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Strong Language: A Socio Pragmatic Study of Gender Differences in the Use of Profanity

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Abstract

The current paper investigates the communicative function of profanity and swear words in both men and women's language use, and highlights further how the linguistic and gendered interactions in Moroccan Arabic have evolved. The paper displays offensive expressions in vernacular Moroccan Arabic and examines the most common functions of the chosen expressions used by both genders. It was important for the researchers to study this layer of vocabulary because it reflects the culture and relevance of gender-specific language, and what such language accomplishes in the speech community. The findings are basically generated from quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative methods were used to determine men's and women's perceptions of profanity while qualitative methodology was adopted to determine the communicative function of each expression. The findings of the study suggest that the use of profanity and swear words carries social functions and pragmatic meaning, and that the level of obscenity of swear words is highly dependent on the context and influenced by pragmatic variables, such as the speaker-listener relationship, social context and the nature of the swear word.

Keywords: Moroccan Arabic, profanity, obscene language, language use, social functions, pragmatic meaning, gender-specific language

0. Introduction

Gender and power are not only performed by people, they are also concepts that people expose among other things, through language. Profanity, the use of obscene words, or as we will refer to it throughout the paper, swearing, is a linguistic and interpersonal activity. In fact, there are certain norms, expectations and communicative functions that are carried through the



use of swear words. These words and expressions are diverse and strikingly versatile. The same swear word can sometimes perform distinct and different interpersonal social functions in different contexts (Trudgill and Andersson 1990; Beers Fägersten 2012; Baruch and Jenkins 2006).

While former research relied on questionnaires as the main and only approach to the examination of the presence of obscene and taboo language as a methodological approach, this study relies on both a questionnaire and conversation recordings as the main tools for data collection. The researchers believes that this will help provide other researchers in this field with a more holistic picture of taboo linguistic forms and their social functions, because it will allow them with a deep insight into the immediate communicative context as well as how it influences the speaker's behavior.

Profanity is, in fact, a subject which generally provokes significant tensions and debates, even when gender is not concerned. We can trace this back to the nature of swearing. In other words, profanity is often considered as part of what is called “bad or negative language”. There are other linguistic aspects that can fall under the same category, namely jargon, slang, new forms, etc. In this sense, bad language actually refers to unacceptable linguistic performances, or language that the majority judges as wrong. This does not necessarily mean that every grammatically incorrect speech is bad, but rather what does not conform to the traditional linguistic rules of the culture of a specific speech community is what is considered as such. Unlike most forms of speech, swearing is a linguistic phenomenon which is primarily used to convey connotative or emotional meaning. Individuals primarily understand the meanings of swear words as connotative (Jay and Danks 1977). Generally speaking, people only understand swearing at the surface level, which masks the underlying communicative function of that speech. Field studies of swearing have shown that using swear words in public by both men and women is a common practice, and that most situations where profanity is used are conversational (Jay and Danks 1977).

Deeming a language bad, obscene or vulgar can only be determined within a social context in which some relevant variables interact (the speaker, listener, setting, themes and topics...). The subjectivity and inherent variability of this linguistic act are what make it an interesting social behavior that requires further investigation. In very basic terms, swearing can be



understood as the use of words or expressions which are potentially unacceptable, inappropriate or offensive in a given social context. Limbrick (1991) argues that “swearing resists concrete definition; exactly what constitutes a swear word is generally determined by social codes” (p.79).

Profanity is a subject which calls for debates on whether it should be used or avoided due to its obscene nature. Research on rudeness shows that it has the ability to display pragmatic competence. Beebe (1995) notes that rudeness has two functions: either venting negative feelings or obtaining power. Rudeness may be beyond the scope of this study; however, impoliteness and gendered language use can be tied to swearing. According to Jay (2000), swearing is the expression of an emotional state and its cathartic function is to avoid violence and physical aggression, which is linked to notions of power, masculinity and dominance (de Klerk 1991). There is an ongoing disagreement among scholars regarding the concept of impoliteness. The most common definition of impoliteness is stated by Culpeper (2003), he states that impoliteness is “the use of strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony” (p. 131).

In this paper, we investigate the concepts of powerful and powerless speakers as well as the social status of the male and female participants. Here, social status is seen as the status acquired through the position the person holds, as well as by how he or she speaks and acts. That is, two people who hold the same position in a family might not have the same social status. In the same way, power is seen in this study as something that is performed through what and how words are uttered. As we shall see in this study, swearing plays a part in the construction of power relations.

In today’s Moroccan society, swear words are used by both men and women. In the context of anger and frustration, swear words are prominent features in the vocabulary. Nevertheless, other areas of emotional states, such as surprise or humor, can bring about the use of profanity in language. This article shows how difficult it is to research swearing within a conservative society, as the linguistic act is dependent on the right socio-physical setting. The findings reveal some irregularities and put light on the need to study some linguistic phenomena that have meaningful effects on gender and power relations. The main aim of the study is to highlight



men and women's attitudes towards the use of swear words, identify the situation(s) of their use in addition to their main communicative and social functions.

It is an undeniable truth that both men and women use swear words across cultures. There has been a significant ongoing research on the role of gender in the linguistic use of swear words in several societies that are culturally diverse societies. According to Lakoff (1973), women generally “use milder profanities than men who use stronger swear words” (p.17), she explains this by arguing that there is a double standard in the use of swear words, with women being “scrutinized more”. When men curse, it is perceived as “locker room talk” or is met with “boys will be boys”, whereas when women do, they are seen as impolite, which can be considered stereotypical.

The findings of this paper can be considered as controversial as the issue itself. The sampling procedure includes every person to take on a particular role according to certain standards which are fixed in the society. To be a woman has always been closely linked with having to speak “properly”. Women are generally prohibited from expressing any type of control and authority, even linguistically speaking. Swearing is almost reserved and considered to be exclusive to men.

For Kira Hall (2004), linguistic research on gender should “seek not to describe how women's language use differs from men's, but to document the diverse range of women's and men's linguistic repertoires as developed within particular contexts” (p.199). This is especially relevant to the objective of this research. The purpose of this study therefore is to conduct a contextual study of the speech patterns used by Moroccan men and women, with particular focus on the functions of these patterns. To wrap the ribbon around the edge, we argue that the use of swear words is bound up with both context and other pragmatic variables, namely gender, speaker-hearer relationship, setting, topic and social status. Taking these variables into account is crucial in determining the influence of swearing on appropriateness, and how it is an indication of powerfulness or powerlessness in speech.

1.Literature Review

When it comes to the study of gender and swearing, scarce research was made in Morocco. There is also very little which is known about research studies that are based on



gender (McEnery, Xiao 2004, p. 235). This study seeks to fill some of the gap in previous research. In doing so, it contributes to both fields: pragmatics and gender studies.

Socially speaking, Morocco is a conservative and patriarchal society. Undoubtedly, some parts of the country are less conservative than others. However, one cannot see or hear Moroccan women cursing and not being frowned upon. According to Sadiqi (2003): “there are things which are crucially important for gender, but are not the same cross-culturally” (p.314). Sadiqi (2003) believes that different elements are implicated in the upbringing of Moroccan women. Some elements that could interfere range from historical circumstances, to life experiences. Ennaji (2016) adds that in Morocco, “the conservative forces regard women’s role to be limited to home, reproduction, and child rearing.” (p.3). In the Moroccan society, religion plays a fundamental role in culturally building people’s understanding of what is “right”, what is “wrong”, and what is “moral”. Sadiqi (2003) notes that “only new perspectives and comparison can guarantee progress in language and gender research in a world where non-Western communities are statistically bigger than Western ones” (p.314).

In a study on how stereotypes affect Moroccan men and women’s perceptions and attitudes towards bad language, Larhouti (2016) argues that certain stereotypes ultimately result in creating, sustaining and perpetuating some preconceived ideas which are a root cause for the stigma around women using profanity. Larhouti (2016) reports that women use less profanity than men because they have been taught to be polite, and that swearing is generally considered a masculine behavior. He affirms that when gender is not known in an interaction, the speakers who swear are more likely to be judged to be male. Gender roles and expectations can affect language choice. Additionally, women are more likely to use euphemisms because politeness is expected from them. Women’s speech is stereotypically characterized by politeness, femininity and wordiness. They are also expected to use a language that reflects their gender’s characteristics. In contrast, men’s speech is considered to be more logical, aggressive and to the point. Men are also believed to be more assertive than women. Similarly, swearing is considered a type of speech which enables the speaker to display power and assert themselves (see Lakoff 2004; Beers Fagersten 2012; Murray 2012).

In recent years, an important number of studies on swearing have been conducted in different societies with different cultures in order to debunk the swearing gap that is said to



exist in men and women's linguistic practices. In an attempt to investigate contextual swearing in an Indian speech community, Kapoor (2016) conducted two studies in which the participants' attitudes towards the obscenity of swear words were explored. The participants assessed the obscenity of some words and expressions, and were asked to complete a number of dialogues by using swear words. The findings suggested that female participants used swear words with the same frequency as their male counterparts, yet they still assessed the practice of swearing as obscene and inappropriate.

In another study on gender and the use of sexual invectives by young Egyptians, Zawrotna (2016) explored the effect of gender, age and class on the use of swearing. The study took into account important variables and allowed Zawrotna (2016) to divide her participants into three groups. In the first group of her sample, she worked with young men and women from private universities, the second group included participants from state universities, and the last group comprised of individuals from high school and middle school. The results of this study reported that swearing was significantly related to the social background of the participants, especially females. The findings also reported that female participants from the middle class used less swear words and were less inclined to describe intimate body parts, while the male participants did not struggle in offering explicit descriptions. Zawrotna's (2016) findings show that 70% of her female participants from the lower class did not use swear words at all.

Undoubtedly, ideologies of gender and language are specific to their context and time, but what remains constant is the idea of the existence of separate masculine and feminine languages. Lakoff (1989) attempts to define "women's language" while Separate Worlds Hypothesis suggests that men and women are socialized into developing different ways of speaking. According to the hypothesis, genders develop different perceptions of the world because they are socialized differently during childhood. Fundamentally, the ideologies that support the "girls don't/shouldn't fight" and "boys don't cry" directly influence the development of boys' "competitiveness" and girls' "nurturing". Ultimately, this separation leads to associate certain characteristics and attributes to either men, or women. One of the attributes that is most commonly associated to men is authority and power, which enables them to have more control on many layers, including language.



Impoliteness, profanity and rudeness research is personally and culturally determined. Therefore, these phenomena are impossible to be universally defined. Brown and Levinson (1978) offer classic approaches to politeness by framing interpersonal communication as situations in which a speaker's motivation is to avoid threatening the face (Goffman 1967) of a listener through behaviors like swearing, and promote social harmony. Moreover, it is interesting to adopt more recent approaches to politeness since they include rudeness and impoliteness (Thomas 1983; Arndt and Janney 1985; Lakoff 1989; Kasper 1990; Beebe 1995; Culpeper 1996; Culpeper et al. 2003; Locher and Watts 2005; Bousfield 2007). These approaches examine situations in which speakers use forms of speech that are offensive or use swearing for purposes that go against social harmony.

The motivations for swearing are versatile. For instance, Lakoff (1989) offers an explanation for how intentional verbal aggression in courtroom discourse is indispensable. According to Beebe (1995), people are rude on purpose in order to vent negative feelings or to obtain power. On the other hand, Locher and Watts (2005) argue that impoliteness depends primarily on the relationship between speaker and listener, and that what is considered impolite speech cannot be universally interpreted. The power of swearing is explored within impoliteness research and is not considered a simple face threatening act. Swearing is actually regarded as an act of power due to its provocative nature, and this can be a plausible explanation as to why women have been denied it for a long time.¹

Communicative behavior is different for men and women, and it depends on whether the speaker is communicating with a person of the same gender or not. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) investigated men's and women's ability to exert power and have stated that in task-oriented interactions, men tend to have more power, status and influence, they also interrupt the other speaker more than women do (p.62). There are inconsistent explanations for the speaker's speech style selection. For men and women, speech style selection can be based on gender or on power. The evaluation of speech style can also offer an insight into how listeners interpret the speaker's utterance.



Logically, we can argue that if power is more relevant in gender interactions, then women's language use must have evolved since their status evolved in the Moroccan society. Profanity and swearing have been associated with strong or powerful language. Holmes and Meyerhoff (2005) argue that profanity is considered a strong form of language, which is why it has been long reserved for men only. Consequently, if women gain more status/power in a society, their evolution of the use of swearing should be momentous. One of the techniques to investigate this is Conversation Analysis. According to Elizabeth Stokoe (1998), the approach of CA is a way to unmask and debunk the stereotypes that pervade language and gender analyses:

Many gender and language studies assume that participants have an intellectualized gender identity and that people's speech is somehow related to that identity. [...] Taking a more conversation analytic approach means not treating identities as a kind of demographic or psychological facts whose relevance to behavior can simply be assumed. Instead of asking about the strength of gender identity or the kind of contexts where that identity is salient, the focus is on whether, when, and how identities are used. (Weatherall and Gallois, in Holmes and Meyerhoff, 2003, 500)

Conversation Analysis, dialectological research, and analytical studies more generally, had to adapt more modern techniques of investigation. Therefore, scholars such as Bing, Bergvall, Freed and Crawford (2016), recommended the use of Conversation Analysis (CA). In gender and language research, there has been a long tradition of considering the gender of the participants itself as a factor which influences linguistic choices. As a result, speech analysts overlooked certain variables by only taking the participants' gender into account, without investigating whether other factors may have affected the linguistic interaction.

Conversation Analysis attempts to pinpoint different views and even consider some contradictions instead of overlooking some factors. CA can be considered an objective and reliable method in identifying the connections that exist between some particularities in gendered social interactions. It is also worth mentioning that the most interesting part of studying gender and pragmatics, is that the field is dynamic and ever-changing. Therefore, the time and dimension of this study should be taken into account. In fact, the differences which



existed in language and power relations between men and women twenty years ago might not be the same as today's, and observations that had been done a few years back may not necessarily still be relevant. The Moroccan society, just like any other society, is constantly evolving making theories on gender and language likely to evolve at some point too, hence the need to regularly update the data we have about specific speech patterns.

2. Methods

2.1. Quantitative Methods (survey)

In this study, a Google Form survey was used and disseminated online. Participants were selected through convenience and snowball sampling from the Department of English at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities of El Jadida in group messages, social media and class email lists. The participants were asked to take part in a linguistic study on profanity. Student participant responses totalled 162: 90 (55.56%) of which were female and 72 (44.44%) of which were male. The grade levels of responders were limited to freshmen (2nd semester) and sophomores/juniors (4th semester). The questions were all multiple choice, or fill-in-the-blank. Participants were asked why they use swear words, who they use them in front of and which curse words they usually refrain from using, as well as the ones they use most frequently.

The participants were also asked to judge the vulgarity or obscenity of swearing and derogatory language use in different contexts. Participants were provided with two sets of 6 situations. The first set of 6 include situations with only male speakers. 2 of these situations include a male speaker using a vulgar term to describe a female, 2 include a male speaker using a derogatory term to describe another male, and 2 consist of a male speaker using profanity for other purposes, such as expressing anger, not necessarily directed at another person. The second set of 6 comprises situations with only female speakers. 2 of these situations include a female speaker using vulgar language to describe a male, 2 include a female speaker using derogatory language to describe another female, and 2 include a female speaker using profanity for other purposes. Finally, the same participants were given the option of doing a follow-up interview in which they were asked to explain their answers further. Only 62 (38.27%) of the students were interested in the interview.



In order to further answer the question of the function of the use of certain selected swear words and the circumstances of their use, this research looks at recorded conversations from both single sex groups and mixed sex groups. The recordings were gathered through random sampling. They focus mainly on spoken interactions that occur naturally in different contexts during face-to-face conversations, but also card games, and food preparation. The participants were of different ages, occupations, and social backgrounds. These recordings were analysed from a qualitative perspective in order to examine the purpose of the swear word used.

2.2. Qualitative Methods (Conversation Analysis)

The recorded conversations between random participants were an efficient way of collecting data in order to study linguistic variables. Typically, this technique requires a considerable amount of time, the recordings had to last at least half an hour in order to collect enough variables. Additionally, finding people who are willing to participate in studies of this nature can be hard (Trudgill1976), which makes the time dimension harder to manage. The data was thankfully collected right before the evolution of the current pandemic (Covid-19), which allowed for less limitations.

For this study, we have employed some of the principles and practices of CA in order to present an orderly account of swearing in our data. When using conversation analysis, listening to recordings of naturally occurring conversations, repeatedly, allows for the description of salient speech features (Hopper, 1992). Conversation analysts are more interested in how conversation is “fluid in structure [but] organised in an orderly way” (Graddol et al., 1987). The study also uses some tools of Pragmatics. Traditionally, CA and Pragmatics are seen as conflicting; the Pragmatic criticism of CA is that it only deals with some little details and not the bigger picture, it also reproaches that CA has no value or use beyond scholarly research (Hutchby andWooffitt,2006). Nevertheless, the tools of analysis from both disciplines allow a look at language which is neither limited to the data nor tied to the researcher’s interpretation. Pragmatics views language as heavily affected by the context in which it occurs. Neither CA nor Pragmatics consider language as an entity that is separate from the language user, and both disciplines are more interested in both the process of producing language as well as its producers (Mey, 2001).

The data for this second part consists of 8 transcripts taken from 10 separate recordings varying in length from 15 minutes to half an hour long. In research, it is important to set limitations and that is true for this study as well. The expression swearing has several synonyms. In addition, there are several different forms of the same swear word in Moroccan Arabic, depending on which variation of the language was used by the participants. Another delimitation is the choice not to address euphemisms in depth, and to focus on swear words only.

3. Results

Figure 1: Percentages of males and females who swear

	Yes	No
Males (n=72)	95%	5%
Females(n=90)	80%	20%
Total (n=162)	86.67%	13.36%

Figure 2: Percentages of males and females who tend to swear more around the same gender

	Males (n=72)	Females (n=90)	All (n=162)
Yes	61%	32%	44.88%
No	37%	68%	54.22%

Figure 3: Males and Females' reasons to swear (n=162)

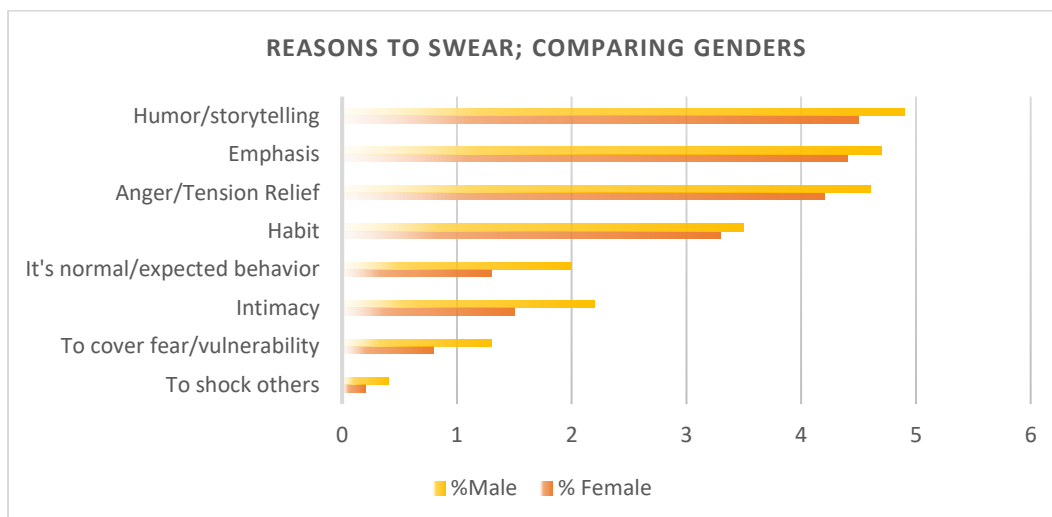


Figure 4: Male-speaker situations

Situation in which the male speaker is cursing	Percentage of male responders saying yes, it is obscene (n=72)	Percentage of female responders saying yes, it is obscene (n=90)	Total percentage of responders saying yes, it is obscene (n=162)
A male telling his male friend(s) in private that a female is a slut (<i>qəhba</i>).	66%	71%	68.78%
A male calling a female he does not know a whore(<i>qəhba/hariba</i>) in public.	70%	84%	77.78%
A male calling his friend a faggot (<i>zaməl</i>) while hanging out.	30%	33%	31.67%
A male during lecture in class calling his classmate a pimp (<i>quwwad</i>)out loud.	55%	60%	57.78%
A male walking outside and tripping exclaiming “shit” (<i>xra</i>) loud enough for those around him to hear.	12%	10%	10.89%
A male saying “shit” (<i>xra</i>) in front of the dean of the faculty.	45%	72%	60%

Figure 5: Female-speaker situations

Situation in which the female speaker is cursing	Percentage of male responders saying yes, it is obscene (n=72)	Percentage of female responders saying yes, it is obscene (n=90)	Total percentage of responders saying yes, it is obscene (n=162)
A female telling another female that a man they know is one “son of a bitch” (<i>wəld lqhba</i>).	77%	23%	47%

A female calling a male she does not know a donkey (<i>Hmar</i>).	22%	26%	24.22%
A female calling another female a bitch (qəhba) in front of their friends.	44%	60%	52.89%
A female shouting bitch (qəhba, ḡahira, hariba...) during a lecture in class.	71%	76%	73.78%
A female saying, she has to “go take a piss” (<i>nəmshi nbul</i>) in front of her friend’s parents.	65%	80%	73.33%
A female walking outside and shouting “shit” (xra) after tripping, loud enough everyone could hear her.	28%	41%	35.22%

Figure 6: Percentages of males and females who believe that certain curse words are more acceptable for men than women

	Everyone (n=162)	Males (n=72)	Females (n=90)
Yes	59.11%	46%	70%
No	40.88%	54%	30%

4. Discussion

4.1. Perceptions of Profanity: How Gender Affects Perceived Offensiveness

Figure 1 shows that both genders use profanity. While the females use it slightly less, 86.67% shows that the large majority uses curse words. It is also worth mentioning that the female sample in this study is higher by a margin of 18. Taking that into account, we could assert that both genders use profanity equally. Klerk (1992) argues that men and women use profanity for similar reasons: either in an innocuous manner through humor/story-telling, to create emphasis, to express emotions such as anger or simply out of habit (Figure 3).

In the questionnaire, the question “do you use curse words more around the same gender” was problematic. After looking at the data, we noticed that if the respondent answers ‘no’, it is unclear whether they use swear words more around the opposite gender or not. The face-to-face elicited conversations added more nuance to this question. The data presented in Figure 2 indicates that females in the study are nearly twice as less likely to use swear words in same sex interactions. This result in particular goes against Stapleton’s (2003) findings that women show intimacy through swearing in same sex settings, whereas men do not. Only 32% of female participants said that they use swear words more around other females. In one of the recordings, one female respondent expressed that gender was not an important determinant in comfort level.

Figure 4 shows that there are no significant differences to be noted between male and female participants concerning which situations are considered the obscenest. The respondents agreed by a large majority that “a male calling a female he does not know a whore (*qhba/hariba*) in public.” is the most unacceptable situation. What is interesting to note is that the context of the situation for all answers was regarded as far more important than the vulgarity of the curse word itself. In other words, saying “shit” (*xra*) in front of the Dean of the faculty is regarded as more obscene than calling a friend a “faggot” (*zaməl*) in a less formal context. Therefore, cursing in front of an authority/powerful figure is perceived as unprofessional and immature. The reason the first situation is regarded as the obscenest is the directness of the insult. Some participants expressed that the directness of some insults is unwarranted and uncalled for.

The second most obscene situation is a male telling his male friend(s) in private that a female they know is a slut (*qhba*). Beyond any shadow of doubt, in this data, the variable of social setting/context had the strongest impact on how the participants perceive vulgarity or obscenity. We also notice the constant difference in all of the answers that is worth noting. The female participants would always rate an answer as higher in obscenity even if the insult is generally not shocking. The follow-up conversations supported previous findings that females are still struggling with curse words and would perceive them as obscener due to their forbidden nature in their bringing up (Braun & Kitzinger, 2001). An exception was made when more male participants considered “a male walking outside and tripping exclaiming “shit” (*xra*) loud

enough for those around him to hear” to be obscener than females did. This can suggest that females are more used to hearing males curse in public. However, males might feel the pressure to censor their language even if they do curse more often.

Figure 5 shows significant differences between the genders concerning which female-speaker situations can be considered the obscenest. Both male and female participants agreed by a large majority that **“a female shouting bitch (*qhba*, *ḡahira*, *hariba*) during a lecture in class is the obscenest situation due to the public context, which proves that the variable of social setting has a massive impact on how both genders perceive obscenity**. A female saying, she has to “take a piss” (*nəmxī nbul*) in front of her friend’s parents was the second most obscene situation to both male and female participants. During the face-to-face conversations, the participants were discussing some of the situations of the survey and a female expressed that her parents would be startled by her if she said she had to take a piss, and it would not be the case if her brother had said the same thing. “*Nəmxī nbul*” is a “male phrase”, she said, because it sounds very “masculine” and “vulgar”. This comment suggests that vulgarity is associated with masculinity, and that men using swear words is not unusual and almost natural because of the masculine nature of the act. Males also think that a female saying she has to “take a piss” is obscener than a female calling another female “a bitch”.

Figure 6 shows that more female participants think certain swear words are more acceptable for men to use than women. Nunberg (2018) believes that when a speaker uses a swear word, the speaker utilizes Grice’s (1975) Maxim of Manner to express an affiliation with a particular social identity. If we consider this view, this finding may not be mirroring a culture of socializing women into believing that they should be polite at all times, but rather men’s affiliation to their gendered identity. The observation of the data reveals that socio-cultural stereotypes on language and gender could be questioned. It is not that women do not swear or are prude. Our findings show that although they do swear, they still find it an uncomfortable and unfamiliar territory that had belonged to men for a longer time. We can argue that swearing is still not an equal opportunity practice for Moroccan men and women.

4.2. Undressing the Words: CA and Pragmatics Analysis

Our Pragmatic/CA analysis has offered a deeper look into the linguistic phenomenon of swearing. Using the empirical rigour of CA and the aims of Pragmatics was a major point

in analysing our data. We focus on speaker intention, or what both men and women are doing with the swear words, and what they achieve or intend to achieve by using them. We have grouped the swear words into categories: zoomorphic swear words, sexually related expressions, humorous swearing, and religious insults. We have also categorised modes of swearing in accordance with three variables; first, whether there is a specific target for the swearing, secondly what is the speaker's intention through cursing, and thirdly whether the swearing is performing a function.

4.2.1. Aggressive Swearing

This category includes some examples of curse words which are used for aggressive purposes towards a specific target, constituting a face threatening act (Holtgraves 2001). Additionally, Brown and Levinson (1987) note that “positive” face refers to a person wanting their possessions, goals and achievements to be considered desirable. “Negative” face refers to a person's desire to be unimpeded in their actions. A face threatening act can threaten either a person's positive or negative face. Some of the ways a person's positive face can be threatened by the speaker is through complaints, criticism or disagreements, while their negative face can be threatened by requests and orders.

4.2.1.1 Zoomorphic Swearing

These examples show participants using swearing as a form of aggression. We are particularly interested in their use of zoomorphic invectives here:

[ZA:19:Oct15:(0.15.43):3]

4. Male 1: *Nta hmar fhad lləqta a sahbi! (You are a jackass dude!)*

5. Male 2: *Kayn xi hmar qddək?(Who are you calling a jackass?)*

We will refer to *hmar* or jackass as a zoomorphic invective, which is a lexeme (a name of an animal), that went from being a figurative representation of an animal to being used to name a person displaying negative traits associated with that animal. Animal or *hayawan* by itself can be considered an abusive curse word in Moroccan Arabic when said with an aggressive tone. Women tend to use *hayawan* more, while men prefer to be more direct in their

cursing. Women’s use of *hayawan* can be considered a euphemism to regulate the obscenity of the curse word.

[ZA:19: Nov21:(0. 30.23):7]

1. Female: *gīr ləkḷab lli kaybesslou ʕla lbnat u aḡlabia dyal rjal klab (Only dogs follow/catcall women, and most men are dogs.)*

2. Male: *hia daba ana kelb (So, you’re saying I am a dog.)*

This example shows aggression directed towards a human target, constituting an FTA towards the target. Swearing here is used to exacerbate disagreement. *Kelb* or dog is a common zoomorphic swear word in Moroccan Arabic as well as other Arab countries where a dog is considered “dirty” in Islam. In the example, implying that all men are dogs by the female threatens the male’s positive face. When she proceeds to emphasize that most men are dogs after stating that men who catcall women are dogs, she is simultaneously stating her opinion and disagreeing with the male who considers himself part of the majority. He replies saying ‘so that means I’m a dog too’ which indicates how he felt offended by her statement.

4.2.1.2 Sexually Related Invectives

Generally, swearing in Moroccan Arabic comprises sexually charged terms. These can be seen as the strongest in terms of emotionality. The tone and pitch that accompanied these expressions in our data was an indicator of how heated the conversation was. In Moroccan Arabic, we can notice three types of sexual curse words: the description of the sexual behavior of a woman; words that refer to an individual’s sexuality or heteronormative insults, and words that refer to human genitals.

[ZA:19:Oct1:(0.18.8):1]

7. Male: *wəld lqhba maḡatxellinish nkəmməl lhədra?(Will you let me finish you son of a bitch?)*

This example was taken from an extract where two males were having a pleasant conversation. At one point in the conversation, they started disagreeing, and what started out as the second male teasing the male who used the swear words, turned into an aggressive attack. We should also note that the teasing was interrupting the first

speaker's sentences. In order to express frustration, the speaker used “*wald lqəhba*” or “son of a bitch”. In Moroccan Arabic, the reputation of female relatives (mother and sister) is heavily implemented into cursing tradition. *Rajəl mmuk* (your mother's husband) or *rajəl xtek* (your sister's husband) are also used as insults. This phenomenon has a strong cultural dimension and background, since women in the Moroccan society are the symbol of reputation and morality. Therefore, the family's reputation depends on the woman's behavior as well. Casting doubts on the chastity of women of the individual's family is one of the most common ways of insulting both Moroccan men and women.

4.2.2. (Im)polite Teasing: Humorous Swearing

The word “mother” takes different nuances that depend on context. In other words, it can itself be used as an insult and express a different meaning. Here is an example that portrays this.

[ZA:19:Nov21:(0. 30.23):7]

4. Female: *Mal mmuk nti? Ash dəxlek ?(That is none of your Goddamn business!)*

In this example, the lexeme *mmuk* (your mother) has an aggressive shade and it is used to express “that is none of your business” or “what is wrong with you”. In this case, the swearing's purpose could fall under the humorous/aggressive class. This form is more known as ‘teasing’. The female speaker was teasing a second female when asked about a personal topic. In order to dodge the question, the speaker teased her way out of it. Although humorous swearing used the same tactics as aggressive swearing (degrading, humiliating, insulting, etc.), the force of the utterance is different. The purpose here is not to hurt someone's face, but rather to reinforce bond and intimacy.

4.2.3. Monologue swearing

Monologue swearing can be defined as those times when a speaker swears but is not targeting anyone and only talking to themselves. We can formulate a hypothesis that the swear words each speaker uses in monologue swearing is a product of habit. In our data, men used strong curse words referring to male genitals in monologue swearing, whereas women would either use code switching (French and English) or weaker words like *xra* (shit) as a way to reduce the level of both aggressiveness and strength of the curse word used.

[ZA:19:Nov21:(0.30.23):7]

6. Female: *xra! Kanḡadi y-tih lia telefon.(Shit! I almost dropped my phone.)*

Interestingly, *xra* (shit) would always be uttered with comfort by both males and females. It is more frequently used among females. This could indicate that *xra* is attaining a less offensive status since it is used in a casual and relaxed conversation.

4.2.4. Unholy Words: Religious Insults

Religion oriented expressions to curse are also very common in Moroccan Arabic. The use of taboo vocabulary does not always mean merely using sexual expressions. Religious expressions are used aggressively through swearing. They could fall under the category of aggressive imperatives. In addition to that, these expressions seem to contain orders either to do or forbid someone from doing something. As we have previously seen, orders threaten the person's negative face. Stavyt'ska (2008) argues that religion-oriented cursing is a way for the speaker to ask God to deal with the opponent:

[ZA:19:Oct15:(0.27.43):5]

1.Female: *Allah ymḁssxək (May God curse you.)*

[ZA:19:Oct3:(0.27.43):4]

2. Male: *Allah yal'an din lli galha lik (May God curse whoever told you this.)*

[ZA:19:Oct15:(0.27.43):5]

3. Female: *Allah ya 'tik deqqa (May God curse you.)*

This type of swearing can be explained by the fact that ceremonial vows, solemnities and curses are common in the Moroccan culture. When a speaker uses these expressions, they are calling to God to witness. Asking for God directly to punish the opponent also stems from viewing God as the symbol of supreme power. Women in our data used this type of swearing more than men did. However, men used more religion-oriented expressions coupled with sexually related invectives. There is also a new surge in the use of the word *rbbek* (your God) and insulting one's God, especially by males. Blasphemy



can be considered newly introduced to Moroccan Arabic, and could reflect new social shift in views regarding religion.

5. Conclusion

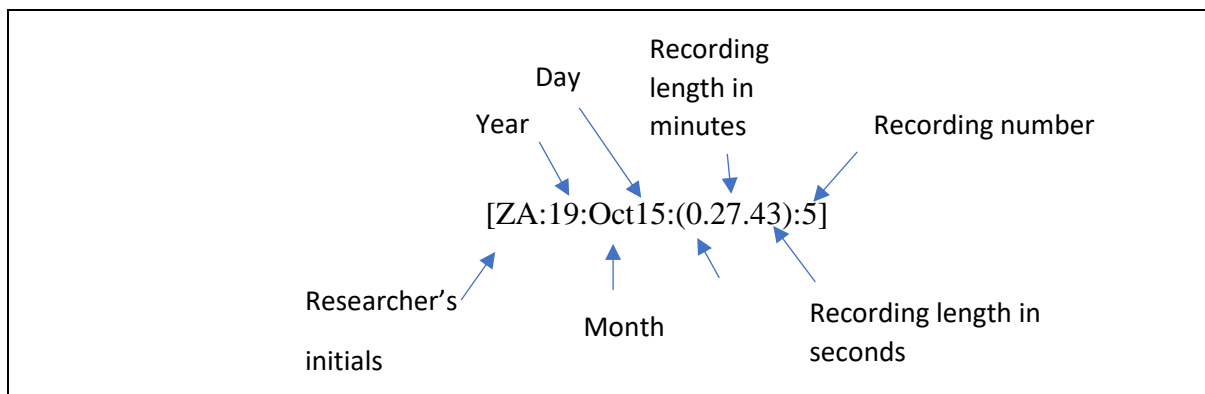
After analyzing speech patterns through Conversation Analysis and investigating how Moroccan men and women perceive profanity in language, the study found out that the impact of swearing depends on one's own experience with culture and its language conventions more than one's gendered identity. The findings demonstrated that the inappropriateness and obscenity of swearing depends highly on the context and is influenced by pragmatic variables, such as the speaker-listener relationship, social context and the particular swear word used. Moreover, the data shows that the offensiveness of swearing can depend on gender when such language is seen as taboo (mainly for women). In sum, data support the idea that regardless of gender, speakers consider where, when and with whom it is appropriate to use swear words.

Beyond any shadow of doubt, there are socio-cultural influences on swearing in Moroccan Arabic. A good means of locating the taboo placed on women using swear words in Moroccan Arabic was their use of euphemisms. Moroccan women avoid more offensive swear words and believe that some swear words are more acceptable when used by men. Investigating the speaker-listener relationship in depth could have added more nuance to this study, since friendliness affects the use and comprehension of swear words (Jay 1992). We have reported that more female participants think certain swear words are more acceptable for men to use than women. The reasons behind these reported perceptions can vary from culture, religion, and even the fact that women are the ones expected to raise children, and should, therefore, avoid cursing in front of them.

It can be concluded that men and women have different politeness requirements. Women tend to modify their speech accordingly and would resort to euphemisms instead of strong curse words. There is a heightened sensitivity that could be linked to women's relative lack of power in the Moroccan society. Women avoid threatening the listener's face and use politeness strategies in their language use with all people (men and other women). However, if we consider politeness as a strategy for navigating through dangerous, emotionally charged, sensitive and potentially "face threatening" situations, women could be regarded as smarter

and better manipulators of language to their own advantage. Their use of politeness could be interpreted as a phatic function of language in which they serve to establish and prolong communication. If women’s use of politeness is a choice, we can argue that they are the ones who use a strong language, one that keeps the channels of communication open.

APPENDIX (1)



APPENDIX (2)

Transcription Character	Arabic Character	Description
a	أ / آ / ا	sometimes the /ä/ in “father,” sometimes the /a/ in “mad”
b	ب	the normal English sound /b/
d	د	the normal English sound /d/
e	إ / ا	the short “e” sound /e/ as in “met” (this transcription character is not used often, only when confusion would be caused by using the transcription character “a”)
f	ف	the normal English sound /f/
g	گ	the normal English sound /g/ as in “go”
h	ه	the normal English sound /h/ as in “hi.”
i	ي / إ	the long “ee” sound /ē/ as in “meet”
j	ج	the /zh/ sound represented by the ‘s’ in “pleasure”
k	ك	the normal English sound /k/
l	ل	the normal English sound /l/
m	م	the normal English sound /m/
n	ن	the normal English sound /n/

o	و	the long “o” sound /ō/ as in “bone” (this transcription character is not used often, mainly for French words that have entered Moroccan Arabic)
p	پ	the normal English sound /p/
r	ر	this is not the normal English “r,” but a “flap” similar to the Spanish “r” or to the sound Americans make when they quickly say “gotta” as in “I gotta go.”
s	س	the normal English sound /s/
t	ت	the normal English sound /t/
u	و	the long “oo” sound /ü/ as in “food”
v	ف	the normal English sound /v/
w	و	the normal English sound /w/
y	ي	the normal English sound /y/
z	ز	the normal English sound /z/
š	ش	the normal English sound /sh/ as in “she”
Some vowel combinations		
ay	اي	the “ay” as in “say”
au	او	the “ow” as in “cow”
iu	يو	the “ee you” as in “see you later”

Transcription Character	Arabic Character	Sound	
ḍ	ض	the Arabic emphatic “d”	These sounds are pronounced like their non-emphatic counterparts, but with a lower pitch and a greater tension in the tongue and throat.
ṣ	ص	the Arabic emphatic “s”	
ṭ	ط	the Arabic emphatic “t”	
q	ق	like the English /k/ but pronounced further back in the throat	
x	خ	like the ‘ch’ in the German “Bach”	
ġ	غ	like the x sound above, but pronounced using your voice box; similar to the French “r”	
ħ	ح	like the English “h,” except pronounced deep in the throat as a loud raspy whisper.	



ε	ε	This sound can be approximated by pronouncing the 'a' in "fat" with the tongue against the bottom of the mouth and from as deep in the throat as possible.
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