



THE USAGE OF SWEAR WORDS AMONG GENERATIONS X, Y AND Z IN RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITY

Empress Ayebanengiyefa Tikile and Isaac Eyi Ngulube

English and Literary Studies, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt.

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examined the use of swear words among individuals from three generations in Rivers State University. It specifically explored the frequency of usage of specific swear words, contexts of use, and communication platforms. Data was gotten through questionnaires, which were analysed through quantitative methods and presented in their frequency and simple percentages. The analysis of the data revealed that there are significant generational differences in the use of profanities. Generation Z uses swear words more often and with a more positive attitude, incorporating them into everyday conversations face-to-face and even on social networks, to a greater extent than older generations. In contrast, Generation X uses swear words less frequently and typically reserves them for more private situations. The findings indicate possible changing attitudes towards profanity and a greater tolerance for and acceptance of its use, especially among younger generations.*

KEYWORDS: Swear words, Profanities, Generations, Generational differences.



INTRODUCTION

Language has existed for as long as man has been on the face of the Earth. Language as defined by Mary Finnocchiaro is "a system of arbitrary vocal symbols which permit all people in a given culture, or other people who have learned the system of that culture to communicate or to interact" (p.8). F.C. Stork is of the opinion that:

All human languages are highly developed and sophisticated communication systems, all capable of meeting the demands of the society in which they are used, and the personal needs of the individuals of the society in terms of expressing emotion and giving and receiving information (p.21).

The human language has distinct characteristics. It is highly flexible and can be used to produce an endless array of utterances. It can be used to express ideas, feelings, and other needs in human social life. It can be represented and projected orthographically. It is structured and can be learned or taught to other people. Despite being organized, it is also highly complex, dynamic, and unstable, changing and growing with human civilization. Its dynamicity makes it versatile and able to tally with the humans who use it. Other known forms of communication (like those used by animals) cannot boast of the complex intricacies of the human language.

Besides its numerous features, language serves multiple functions for humans. Obi-Okoye, as cited by Isaac Tamunobeleva, gives four general functions of language. They are:

"personal", which includes - for pleasure, writing, thinking, learning, reflecting, exploring, questioning, describing, crying, praying, singing, among others; "practical", which includes - to negotiate, communicate, evaluate, promise, invite, discuss, learn, write, read, work, narrate, argue, expose, order, among others; "social", which includes - to communicate, share, congratulate, console, praise, reprimand, insult, curse, flatter, greet, salute, complement, and many more; and "imaginative", which covers - to entertain, narrate, fantasize, create, and so on (pp.10-12).

Communication tops the list of these functions. Communication is a very important part of human life and relations. It is generally said that humans are social beings, and it is near impossible to socialize without interacting with other people. Every establishment and industry run by people, from school to churches, to politics and entertainment, run on the human ability to communicate through language, and language, as a tool used to communicate, is inherently heterogeneous. This heterogeneity can be attributed to the multifaceted nature and needs of humans; thus, language function can be seen as a direct correspondence to the numerous demands of human social existence.

Related to the heterogeneous nature of language is the concept of variation. Variation is an element of every language as no two languages are the same, and no two people who use the same language use it in the same way all the time. Language variation thus describes differing linguistic behaviours. This differing linguistic behaviour can be observed in linguistic structures like sounds, grammatical forms, word choice, among others, and influenced by factors which can be social, regional, or based on subject matter, interference, medium, and many more. Language variation studies:

features of a language that differ systematically as we compare different groups of speakers or the same speaker in different situations. Rather than comparing features of two different



languages (say, English and French), language variation studies regional varieties of the same language, ... social, ethnic, and gender-related varieties of the same language... and stylistic varieties of the same language (Frank Parker & Kathryn Riley, p.148).

The English language today holds a position of dominance in specific regions of Europe, America, and Canada, and serves as a global lingua franca. Originating from the West Germanic language family, it has been influenced by other languages such as Norse, Latin, and even French. Over a span of more than 1,400 years, it has evolved and spread, becoming the second most prevalent native language worldwide, trailing only behind Standard Chinese and Spanish. English is also the most learned second language and is either the official language or one of the official languages in nearly 60 independent nations. It boasts of a greater number of second language learners than native speakers and is the most extensively spoken Germanic language, accounting for almost 70% of speakers in the Indo-European branch. In countries such as the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand, English is the primary spoken language, and it is widely used in certain regions of the Caribbean, Africa, and South Asia (Sanoj Singh v). Due to its massive spread and use, different variations in the use of the English language can be seen in various countries and linguistic communities. This is true in Nigeria where different varieties of the English language are employed side-by-side. Presently, the English language is used as the official language and lingua franca in the country, but the Standard British English, American English and even the Nigerian English, alongside the local variants of the Nigerian English like Hausa English, Yoruba English, Ijaw English, among others, can be found in use. Besides these regional varieties of the English language in Nigeria previously stated, variation also occurs socially.

Social varieties include deviations influenced by factors such as age, class, sex, among others. They are "varieties of language used by groups defined according to class, education, age, sex, and a number of other social parameters" (Tamunobelem 50). Studies in social variation show that social factors like age, sex, class, education, among others, affect and influence the way speakers of a language use that language. When it comes to gender and language, studies and observation show that in some languages there are gendered words, such as the Portuguese term for "thank you" - *obrigado* (for men) and *obrigada* (for women) and English word pairs like hero/heroine, actor/actress. Also, men and women speak and use language differently. Due to the difference in length, size and thickness of the vocal tract, larynx and vocal folds, men tend to speak in a lower pitch range than women. Among women using contemporary American English, there is more use of pitch movement, i.e., more rising and falling intonation; use of rising intonation at the end of sentences, more use of hedges (sort of, kind of) and more use of tag questions, when expressing opinions.

This is indicative of a speech style that invites rather than asserts agreement, and stands in contrast to men's speech, which is made up of more assertive forms and "strong" language. These differences also become apparent in same gender and cross-gender interactions. When interacting with their gender, women use more "back channels" to show they are listening and paying attention, while men use much fewer back channels during conversation and tend to view them differently from women. "The term back-channels describes the use of words (yeah, really?) or sounds (hmm, oh) by listeners while someone else is speaking" (George Yule, pp.275-77). Class and education as social factors are two sides of the same coin. They both influence language variation in similar ways. Generally, individuals in the upper echelon of society tend to use more standard varieties when compared to members of the lower ranks.



Similarly, the more educated an individual is, the more prestigious and sophisticated their variety of language used.

As a social factor, age "plays a prominent role in social interaction and organisation" (Shirley Yul-Ifode, p.156). A lot of what people do in society is influenced by age. The time children start formal education, the type of clothes worn, the ability to vote and even learning to drive a car, are determined, and influenced by age. In the same vein, age plays a role in the means by which a language(s) is utilized by its speakers. Research has shown that changes occur in the language use of individuals based on their age group. There are certain features that are specific to a child's use of language, just like there are for adolescents and adults. The speech of children typically changes and develops from the time they are born and stabilizes when they clock 6 to 7 years. Each stage of development in a neurotypical child's language is marked by certain features. During the first few months of a child's life before they can use words, cries, coos, babbles and gestures are used to communicate. As soon as a child is born, the child cries.

At first, it is a reflexive behaviour and not intentional communication from the infant, but the process of communication begins when babies begin to learn that crying can act as a signal that brings relief from hunger, discomfort, and loneliness because it propels adults to do what it takes to make it stop (*Language Development* 295). Between 2 and 4 months after birth, infants begin to make more pleasant sounds. The first sounds they usually make are vowels which are soft and sound like the cooing of doves. At this point, babies also start to giggle and engage in a discussion with their parents. A baby coos, a parent responds, the infant stares, laughs, and the adult grins and speaks. Babies start to babble at 4 to 6 months old, uttering single sounds like ba and da. By 6 to 8 months, they are repeating these noises (*Language Development*, pp.295-96).

By the time they are a year and a half old, young children usually only know a few words, and at that point, they start stringing these words together to form sentences like "Mommy up" or "All gone kitty." At this age, children everywhere use language similarly: they only provide the most fundamental details in their speech. They can say, "Eat apple," for instance, but they are unable to say, "I'm eating an apple" or "You ate the apple" (*Language Development*, pp.304-05). Most kids can form multi word phrases by the time they are three years old. Additionally, children three years old and above start to add morphemes to words, although younger children simply utilize the simplest forms, such "I go store." The youngster says, "I walked home" instead of "I walk home." It is important to note that they may use both versions—even within the same sentence—of the word: "I goed to the store and then went home" (*Language Development*, p. 305).

Teenagers'/adolescents' use of language differs slightly from that of many adults. In one sense, adolescent speech becomes more adult-like in that it becomes more complex in grammar and subject matter, but teenagers are more prone to use slang or invented phrases, particularly when chatting among themselves. Words that have negative connotations are frequently transformed by teenagers: "That's sick" becomes "it's really good." Additionally, shortcuts like "Hello, how are you doing?", turns into "sup?" (*Language Development*, p.324). Adults on the other hand use less slang forms and more standard and correct forms of a language. These peculiar features attributed to an age group's use of language is why at times it is possible for a listener to correctly guess the age group of an individual just by hearing and listening to them speak. This skill implies that we can recognize and interpret various aspects of language, such as speech



sounds, grammar, and vocabulary, and we rely on these cues to identify the age range of speakers (Carmen Llamas, p.69).

Penelope Eckert recognizes that age is "experienced individually and as a cohort" (p.151) and as such the relationship between age and language use is usually explored from two viewpoints – "the changing language used during the lifespan of an individual, and the language of different cohorts of individuals living within a speech community" (Jenny Cheshire, para. 1). The first, Jenny Cheshire calls "age-specific use of language" and the other, "generation-specific use of language." Both terms are used to introduce and describe the sociolinguistic concepts of age-grading and the apparent-time hypothesis. They both deal with age-based language variation but with varying focus. In the apparent time hypothesis, language variation is studied in relation to progressive linguistic change in a community, while age-grading studies language change as it takes place over the course of the life of an individual or age group. Age-specific changes observed in age-grading recur in each generation.

Besides age-grading and the apparent-time hypothesis, language differences due to age have also been explored as a feature of subculture. According to Umera et al., "every society is divided into three subcultures: children, adult and youth subcultures" (p.18). Each subculture has its peculiar pattern of doing things from the general society. A subculture may be distinct due to social factors like class, gender, race, among others, but it may also be determined by age, language, and other qualities. A subculture consists of individuals who are part of the same age group and are connected through the language they utilise (Umera et al., p.18). From the foregoing, language is a necessary aspect of subculture. Umera-Okeke and Okitikpi illustrate this by bringing to the fore the peculiar linguistic patterns of the speech of youths in Sapele, Delta State, Nigeria. Other studies, like Beauty Umokoro's 2016 paper "Youths' Language and Resistance Identity" and Kevin Egbo's paper "A Sociolinguistic Study of Youth Slang in Nenwe Community of Enugu State," have also shown that there are peculiarities in the way youths or members of the younger generation use language.

Although the studies listed above concentrate on youth slang and varieties, they evince that age truly plays a role in speech forms and language use. This study explores the relationship between age and language use using a type of age cohort – generations. A generation according to *Collins Dictionary* is, "all the people in a group or country who are of a similar age, especially when they are considered as having the same experiences." Similarly, the *Cambridge Dictionary* defines generation as "all the people of about the same age within a society or within a particular family." These definitions of generation border on the view of the concept as a social phenomenon and has only recently gained traction. Before now, the term generation was used mainly to refer to family relations and genealogy.

Duane Alwin and Ryan McCammon, in their article "Rethinking Generations", underscore three concepts of generations – "(a) generations as positions in family lineages, (b) generations as birth cohorts, and (c) generations as historical participation." The first concept of generations is used to define "kinship relations" (pp. 221-29). The second is used to refer to a group of people birthed and living at around the same time, and the third gives precedence to active participation/engagement in social movement. Both the second and third concepts are traced to Karl Mannheim's *Theory of Generations* introduced in his 1928 essay, "Das Problem der Generationen," translated later in 1952 to "The Problem of Generations." In the essay, Mannheim posits that people who share the same historical context and experiences tend to develop similar attitudes and values that differ from those of other generations. He argues that



these shared experiences create a generation consciousness, which shapes the way that people understand the world around them and their place in it.

Alongside Mannheim's *Theory of Generations*, the Generational Theory is also relevant and cannot be overlooked in the discussion of generations as a social phenomenon. The Generational Theory has its history in America and can be traced to Neil Howe and William Strauss in their 1991 book *Generations*. These historians used the term generations to propose that history follows a predictable cycle of four generational archetypes that repeat themselves over time, each with its own distinct attitudes and values. They also introduced the named grouping of birth cohorts through "saeculums" – naming specific generations from 1483 to the 2000s. Howe and Strauss' idea of generations has gained popularity in recent times and has been used by sociologists and statisticians, among others, to explain and account for behaviours and attributes that are characteristic of certain age groups and differences that exist between them. Besides behavioural differences, the Strauss-Howe generational grouping has also recently been used to explore differences that occur in how individuals in these generational cohorts use language.

This study is concerned with the concept of generations as birth cohorts and seeks to identify age related patterns in the way the English language is used among select individuals in the Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z generational cohorts. Although most studies on age-based variation in language are usually done to observe and account for language change, this is not the aim of this paper (as that would require a more in-depth study). This study is based on the premise that as long as people exist and use language, new variant forms will emerge. As Sanoj Singh puts it, "The continual flux of living languages means that new variant forms are constantly being created in a given linguistic state. However, these variants are not themselves linguistic changes" (5). The use of a language among groups, people, and individuals differs generally, and while this difference may not always affect communication and mutual intelligibility, it is necessary to seek to identify and account for these differences, when possible, to understand the language as a whole and the people or groups who use the observed varieties better.

Swear words are often regarded as blasphemous, filthy, vulgar, or objectionable. They are called various other names, some of which include four-letter term, expletive, profanity, bad word, dirty word, among others. When a person uses a swear word, it is known as swearing or cursing (Richard Nordquist, p. 67). Swear words are well-known in the speech groups in which they are used, do not rapidly change from time to time, and are taboo due to their semantic association with highly heated topics like sexuality and human waste. Naturally, the emotionally charged subjects that swear words allude to may also be identified with non-taboo parallel vocabularies that are reminiscent of conversations one could hear at preschools or doctor's offices. However, the basis for the taboo status of swear words is their semantic association with entities that evoke impact. Swear words are used to convey extreme emotions such as surprise, antagonism, and rage. (Robert Moore, pp.170-71).

Swear words are employed in speech by individuals for several reasons. According to Pinker, cited by Eileen Finn (pp.18-19), there are two categories of swearing: propositional and non-propositional. Propositional swearing includes "dysphemistic, euphemistic, abusive, idiomatic, and emphatic swearing" (p.18). Dysphemistic swearing is employed when speakers have a purpose in mind and are conscious that they are using swear words. In this type of swearing, a speaker chooses to emphasize the feelings they want the other person listening to understand.



Euphemisms, on the other hand, are indirect words used to replace unpleasant terms. Idiomatic swearing, such as the phrase "pain in the ass," serves the purpose of gaining attention, projecting toughness, expressing dominance, or strengthening relationships. Abusive swearing is always considered impolite when employed to threaten or degrade others. Metaphors (like "You fight like a pussy!"), advice (like "Why don't you kiss my ass?!"), and accusations (like "You are being a real bitch!") may all be used to describe this kind of communication.

This kind of communication ultimately aims to intimidate or exert control. Emphatic swearing is used to highlight a point. It can be used to emphasize a term that is used to describe an event or person, either in a favourable or bad way. It is frequently used to encourage social peace and to convey an individual is doing well. Finally, cathartic swearing is a non-propositional form of swearing, and serves to reduce stress, raise pain threshold, or frighten or surprise an aggressor. It is not seen as loutish or impolite. From the foregoing, it is evident that people use swear words for a variety of reasons. While swearing is often associated with rudeness and negative emotions, it can also hold social significance when used appropriately and can even be perceived as polite in certain contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of swear words has received considerable attention in sociolinguistic studies, which have considered how factors like gender, age, and social status impact how people swear. Gender has long been thought to play an important role in swearing behaviours. Studies from the past suggest that men tend to swear more than women, and swearing by men is often seen as more socially acceptable. Trudgill (1974) found that men are more likely to use non-standard language forms, including swearing, as a way of asserting masculinity and gaining social prestige among peers. More recent research, however, suggests that there is less of a gender disparity in swearing. Stenstrom, cited by Dewaele (2014), observed that adult women were found to use more but 'weaker' taboo words than adult men. Similarly, McEnery (2006) observed that young women are increasingly using swear words, particularly in contexts that involve peer bonding and informal communication. However, he found that men tend to favour "stronger" swearwords, while women seem to prefer "weaker" ones that are less offensive.

Swear words usage by individuals can also be influenced by their social class. It has been observed that working-class people swear more often than people from middle-class and upper-class backgrounds. Coates (2003) suggested that in working-class speech communities, swearing may be used as a form of in-group solidarity and as a marker of authenticity and toughness. In contrast, middle and upper-class individuals are often socialized to avoid swearing, particularly in formal settings. Holmes (2001) argued that members of this group typically follow linguistic conventions that prioritize decorum and politeness, considering swearing to be improper or unprofessional. However, even within these groups, swearing can occur in private or among close friends to build rapport and express strong emotions.

Age is another important factor that influences how people swear. Studies have consistently shown that swearing is more common among younger individuals. According to Stapleton (2010), adolescents and young adults use swear words as a means of expressing identity, rebellion, and solidarity within their peer groups. People in this age range are more inclined to accept swearing as a form of humour and entertainment, allowing them to use it more freely in



everyday interactions. As individuals age, the frequency of swearing tends to decrease. Hughes (1992) found that older adults are less likely to swear, often due to social expectations and norms that discourage profanity in professional and family settings. This decline in swearing with age is also linked to increased social responsibilities and a desire to maintain a respectable image.

RESEARCH METHODS

The data for the study were collected through mixed questionnaires (web and physical) distributed to the study's respondents. The participants of the study included students randomly selected from various programmes, faculties and hostels, and members of staff of various offices and positions, ranging from lecturers and teaching staff to administrative and non-teaching staff in the Rivers State University. The questionnaire on swear word usage contained 4 questions. The first question asked participants how often they used swear words. The second question asked what specific swear words participants used; the third question asked for participants' context of use of swear words; and the final question asked on what platforms these swear words were used. For data analysis, descriptive statistics is used. The frequency and simple percentage of relevant responses provided by participants are calculated and compared.

FINDINGS

This section discusses the responses received from the questionnaire. In all, four questions were provided to solicit swear word usage among participants from Generations X, Y and Z. The questions were designed to gather information on the frequency of swear word usage, specific swear words used, contexts of usage and platforms of usage.

a. Frequency of Swear Word Usage

The first question asks if respondents use swear words. The options provided by the researcher are intended to not just know if respondents use swear words, but also how often. Below is a summary of responses received.

Table 1: Usage of Swear Words by Generations X, Y, Z

	Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z
All the time	0 (0%)	6 (4.61%)	28 (20.7%)
Sometimes	21 (16.1%)	40 (30.7%)	79 (58.5%)
Rarely	53 (40.7%)	57 (43.8%)	23 (17.03%)
Never	56 (43.07%)	27 (20.7%)	5 (3.7%)

The table above indicates that out of 130 responses received for Generation X, 74 persons report usage of swear words. With Generation Y, this number increases to 103, and with Generation Z with 135 total respondents, this number increases a lot more to 130. These responses for swear word usage will be referred to as positive responses in the latter sections



of this paper. The opposite of this is seen with negative responses, that is, responses against the use of swear words. With Generation X, this number is 56, and it reduces to 27 in Generation Y, and finally to 5 in Generation Z.

A further look at the figures reveals that although 90% of Generation Z respondents use swear words, it is used at varying frequencies/intensities. Twenty percent (20%) claim to use it all the time, 58% sometimes and 17% rarely. Just like members of Generation Z, most Generation Y respondents respond positively to using swear words, though at varying intensity. Four percent (4%) use it all the time, 30% sometimes and 43% rarely. With Generation X, for those who use swear words, it is used in less frequency and intensity when compared to the younger generations. This is evident as just 21% of Generation X respondents claim to use swear words sometimes while 40% of them report rarity of use.

b. Specific Swear Words Used

The second question asks respondents which swear words they used and presented the options - fuck, shit, asshole, bitch, bastard, nigga, and a space for any other. The table below presents how participants responded.

Table 2: Specific Swear Words Used

Swear word	Frequency by Generation		
	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z
Fuck	32 (24.6%)	58 (44.6%)	79 (58.5%)
Shit	39 (30%)	73 (56.1%)	82 (60.7%)
Asshole	0 (0%)	4 (3.07%)	16 (11.8%)
Bitch	1 (0.7%)	5 (3.8%)	32 (23.07%)
Nigga	3 (2.3%)	28 (21.5%)	46 (34.07%)
Damn	2 (1.5%)	26 (20%)	20 (14.8%)
Hell	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.4%)
Bastard	0 (0%)	5 (3.8%)	30 (22.2%)
Darn	5 (3.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
None	56 (43.07%)	27 (20.7%)	4 (2.9%)

The table indicates that the swear words fuck and shit are repeated the most among the Generations X, Y and Z. Swear words like asshole, bitch, nigga and bastard are reported more among Generation Z respondents, but are also used by respondents in Generation Y. These swear words though are not used at all or are reported in insignificant figures in Generation X. This indicates that swear words by each generation differ to an extent, and some are used more by respondents in a particular generation, with Generation Z having and using a wider array of swear words.



c. Context of Use of Swear Words

The third question investigates the situations and contexts in which participants use swear words. Four options are provided by the researcher – when expressing frustration or anger, when joking or in a light-hearted manner, during casual conversation with friends and while driving or in traffic. The responses to this question are summarized in the table below.

Table 3: Context of Use of Swear Words by Generations X, Y and Z

Situations	Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z
When expressing frustration or anger	43 (33.07%)	62 (47.6%)	93 (68.8%)
When joking or in a light-hearted manner	20 (15.3%)	48 (36.9%)	58 (42.9%)
During casual conversations with friends	22 (16.9%)	57 (43.8%)	76 (56.2%)
While driving or in traffic	14 (10.7%)	18 (13.8%)	18 (13.3%)
During intercourse	0%	8 (6.1%)	0%

The data in Table 3 above illustrates that respondents in Generations X, Y and Z use swear words in similar situations. Out of the 74 Generation X respondents who swear, 43 report using it to express strong negative emotions like frustration and anger. This number accounts for 33% of all Generation X responses and 58% of the 74 positive responses. With Generation Y, out of 103 respondents who report using swear words, 62 persons report using it to express frustration and anger. This accounts for 47.6% of all Generation Y responses and 60% of all their positive responses. With Generation Z, 93 people report using it to also express frustration and anger. This number accounts for 71.5% of Generation Z positive responses.

Similarly, respondents in Generations X, Y and Z report using swear words when joking and in casual conversation with friends. The responses though reveal a higher frequency of use in these contexts for Generation Z when compared with Generations X and Y. In addition, only Generation Y (although a tiny percentage) report using swear words during intimate relations.

d. Platforms of Usage of Swear Words

The fourth question on swear word usage investigates the platforms or communication channels where participants use swear words most often. The summary of responses to this question are presented in the table below.

**Table 4: Platforms of Usage of Swear Words**

Platforms	Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z
Face-to-face conversations	30 (23.07)	79 (60.7%)	108 (80%)
Phone calls	15 (11.5%)	50 (38.4%)	42 (31.1%)
Text messages	12 (9.2%)	13 (10%)	37 (27.4%)
Social media	10 (7.6%)	44 (33.8%)	57 (42.2%)
Online forums or chat rooms	6 (4.6%)	11 (8.4%)	29 (21.4%)
Alone	16 (12.3%)	3 (2.3%)	6 (4.4%)

The data in Table 4 shows that the majority of participants from all three generations who use swear words use it in face-to-face conversations, while a smaller percentage use swear words via text messages and online chat forums. This suggests that in-person interactions remain the primary context for the usage of swear words, regardless of age. Also, 31% of Generation Z, 38% of Millennials and 11% of Generation X use it during phone conversations, while a decent percentage of Generation Z (42.2%) and Millennials (33.8) use it on social media. This contrasts with Generation X respondents who report usage on social media at just 7%.

This paper focuses primarily on how swear words are used by individuals of different age cohorts in Rivers State University, but the data received shows that some swear words are reported more by a particular gender within Generations Y and Z.

Table 5: Usage of Swear Words by Generation Z

Swear words	Female n(%)	Male n(%)	Total n(%)
Fuck	38 (28.1%)	41 (30.3)	79 (58.5)
Shit	38 (28.1%)	44 (32.5)	82 (60.7%)
Asshole	7 (5.1%)	9 (6.6%)	16 (11.8%)
Bitch	19 (14.07)	13 (9.6%)	32 (23.7%)
Nigga	5 (3.07)	41 (30.3%)	46 (34.07%)
Damn	20 (14.8%)	0 (0%)	20 (14.8%)
Hell	2 (1.4%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.4%)
Bastard	7 (5.1%)	23 (17.03%)	30 (22.2)

Table 5 shows the swear words use reported by Generation Z males and females, alongside their frequency and simple percentage. The percentages calculated are a part of the total of Generation Z participants and not the total of everyone swear word.

- a. The swear word *nigga*: Male members of the Generation Z cohort account for over 80% (41) usage in the 46 counts presented. A similar response is seen with Millennials. Out of 28 total responses for the use of the swear word *nigga*, 25 are males.



b. Use of *bastard*: Just like nigga, the table above shows that bastard is reported to be used more by male Generation Z respondents, making a total of 23 out of a total of 30 responses given.

c. Use of *damn*: The swear word damn is reported 20 times by the Generation Z cohort and all 20 counts are reported by female Generation Z participants. This is worthy of note because, the option damn is not given in the questionnaire, but it is repeated among these females. A similar pattern is also seen with Millennial females. All 26 (100%) responses for the use of damn are provided by females.

IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

The aim of this paper is to investigate the usage of swear words across three generations at Rivers State University. This study finds that the use of swear words varies across different generations. The frequency of use, specific swear words used, contexts of use, and platforms of usage are examined.

Respondents report less usage of swear words as the age cohorts increase. The youngest generation in this study, Generation Z, reports a more positive and frequent use of swear words, ranging from all the time to rarely. In contrast, the oldest generation, Generation X, reports a less positive and less frequent use of swear words, ranging from sometimes to rarely. While only 4% of Generation Z participants report never using swear words, 43% of Generation X participants report never using them. Although participants' opinions towards swear word usage are not explicitly asked, the results suggest a tendency for younger people to use swear words more than their older counterparts. This is in line with previous research showing that individuals are more likely to use swear words as teenagers and young adults and then reduce this usage as they get older.

Among those who swear in Generations X, Y, and Z, it is reported that most do so when expressing frustration or anger, both of which are intense emotions. This similar usage of swear words across all three generations suggests that this is a common, perhaps universal, function of swearing. This aligns with the idea that swearing can serve as an emotional release or a way to intensify expressions of negative emotions.

The results also indicate that, compared to Generation X, Generation Y and Z participants are more open to swearing during casual conversations with friends and while joking. While the older generation, Generation X, reports swearing in more private contexts (such as expressing emotions and face-to-face conversations), younger generations integrate it into everyday conversation and humour. The high frequency of swearing on social media platforms among younger generations also highlights the role of technology in shaping language use. This suggests that digital communication environments, where informal language is more common, might contribute to the normalization of swearing.



CONCLUSION

Sociolinguistics has brought to the fore of language research the importance of social factors in influencing language choices. When it comes to the use of swear words, this relevance still proves true. Despite the controversial nature of profane words, they are still important linguistic elements which somehow find their way in everyday discourse. The primary aim of this study was to investigate the usage of swear words across three generations at Rivers State University. The study found significant generational differences in swear word usage, with Generation Z exhibiting the highest frequency and most positive attitude towards swearing, while Generation X showed the least frequency and least positive attitude. However, this study is limited to students in Rivers State University and may not be generalizable to other populations or regions. Future research could explore swear word usage across different regional contexts. Longitudinal studies could also provide deeper insights by tracking changes in swear word usage over time. Overall, this study enhances our understanding of generational differences in language use and contributes valuable insights into the social dynamics that shape linguistic change. By being aware of these differences, we can better understand the complexities of communication across generations.

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