs contribute to what we perceive as ugly or demeaning. The results indicate that words which have been used to describe people or conditions are among the worst words to use in vulgar expressions. *Nigger* and *retard*, words which for the older generation have been descriptive and informative, are nowadays considered extremely offensive and among the worst possible insults.

According to this study, the variety of uses foul language can represent is thought to be general knowledge and examples of uses found are both positive and negative feelings, such as fright, surprise, nervousness, irony, anger or complaint. Additionally, the use of foul language can have a variety of interpersonal consequences. Apart from inhibiting aggression and causing emotional pain to others it can also promote group bonding and solidarity and elicit humor.

The results show that *shit* and *goddamnit* are the most common and inoffensive words, while *shit* and *fuck* are most frequently used. Racial slurs and gender-coded words are considered most offensive and generally Americans appear to tolerate less religion-based words than their Swedish counterparts, which confirms my hypothesis. Foul language is mostly used when evoking different kinds of feelings, such as anger or surprise, but uses may also occur spontaneously. My study supports the hypothesis and confirms my hypothesis of a narrowing gap between men's and women's language as no great differences in gender and foul language could be found and the words appear as equally offensive irrespective of gender. Code-switching using foul words among Swedish speakers is rather common, especially among the youth. These findings show that although foul language may not be socially desirable, people generally recognize it as a valuable source for communication purposes.

The results obtained in this study should not be generalized, but they work as suggestions and valuable guidance concerning the approaches towards taboo language. In order to further determine relationships, it would still be necessary to collect more data, for instance, a larger questionnaire study where informants may choose which of the arguments found for the use of foul language best motivate the offensiveness of specific words.

The current study provided a number of opportunities to freely express thoughts in the form of open questions. However, a future study could include interviews with people as in that way one may receive more elaborated answers and on a deeper level. Furthermore, the inability to control the environment and in which ways my survey was distributed can be considered a limitation per se. For instance, not being able to control to what extent the age limit has been followed is a potential problem. However, comparing some aspects of my results to those attained in previous studies, it is evident that they are in accordance with those of general attitudes and gender differences. Finally, one must also bear in mind that there may be differences in the views of Sweden-Swedish and Finland-Swedish people. Although they are geographically close and share the same language, values and traditions may differ between the two. With larger data, potential differences between the two could also have been explored.

The results from this study revealed that many are afraid of involuntarily contributing to the way children learn foul language. My study has focused solely on individuals officially classified as adults, in other words those above the age of eighteen. However problematic it is bound to be due to the nature of the words and protective parents, future research could focus on investigating bad language from a child's perspective. The code-switching perspective could also be investigated further. Perhaps on a more global scale or by targeting multilingual individuals and investigating their preferences. Lastly, because context is revealed as the main factor which determines offensiveness, the next step could be to investigate collocates of the surveyed words in order to find out more about the contextual use. A similar study was, for instance, carried out by Grauthier and Guille (2017).

In conclusion, the attitudes towards the use of foul language have changed over time. Similarly to code-switching, my study indicates a shift in the focus of the bad attributes which have been replaced by more positive views and appreciation of the diversity of language. The primary drive for using foul language is to express emotions, but the offensiveness depends on the context in which it is used and the background of the people involved.

10. Svensk sammanfattning – Swedish Summary

Attityder till och användningen av fult språk - En jämförelse av individer med engelska som första språk och engelska som främmande språk

1. Introduktion

De första svordomarna existerade redan i den forntida Egypten, där gudar var det främsta motivet för eder och förbannelser. Gudsmotivet existerade i det antika Grekland och Rom, och även inom Kristendomen användes främst detta motiv. Enligt Byrne (2017: 6) var den främsta orsaken tron på att gudarna kunde straffa enskilda människor, men också hela samhällen. Hängning och att skära ut tungan på dem som yttrade guds namn på ett felaktigt sätt var vanliga straff som utdelades (Mohr, 2013: 8, Pinker, 2007).

Idag kan man se att vad som klassas som fult språk beror på kulturer såväl som personliga värderingar och åsikter. I västvärlden är svordomar och slang exempel på fult språk och kan bidra till vilket intryck andra människor bildar av en. Fysiska straff har ersatts med förutfattade och eventuellt felaktiga uppfattningar om individer. Icke-önskade stämplat som antyder att man är utbildad, ouppfostrad och även mindre sofistikerad är enligt Mohr (2013:10) vanliga tolkningar. Enligt Ljung (2006: 28–31) tillhör det diaboliska motivet och ord som syftar på prostitution de vanligaste idag, medan Mohr (2013: 253) anser religion och kroppsliga tabun mera all dagliga.

2. Syfte

Syftet med studien är att undersöka attityder och användning av så kallat fult språk bland amerikaner och svenskspråkiga. Utöver attityder inkluderas också sektioner som undersöker eventuella faktorer som kan påverka hur och när man använder sig av fult språk, så som ålder, kön och utbildning. För att undersöka detta använder jag

undersökningsmaterial som kvantitativt analyseras, där en vald grupp av ord presenteras. De huvudsakliga frågeställningarna kan sammanfattas enligt följande:

1. Vilka är de generella attityderna till fult språk? Vilka ord / uttryck anses mest kränkande?
2. Finns det skillnader mellan könen i den upplevda anstötligheten som orsakas av fult språk? Anses det mera stötande när ett eller det andra könet yttrar fult språk?
3. Finns det någon språkpreferens för fult språk? Vilka orsaker finns till preferensen att använda fult språk på sitt modersmål alternativt på ett främmande språk (svenska eller engelska)?

Förändringar i språk, sociala värderingar och attityder har resulterat i att ord som tidigare ansågs vara stötande, exempelvis religiösa och sexuella ord, numera är mera acceptabla och andra ord har istället tagit deras plats. Bergen (2016) nämner till exempel att en ökad känslighet mot etniska angrepp har uppstått. Min hypotes är att vi har blivit mer toleranta mot religiösa ord och att exempelvis behovet av att skapa en identitet och behovet av att känna sig accepterad, är bidragande faktorer till ökad känslighet av etniska yttranden och politisk korrekthet. För att undersöka detta delas de utvalda orden i två kategorier med genom att inkludera ord som representerar sådana som anses mindre offensiva jämfört med den andra gruppen av ord som istället representerar ord som erbjuder större risk för kränkning idag. Den första gruppen innehåller ord från religion, skatologi, sexuella handlingar och intima kroppsdelar, medan den andra gruppen innehåller ord som anknyts till politisk korrekthet, exempelvis ras, etnisk och könbaserade yttranden.

En annan hypotes om nationaliteterna som undersöks är att det kommer att finnas skillnader mellan amerikanerna och svenskspråkiga i anknytning till religion. Baserat på kulturella skillnader är min hypotes att religiösa ord kommer att förolämpa människor från USA mer än de från Finland och Sverige.

3. Fult språk

Den ständiga utveckling språket genomgår innebär att betydelsen och statusen ändras samt att nya ord omgående tillkommer. Detta innebär att det så kallade fula språket också genomgår förändringar från generation till generation (Byrne, 2018). Fult språk används som en paraplyterm för språk som anses vulgärt, olämpligt, ohyfsat eller stötande. Exempelvis nämner Battistella (2005:72) svordomar, kodväxling och slang, men även diverse tabubelagda kategorier tillhör fult språk. I denna studie har dessa termer inte använts som separata utan faller även här under paraplytermen fult språk.

När fult språk kommer på tal är det många som förknippar sådant språk och ordval med negativa anseenden, exempelvis i ett förolämpningssyfte. Andra menar att fult språk är ett resultat av en dålig vokabulär. Ljung (2006: 84) nämner att fult språk i samband med frustration och begäret att lätta på trycket är ett av de vanligaste tillfällen ta till ord som inte annars anses acceptabla.

3.4 Kön och fult språk

Forskning har länge intresserat sig för könsbaserade skillnader i användningen av fult språk och speciellt under de senaste tjugo åren har dessa skillnader varit ett hett forskningsområde (Coates, 2016). Forskare har länge menat att mäns och kvinnors tal skiljer sig från varandra och enligt Park et al. (2016: 2) tyder vissa individuella studier på att det finns skillnader i exempelvis ordval och meningslängd som konsekvent används mera av det ena eller det andra könet. Dessa skillnader har ofta förklarats som ett resultat av en mansdominerad värld (Lakoff, 1973). Enligt McEnery (2006: 29) är sannolikheten för användning av fult språk lika stor bland män och kvinnor. Andra menar att det är kontexten som avgör huruvida fult språk används och inte vilket kön man tillhör. Jay (1992: 123) nämner att ju mera lika individens bakgrund är, desto troligare är det att dessa känner sig bekväma att använda fult språk i varandras närvaro.

3.5 Kodväxling och fult språk

Kodväxling betecknar fenomenet där språkbrukare tidvis byter språk eller dialekt mitt i ett samtal eller mening (Gumperz, 1982: 59). På samma sätt som åsikter traditionellt varierat stort angående fult språk, har de också gjort det vad anbelangar kodväxling. Gumperz (1982: 62–63) nämner att somliga ansett kodväxling vara ett resultat på bristande utbildning och/eller vokabulär, medan andra istället sett det som en genuint accepterad del av språkanvändningen.

För att förstå vad som händer när vi lär oss ett nytt språk och väljer att växla mellan språken har forskare fokuserat på individers känslor. Den allmänna uppfattningen är att en person upplever starkare känslor förknippade till modersmålet än språk man lär sig i ett senare skede. Beers Fägersten (2012) menar därför att tvåspråkiga individer hellre väljer att uttrycka fult språk på det språk som inte är deras modersmål. Modersmålet känns därmed mera intimt, vilket också betyder att fula ord kan kännas mildare och upplevas mindre stötande. Även ämnen som upplevs mycket tabu i modersmålet kan anses mildare på andra språk på grund av kulturskillnader och normer. Sambandet mellan normer, språk och känslor uppkommer i barndomen och därmed upplever vi också starkare känslor på vårt modersmål (Byrne 2017: 171, Dewaele 2004: 87). Lantto (2014: 2) menar att sambandet mellan våra känslor och fult språk är en orsak till varför det ofta förekommer som kodväxling.

4. Metod och material

Det huvudsakliga syftet med studien är att undersöka människors attityder och användning av fult språk samt olika faktorer som kan inverka på valet av användningen. Dessa faktorer inkluderar ålder, kön och nationalitet, som undersöks i en jämförelse mellan amerikaner och svenskspråkiga där både finlandssvenska och sverigesvenskar inkluderas.

Studien är kvantitativ och har genomförts med hjälp av det elektroniska enkätverktyget E-lomake av Eduix Oy. Enkäten skickades ut till vänner och bekanta via Facebook och dessa i sin tur ombads förmedla länken till enkäten vidare till sina vänner. Den har också

skickats till en kontaktperson i Kansas, USA som har vidarebefordrat enkäten till elever i Pittsburg State University. Enkäten besvarades anonymt och var öppen att besvaras 24.9.2018-19.10.2018. Eftersom enkäten innehåller många vulgära ord har den avsetts med en 18-års åldersgräns.

Trots att Norden ligger närmare Storbritannien vill jag argumentera att Amerika på grund av dess betydelse i medier har ett större inflytande på oss och den engelska vi är vana att höra. Därmed har jag valt att endast undersöka amerikanska varianter av fula ord och jämföra den amerikanska kulturen med den svenskfinska. Således är alla ord som undersöktes i frågeformuläret ursprungligen amerikanska eller oftast används i amerikanska sammanhang. Orden som undersöks är: *fuck, shit, motherfucker, cunt, whore, nigger, goddamnit, Jesus Christ, retard and fag*.

5. Resultat

Resultaten från studien visar att situationen bestämmer om fult språk är acceptabelt. Ett ord kan anses mildt och lämpligt i ett sammanhang medan det i ett annat sammanhang kan anses ytterst opassande. Exempelvis nämns att många ord som används för att såra andra även används när man skämtar eller berättar historier, och då i avseende att underhålla. Många av orden i undersökningen anses grova, men det har även framkommit faktorer som kan mildra eller stärka känslan av grovhet. Man kan till exempel finna en nyansskillnad i acceptansen beroende på om ordet är riktat mot en person eller mot ett objekt. Det anses även mera acceptabelt att använda orden i deras ursprungliga betydelse.

De ord som anses milda (*fuck, shit*) är också allmänt mera acceptabla i både informella och i vissa fall formella kontext. Minoriteter och särbehandlade (*nigger, retard*) samt ord som refererar till sexualitet och fortplantningsorgan (*cunt, motherfucker, whore*) anses vara de grävsta av orden som använts i studien. Dock kan man finna skillnader i uppfattningen om vilka ord som är grova och milda beroende på nationaliteterna.

Både de svenskspråkiga (90%) och amerikanerna (81%) fann ordet *shit* minst stötande. På samma sätt ansågs *fuck* generellt sett vara ett mildt ord bland båda grupperna. Versionen *Motherfucker* är betydligt grövre än de tidigare nämnda orden och här kan man notera en större skillnad mellan nationaliteterna. Utav amerikanerna uppgav 48% att ordet är grovt

och 33% ansåg det vara mildt. Hos de svenskspråkiga fanns en större mellanskillnad där 77% ansåg ordet vara grovt och endast 10% uppgav att det var mildt.

Resultaten visar att de svenskspråkiga i allmänhet anser att de ord som refererar till religion (*Jesus Christ, goddamnit*) hör till den milda kategorin och kan jämföras med *fuck* och *shit*, medan majoriteten av amerikanerna ansåg att grovheten av dessa ord kan jämföras med *nigger* och *cunt*. Orden *nigger*, *retard* och *fag* är alla ord som beskriver människor som tillhör de mera utsatta i samhället och ansågs därmed också väldigt fula och stötande. *Nigger* beskrivs som ett ord med så starka konnotationer att man inte ens bör yttra ordet i diskussioner kring ordet. Generellt upplever kvinnor de flesta orden mera stötande än männen oberoende av deras nationalitet. Amerikanska kvinnor fann alla ord mera stötande än deras motpart, medan svenskspråkiga kvinnor och män till större utsträckning har delad åsikt över ordens fulhet.

Resultaten av åldersfördelningen visar att unga vuxna utgör den grupp som generellt uppgav den positivaste och mest accepterande inställningen till fult språk och är den grupp där majoriteten finner orden milda eller mycket milda. Seniorerna utgör den grupp där den största procenten angående okända ord finns, dock är de inte mest negativt inställda till fula ord. Istället framkommer det att informanterna som tillhör medelåldern har den mest negativa inställningen. Det framkommer även att fult språk oftast används när man är ensam eller med sina vänner. I familjens närvaro var framkom det som mindre vanligt, och bland kollegor och främlingar var det allra minst förekommande. Motiveringar för användning av fult språk bland kollegor förutsätter att man arbetar inom samma position i ett företag. Fult språk med chefer och högre uppsatta rekommenderas inte.

Informanterna ombads också fylla i en lista med givna yrken och personer de tror använder fult språk. De yrken där fult språk antas oftast förekomma är hos lastbilschaufförer, portvakter, fastighetsskötare, poliser och advokater, medan de yrken där fult språk anses förekomma mindre ofta är lärare, präster, kassörer, arbetare inom socialtjänsten, servitörer och doktorer.

I jämförelsen mellan åldersgrupperna framkommer att en överlägsen majoritet uttrycker en neutral uppfattning där informanterna inom alla grupper, förutom de som har en

doktorandutbildning, upplever att fult språk är kontextberoende. Majoriteten bland de högre utbildade var snäppet mera positivt inställda till fult språk.

Studien visar också att män och kvinnor är lika troliga att använda majoriteten av orden. Dock är *motherfucker* ett undantag, där en stor majoritet (62%) upplever män mera troliga användare av ordet. Även *cunt* and *fag* anses med över 50% av informanternas svar mera troligt höra till en mans ordförråd. Jag ville också undersöka om det fanns någon skillnad i den upplevda grovheten och acceptansen beroende på vilket kön som yttrar orden. Dock visade sig det även här att inga markanta skillnader kunde observeras.

Majoriteten av orden ansågs mer stötande på engelska, men de svenska orden *jävlar* (*fuck*), *skit* (*shit*) och *gud förbannat* (*goddamnit*) betraktades som grövre och mera stötande än på engelska. Den största kontrasten finner man dock mellan *fuck* och *jävlar*, där 81% anser att *jävlar* är mera stötande och 19% finner *fuck* mera stötande. *Whore* (81%) och *hora* (19%) är exempel på ett ordpar där språken blir omkastade och det engelska ordet anses betydligt mera stötande. Vidare uppfattas *motherfucker*, *nigger* och *retard* mera stötande än de svenska *mammaknullare*, *neger* och *CP*.

6. Diskussion

Resultaten från denna studie har bidragit till tankar kring fult språk som resulterat i vissa återkommande trender. Fyra huvudsakliga motiveringar och argument för fulheten av orden i undersökningen kunde sammanställas: ordets innehåll, talarens avsikt, lyssnarens uppfattning/upplevelse och ordets vanlighet. Dessa stämmer även överens med Biströms (2017) undersökning av tabubelagda ord i Svenskfinland.

Ett ord kan upplevas olika fult beroende på den bokstavliga betydelsen av ordet i fråga. Exempelvis anses *motherfucker* mycket vulgärt med tanke på vad ordet insinuerar. Några informanter anser att *cunt* är fult eftersom de upplever att ordet låter fult och att det finns andra ord som låter vackrare i tal. Vissa påpekar dock att undvika ord kan leda till att orden istället får en felaktig stämpel. Exempelvis nämner en kvinnlig informant att hon medvetet försöker använda ordet *cunt* för att beskriva sitt könsorgan med avsikten att inte låta ordet betraktas som fult, utan istället som vilket annat beskrivande ord som helst. *Fag* och *retard* anses fula av informanterna eftersom man jämför en person med någon som

har en utvecklingsstörning eller är homosexuell och kommentaren blir därmed en förolämpning mot människor tillhörande dessa grupper. Samma motivering framkommer för orden *whore* och *cunt* som framkommer som nedvärderande mot kvinnor och yrket prostitution, vilket ofta också förknippas med kvinnor.

Avsikten är avgörande för hur ordet upplevs och om det anses fult och stötande. Om ett ord yttras som en förolämpning upplevs ordet omedelbart fult, oberoende om det annars anses mildt eller grovt. Några informanter anser inte att *nigger* och *fag* är stötande ord eftersom de själva inte använder orden med avsikt att såra någon. Om ord yttras som följd av oförutsägbar smärta anses det mera acceptabelt. Ett återkommande argument är också att ord anses mindre fula om det är riktat mot objekt istället för människor.

När ord överanvänds och allmänheten ofta utsätts för dem upplevs de också ofta mindre stötande. Goddard (2015) förklarar dock att orsaken till att dessa ord anses mildare är för att andra ord på samma gång börjar anses mera stötande i jämförelse. Somliga finner detta fenomen positivt eftersom de försöker hålla sig till ord som anses milda i andras ögon, medan andra helst inte ser att sådana ord accepteras i samhället. Dock poängterar en informant att oberoende om ordet vanligtvis uppfattas som mildt, blir det ändå fult om det används flera gånger i samma mening och uppnår istället en störande effekt. Många informanter misstycker användningen av fult språk som ett utfyllnadsord och anser det som ett fall var man kan betvivla individens ordförråd. Ett exempel på hur olika ord upplevs på grund av utsattheten är *motherfucker* och den svenska motsvarigheten *mammaknullare*. Trots den bokstavliga betydelsen upplevs *mammaknullare* mera stötande eftersom det är ett vanligt förekommande ord i olika tv-serier och medier, medan man sällan hör ordet *mammknullare*, förklarar en informant.

De vanligaste och den mest acceptabla användningen av fult språk som framkommit ur undersökningen är att de är hjälpmedel för att uttrycka känslor (positiva och negativa), solidaritet, humor och när ordet används i ursprunglig mening. Förmågan att analysera en situation och agera utifrån detta framstår som nyckeln till användningen av fult språk. Den vanligaste oron och orsak till misstykke är bland informanterna användning av fult språk i närvaro av barn, eftersom barn är snabba på att imitera människor i sin omgivning. Kontext anses vara viktigt inom yrkesvärlden och resultaten tyder på att ju mera formell

position man har, desto mindre troligt är det att personen yttrar fult språk. Detta gäller även situationer i allmänhet.

Resultaten om könsskillnader och fult språk tyder inte på någon märkbar skillnad och stöder därmed min hypotes om att attityden har övergått från en gemensam tro på att män använder fult språk oftare, till en mera fördelad användning samt att orden har samma potential att upplevas stötande oberoende av könet på talaren. Detta stöds även av annan forskning som hävdar att det numera överhuvudtaget inte existerar någon könsskillnad i samband med fult språk (Johnson and Lewis, 2010, Stone and Hazelton, 2008, Bayard and Krishnayya, 2001).

Kodväxling i samband med fult språk förekommer som ett vanligt fenomen hos informanterna. Eftersom majoriteten föredrar svenska eller en kombination av båda språken förkastas min hypotes som baserade sig på att informanterna skulle föredra att använda fult språk på engelska i och med att detta kunde vara mindre känslotarkt. Dock används hypotesen som ett argument av de som föredrar svenska, men de menar istället att de använder svenska eftersom de vill åt känslorna. De som föredrar fult språk på engelska hör främst till den yngre generationen, medan de äldre håller sig till sitt modersmål. Detta är troligtvis ett resultat av den multimedievärld i kombination med globaliseringen av engelskan som de växt upp i.

7. Konklusion

Målet med denna studie var att utforska attityder och användning av fult språk samt olika faktorer som kan ha en inverkan på användningen. Syftet var vidare att jämföra attityderna och användningen mellan amerikaner och svenskspråkiga individer, där både sverigesvenskar och finlandssvenskar inkluderades. Jag var även intresserad av de svenska informanternas användning av engelska i form av kodväxling och försökte få en inblick i detta med hjälp av en uppföljare ämnad för dem med svenska som modersmål.

Utifrån resultaten från studien kan man konstatera att de flesta använder sig av fult språk ibland oberoende om de vill eller anser att det är acceptabelt. Det är kontexten som är avgörande för hur stötande olika ord och fraser uppfattas och detta anses också vara en

färdighet de flesta lär sig. Vidare avgör också orden och i vilket syfte de används huruvida stötande de upplevs, dock anses det finnas ord som oberoende av kontext aldrig borde användas.

Shit och *goddamnit* framkommer som de vanligaste och minst stötande ord, medan *shit* och *fuck* används mest frekvent. Rasistiska yttranden och könskodade ord är de mest stötande. Religionsbaserade ord är mindre tolererade av amerikanerna än de svenskspråkiga, vilket även stöder min hypotes. En annan hypotes var att ingen större skillnad mellan kön och användningen av fult språk skulle finnas och att könet inte heller skulle avgöra hur anstötligt ordet upplevs. Den andra hypotesen bekräftades också och dessa förekomster visar att även om det fula språket kanske inte är socialt önskvärt, erkänner folk allmänt det som en värdefull källa för kommunikationsändamål.

Resultaten från denna studie kan inte generaliseras, men istället fungerar de som förslag och värdefull vägledning angående olika förhållningssätt till tabubelagt språk. För att ytterligare bestämma sambanden skulle det vara nödvändigt att samla in mer data med exempelvis en större enkätstudie. I den här studien gavs ett antal möjligheter att fritt uttrycka sina tankar i öppna frågor, men för att nå en djupare förståelse och förbättra en framtida studie kunde man kombinera detta med ett intervjumaterial. Med en större datainsamling kunde även kulturella skillnader i Finland respektive Sverige undersökas.

Resultaten från denna studie avslöjade att många är rädda för att ofrivilligt bidra till att barn lär sig fula ord och fult språk. Min studie har endast inriktat sig på individer som officiellt är klassificerade som vuxna, det vill säga över en ålder av 18. Vidare forskning kunde fokusera på att undersöka detta tema ur barns perspektiv. Även kodväxling kan också undersökas ytterligare, kanske på en mer global skala eller genom att rikta in sig på flerspråkiga individer och undersöka deras preferenser.

För att sammanfatta har attityderna mot användandet av fult språk förändrats med tiden. Min studie tyder på en förändring och förflyttning av fokusen från det negativa till det positiva vad avsevärt attityder till fult språk. Det vill säga, mer positiva synpunkter och uppskattning av språkens mångfald kan observeras. Huvudsakligen styrs fult språk av känslor och vi använder språket för att uttrycka dessa, dock beror anstötligheten i slutändan på situationen det används i och de involverade individernas bakgrund.

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Appendix 1, Questionnaire

Attitudes to and use of foul language

Hello,

I am writing my master's thesis for the department of English Language and Literature at Åbo Akademi University, Finland. The purpose of this questionnaire is collecting people's views about foul language. I am interested in finding out how different so-called bad words are perceived and which words are generally considered to be the worst. The questionnaire will therefore contain quite a few words that may be offensive to some, but it is not my intention to cause indignation. Please try to answer instinctively and try avoid answering what you think you should answer. Because of the nature of the words the questionnaire is only for people over the age of 18. All responses are treated with confidentiality and remain anonymous.

Information on the respondent:

Gender: Female Male I cannot/ will not answer

Year of birth:

Nationality: Swedish Finnish American Other? _____

Mother tongue: Swedish Finnish American Other? _____

Education level: Secondary BA MA PhD Other? _____

How do you generally feel about foul language (e.g. swearing, taboo words)?

Offensiveness of selected words:

This is the main part of the survey where I want to find out how you perceive foul language. The following pages consists of ten words representing bad language (taboo words, swearwords, etc.) with a few questions each.

Word 1: Fuck

How offensive is this word to you?

- Very mild Mild Moderate Strong Very Strong Don't know the word

Who might use it? Please select all that apply by inserting X in the box(es).

	In their professional role	As a private person	Don't know
A teacher			
A waiter			
A priest			
A lawyer			
A doctor			
A child			
A grandparent			
A student			
A child care worker			
A truck driver			
A secretary			
A janitor			
A parent			
A bouncer/doorman			
A policeman			
A cashier			
A group of friends			

Do you yourself use it?

- Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Very frequently

Is this word more likely to be used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Do you find it more offensive when it is used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Are there contexts or reasons when it is appropriate to use this word

Word 2: Shit

How offensive is this word to you?

- Very mild Mild Moderate Strong Very Strong Don't know the word

Who might use it? Please select all that apply by inserting X in the box(es).

	In their professional role	As a private person	Don't know
A teacher			
A waiter			
A priest			
A lawyer			
A doctor			
A child			
A grandparent			
A student			
A child care worker			
A truck driver			
A secretary			
A janitor			
A parent			
A bouncer/doorman			
A policeman			
A cashier			
A group of friends			

Do you yourself use it?

- Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Very frequently

Is this word more likely to be used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Do you find it more offensive when it is used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Are there contexts or reasons when it is appropriate to use this word

Word 3: Motherfucker

How offensive is this word to you?

- Very mild Mild Moderate Strong Very Strong Don't know the word

Who might use it? Please select all that apply by inserting X in the box(es).

	In their professional role	As a private person	Don't know
A teacher			
A waiter			
A priest			
A lawyer			
A doctor			
A child			
A grandparent			
A student			
A child care worker			
A truck driver			
A secretary			
A janitor			
A parent			
A bouncer/doorman			
A policeman			
A cashier			
A group of friends			

Do you yourself use it?

- Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Very frequently

Is this word more likely to be used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Do you find it more offensive when it is used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Are there contexts or reasons when it is appropriate to use this word?

Word 4: Cunt

How offensive is this word to you?

- Very mild Mild Moderate Strong Very Strong Don't know the word

Who might use it? Please select all that apply by inserting X in the box(es).

	In their professional role	As a private person	Don't know
A teacher			
A waiter			
A priest			
A lawyer			
A doctor			
A child			
A grandparent			
A student			
A child care worker			
A truck driver			
A secretary			
A janitor			
A parent			
A bouncer/doorman			
A policeman			
A cashier			
A group of friends			

Do you yourself use it?

- Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Very frequently

Is this word more likely to be used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Do you find it more offensive when it is used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Are there contexts or reasons when it is appropriate to use this word?

Word 5: Whore

How offensive is this word to you?

- Very mild Mild Moderate Strong Very Strong Don't know the word

Who might use it? Please select all that apply by inserting X in the box(es).

	In their professional role	As a private person	Don't know
A teacher			
A waiter			
A priest			
A lawyer			
A doctor			
A child			
A grandparent			
A student			
A child care worker			
A truck driver			
A secretary			
A janitor			
A parent			
A bouncer/doorman			
A policeman			
A cashier			
A group of friends			

Do you yourself use it?

- Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Very frequently

Is this word more likely to be used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Do you find it more offensive when it is used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Are there contexts or reasons when it is appropriate to use this word?

Word 6: Nigger

How offensive is this word to you?

- Very mild Mild Moderate Strong Very Strong Don't know the word

Who might use it? Please select all that apply by inserting X in the box(es).

	In their professional role	As a private person	Don't know
A teacher			
A waiter			
A priest			
A lawyer			
A doctor			
A child			
A grandparent			
A student			
A child care worker			
A truck driver			
A secretary			
A janitor			
A parent			
A bouncer/doorman			
A policeman			
A cashier			
A group of friends			

Do you yourself use it?

- Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Very frequently

Is this word more likely to be used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Do you find it more offensive when it is used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Are there contexts or reasons when it is appropriate to use this word?

Word 7: Goddamnit

How offensive is this word to you?

- Very mild Mild Moderate Strong Very Strong Don't know the word

Who might use it? Please select all that apply by inserting X in the box(es).

	In their professional role	As a private person	Don't know
A teacher			
A waiter			
A priest			
A lawyer			
A doctor			
A child			
A grandparent			
A student			
A child care worker			
A truck driver			
A secretary			
A janitor			
A parent			
A bouncer/doorman			
A policeman			
A cashier			
A group of friends			

Do you yourself use it?

- Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Very frequently

Is this word more likely to be used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Do you find it more offensive when it is used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Are there contexts or reasons when it is appropriate to use this word?

Word 8: Jesus (Christ)

How offensive is this word to you?

- Very mild Mild Moderate Strong Very Strong Don't know the word

Who might use it? Please select all that apply by inserting X in the box(es).

	In their professional role	As a private person	Don't know
A teacher			
A waiter			
A priest			
A lawyer			
A doctor			
A child			
A grandparent			
A student			
A child care worker			
A truck driver			
A secretary			
A janitor			
A parent			
A bouncer/doorman			
A policeman			
A cashier			
A group of friends			

Do you yourself use it?

- Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Very frequently

Is this word more likely to be used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Do you find it more offensive when it is used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Are there contexts or reasons when it is appropriate to use this word

Word 9: Retard

How offensive is this word to you?

- Very mild Mild Moderate Strong Very Strong Don't know the word

Who might use it? Please select all that apply by inserting X in the box(es).

	In their professional role	As a private person	Don't know
A teacher			
A waiter			
A priest			
A lawyer			
A doctor			
A child			
A grandparent			
A student			
A child care worker			
A truck driver			
A secretary			
A janitor			
A parent			
A bouncer/doorman			
A policeman			
A cashier			
A group of friends			

Do you yourself use it?

- Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Very frequently

Is this word more likely to be used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Do you find it more offensive when it is used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Are there contexts or reasons when it is appropriate to use this word

Word 10: Fag

How offensive is this word to you?

- Very mild Mild Moderate Strong Very Strong Don't know the word

Who might use it? Please select all that apply by inserting X in the box(es).

	In their professional role	As a private person	Don't know
A teacher			
A waiter			
A priest			
A lawyer			
A doctor			
A child			
A grandparent			
A student			
A child care worker			
A truck driver			
A secretary			
A janitor			
A parent			
A bouncer/doorman			
A policeman			
A cashier			
A group of friends			

Do you yourself use it?

- Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Very frequently

Is this word more likely to be used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Do you find it more offensive when it is used by men or women?

- Men Women No difference

Are there contexts or reasons when it is appropriate to use this word?

Uppföljare för svenskspråkiga:

This is the end of the questionnaire, except for those of you whose mother tongue is Swedish. If it is, please take another couple of minutes to fill in the optional follow-up with a few additional questions down below.

If your mother tongue is not Swedish, you can ignore this page and go straight to the next page where you send in the answers.

Thank you for participating in my study!

Om ditt modersmål är svenska, vänligen svara på följande frågor:

Vilket språk upplever du att ordet är mera stötande på?

	ENGELSKA	SVENSKA
FUCK – JÄVLAR	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
SHIT – SKIT	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
MOTHERFUCKER – MAMMAKNULLARE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CUNT – FITTA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
WHORE – HORA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
NIGGER – NEGER	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
GODDAMNIT – GUD FÖRBANNAT	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
JESUS (CHRIST) – JESUS (KRISTUS)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
RETARD – CP	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FAG – BÖG	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

På vilket språk är det mera troligt att du använder dig av "fult språk" (exempelvis svordomar).

Engelska Svenska Båda lika mycket Jag använder inte fult språk

Om du svarade *svenska*, *engelska* eller *båda lika mycket* på föregående fråga, var god motivera ditt svar:

Övriga kommentarer om ord, kontext, användning etc.

Tack för ditt bidrag! Gå till nästa sida för att skicka in dina svar