

Taboo Language on the Internet

An Analysis of Gender Differences in Using Taboo Language

Zhou Ningjue

Kristianstad University

English Department

The C-level of English linguistics

Elective course: Language and gender

Autumn 2010

Tutor: Anna Ekström

Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Aim and Scope.....	2
1.2 Material.....	2
1.3 Method.....	3
2. Theoretical Background.....	3
2.1 The Origin of Taboo and a Discussion of the Definition of Taboo.....	4
2.2 Semantic Categories of Taboo Language.....	6
2.3 Function of Taboo Language.....	7
2.4 Language, Taboo, and Cultural Context.....	8
2.5 Language and Gender.....	9
2.6 Taboo Language and Gender.....	10
2.7 The Nature of the Language Used in Chat Rooms.....	10
3. Analysis and Discussion.....	10
3.1 Definition of Taboo Language in This Study.....	11
3.2 Model of Analysis of Taboo Language.....	11
3.3 A General View of the Conversation Text.....	12
3.4 The Mixed-Gender Chat Room.....	14
3.5 The Female Chat Room.....	17
3.6 The Male Chat Room.....	19
4. Conclusion.....	21
References.....	23

1. Introduction

It is perhaps even possible to say that the earth is shaking because of the virtual world. The Internet revolutions are going on all over the world, and have now made it necessary for the people to make the Internet a part of daily life. This advent is leaving its impression on all aspects of people's life. With a computer, people can almost do everything such as communicating with family and friends, shopping, having conferences, meeting strangers and sharing news from all over the world.

The most important function of the Internet is communication. People on the Internet communicate by language both verbal and nonverbal. Relatively speaking, different from real world, nonverbal language is more widely used on the virtual world. Every day, people talk to acquaintances and strangers via e-mail, Instant Message like MSN, chat room. It is noticeable that, the language used in virtual world is different from the real world. Without a real identity and face-to-face stress, people's potential personality which they restrain in real life becomes active, so that the words and sentences people use on the Internet are more arbitrary especially when they are chatting on the Internet with their friends and strangers. An apparent character of the language on the Internet is that the more taboo languages are used.

Taboo refers to forbidden phenomena in our custom in general, as well as language. For example, in English-speaking countries, it is tabooed to use words connected with sex or religion; in China, seniority's names are forbidden to mention by juniority without a formal address. Taboo has existed for a long time in the world and it is developing and changing as time goes by. In terms of language, taboo relates to both taboo words and taboo topics. However, the definition of taboo language is broad, and it has been defined in various categories. It is offensive to use taboo language which is usually considered improper or believed to be forbidden. It is profanity. It is cursing. It is insult. It is something you would not say in front of your grandmother. But, actually, people do use taboo language. If they were not said at all they could hardly

remain in the language (Trudgill, 2000:18).

Men and women use taboo language differently. In daily life, men tend to use more taboo word compared to women. The belief that women's language is more polite, more refined – in a word, more ladylike – is very widespread and has been current for many centuries (Coates, 2004:13). However, the Internet gives everyone a mask, and the using of taboo language undergoing some changes.

1.1 Aim and Scope

The aim of this study is to analyze the use of taboo language in conversations of mixed-gender, women's and men's talk in English-speaking chat rooms. The study examines the differences and similarities of using taboo language in male and female speech, and conversational strategies.

1.2 Material

The primary material consists of 3 conversations in the chat box website called Palace. This is an American native chat box website and consists of various chat rooms with varying themes. Four kinds of languages can be used in all these chat rooms—English, Spanish, German and Turkish. The participants in this website come from all over the world. They have their nicknames which can be changed at anytime and pictures to show they are male or female.

The three conversations are copied from three differently themed chat rooms. The first chat room is named Ato, and it is a mixed gender chat room. There is no fixed topic, so the conversations in these rooms develop freely. The second chat room is named Kitty Things. The members inside this room are playing a changing outfit game. According to the theme given by a judge, they dress up their models, and the judge decides who is winner. The participants are all female in this chat room. The third one

is called Tattoo. The people in this room are all male. There is no fixed topic, so the conversations in these rooms develop as their wishes. The records are taken at one hour equally, and during this time, the author was not active in any of the conversation.

One must bear in mind that the gender of online speakers can not be confirmed in the virtual world. The identities as a whole of participants may be inaccurate on the Internet. This investigation can only explore the online persons that are portrayed in the chat room.

1.3 Method

Firstly, the chat room texts were all closely read for all taboo words. Any taboo words were noted and collected. Taboo words are selected according to the definition written in the two resources: *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Spears' Forbidden American English: A series Compilation of Taboo American English*. The taboo words were firstly chosen in the context in which they occur. After that, they were filtered further by the definition in the two works. Then, the word without being labeled by any of resources was defined according to its context. The taboo words were then analysed in terms of their numbers and frequency of occurrence. The taboo words were further classified as to form and function concerning for the context. The reasons why taboo words are used were also addressed.

2. Theoretical Background

In this section, the previous study which is correlated to taboo language and gender differences in conversation will be reviewed.

2.1 The Origin of Taboo and a Discussion of the Definition of Taboo

The term taboo is of Polynesian origin---tabu on Tongan Archipelagoes. It originally refers to those holy facts or objects which can not be spoken of or touched and was first noted by Captain James Cook, a British sailor, during his visit to Tonga in 1771. When he came to the islands in the South Pacific, he observed many strange social phenomena. For example, some objects can only be used by their leader or only by God, but some can only be used by common people; and some objects can only be used for special purpose, but some only for general purpose. The local people call this phenomenon as tabu, which means to be holy or untouchable. Cook introduced the term into the English language, from which it achieved widespread currency and was spelled as taboo in English (Freud, 1999: 4). Taboos were most highly developed in the Polynesian societies of the South Pacific, but virtually they have been present in all cultures.

As a special linguistic and cultural phenomenon, taboo has already attracted people's attention for a long time; therefore, studies on taboo have been carried out by a large number of scholars of different fields such as sociology, psychology, linguistics or philosophy all around the world.

Sigmund Freud, a renowned psychologist, discusses the term taboo extensively in his book *Totem and Taboo*. He regards taboo as "restrictions that are distinct from religious or moral prohibitions, they are not based upon any divine ordinance, but may be said to impose themselves on their own account" (Freud, 1999: 2). He provides the most ingenious explanation for the apparently irrational nature of taboo, postulating that they are generated by emotional ambivalence and in effect represent forbidden actions for which there nevertheless exists a strong unconscious inclination.

Wardhaugh, the Canadian sociologist, discusses taboo together with euphemism in his book entitled *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. He points out that "taboo is one way

in which a society expresses its disapproval of certain kinds of behavior believed to be harmful to its members, either for supernatural reasons or because such behavior is held to violate a moral code” (Wardhaugh, 1984:45). Another anthropologist, Ashley Montagu, holds similar point of view and proves that taboo words are indeed social constructions by citing the fact that not every culture contains taboo language (Montagu, 1967:55). He calls the use of taboo language “a culturally conditioned response to the experience of certain conditions” (Montagu, 1967:56). Both of them regard taboo as a social and cultural phenomenon and the taboo language is used under certain culture context.

While in his study, Trudgill defines taboo in following words: “taboo can be characterized as being concerned with behaviour which is believed to be supernaturally forbidden, or regarded as immoral or improper; it deals with behaviour which is prohibited or inhibited in an apparently irrational manner.” (Trudgill, 2000:18). In the same page, he writes that “in language, taboo is associated with things which are not said, and in particular with words and expressions which are not used” (Trudgill, 2000:18).

Taboo can be classified into two categories. One is called verbal taboo; the other is non-verbal taboo or behavioral taboo. The former, indicates “a total or partial prohibition of the use of certain words, expressions and topics in social interaction” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). The latter, the behavioral taboo or the non-verbal taboo, refers to daily behavioral patterns that people could not act upon because traditional values or social customs strongly frown on such behavioural taboo. In fact, adherence to such behavioural taboos means that cultural custom, religious belief and ethic norm are all to be abided by. This study focuses on verbal taboo, especially the taboo words and phrases.

2.2 Semantic Categories of Taboo Language

Taboo language is a broad conception, and there are different ways that people have attempted to categorize them. Timothy Jay (1999:25), Edwin Battistella (2005:38), Montagu (2001:72) give their own ways to categorize taboo words. Actually, there types of taboo language can not be separated completely, they are always interwoven. When you curse someone, you are probably insulting him or her at the same time. In this study, five types are chosen to analyze: epithet, profanity, obscenity, cursing and sexual harassment.

Epithets are “various types of slurs” (Battistella, 2005:72). *Nigger, bitch, wop* can be seen as examples. They usually refer to race, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality, but they may also refer to appearance, disabilities, or other characteristics. In the same page, Battistella gives examples as *midget, gimp, and retard* (Battistella, 2005:72). It is usually motivated by frustration or anger and aimed at any objects or another person.

Profanity is religion related term, which is “based on the church’s distinction between secular and religious speech” (Jay, 1996:10). Jay writes, “To be profane means to be secular or...to be ignorant or intolerant of the guidelines of a particular religious order, but profanity is not a direct attack on the church or religion” (Jay, 1996:10). The range of it is wide, from a mild hell or damn to a more emphatic goddamn. Battistella believes that the feature of profanity is that it involves the coarse use of what is taken to be sacred (Battistella, 2005:72). Example of profanity is like, “For the love of Christ, get off the phone!” (Jay, 1996:10)

Obscenity refers to the usage of “indecent words and phrases” (Montagu, 2001:105). These words and phrases characterize sex-differentiating anatomy or sexual and excretory functions in a crude way (Battistella, 2005:72). The most common words of this kind are *fuck* and *shit*.

Cursing, according to Timothy Jay, is the words “to invoke harm on another person through the use of certain words or phrases” (Jay, 1996:8). When cursing is used, the user probably aims to have it take effect happen in the future. It is similar to swear. But they are different in degree. In this study, cursing stands for both swearing and cursing as a category.

Sexual harassment refers to “unwanted sexual remarks, dirty jokes, references to one’s appearance, or sexual behavior” (Jay, 1996:18). This term is constantly changing in its definition. In his work, Timothy Jay concludes that sexual harassment includes “comments about the one’s sexual behavior, sexual looseness, or sexual preferences; references to body parts; references that denigrate a person based on gender” (Jay, 1996:18).

2.3 Function of Taboo Language

There are many reasons for people to use taboo language. According to Jay (Jay, 1999:84), people, as a kind of emotional animal have a desire to express their feelings, relieve their negative stress, and establish their identities and status through their speech. Using taboo language can help them to achieve these purposes effectively, as language is a tool used by everyone. The function of taboo words are listed as follows, such as humor, catharsis, or showing the power.

In certain contexts, humorous effect can be reached by mentioning something which is normally forbidden. For example, words and expressions related to sex are usually considered as taboo words. However, on the Internet, the jokes about sex are very popular among males or females.

Second function of taboo words is catharsis. “When we are extremely angry and we feel the need of expressing our anger in violence, the uttering of these forbidden words may provide a relatively harmless verbal substitute for going berserk and

smashing furniture; they may act as a kind of safety valve in our moments of crisis” (Hayahawa, 1990: 48). By speaking out what is forbidden, the negative emotion such as anger, dissatisfaction and depression can be relieved greatly. It is good for people’s physical and psychological health.

Last but not the least, taboo language is emotionally powerful. Moreover, “breaking the rules have connotations of strength or freedom which find desirable” (Trudgill, 2000:18). And “...taboo words are frequently used as swear-words, which is in turn because they are powerful” (Trudgill, 2000:19). As a man, behaving polite sometimes means being timid rather than being elegant. When in conflict, taboo language may show masculinity of the speaker.

2.4 Language, Taboo, and Cultural Context

Context is an indispensable factor when we analyze all language phenomena. A linguistic verbal context where a word, a phrase or a conversation occur can help us to understand the particular meaning of the word and phrase. In a broad sense, social context or cultural context is involved in understanding deeper meaning hidden behind some words and phrase. The concept of cultural context was first put forward in the 1920s by Malinowski, who divided context into context of situation and context of culture, to describe the institutional and ideological background knowledge shared by participants in speech events (Malinowski, 2002:45). According to Malinowski, the cultural context refers to the social and cultural background, tradition, social mentality, values, way of thinking in which languages are used. The same utterance may possess different meanings because of the interplay of those external factors. That means more attention should be paid to what speaker achieves with consider of gender, race and the like. The contextual factors are immediately available to the speaker, who uses the context to decide whether to use or not. “Cursing reflects a culture’s beliefs about religion, taboos, word magic, and disgust” (Jay, 1999:153).

2.5 Language and Gender

Language, as a social phenomenon, is closely related to social attitudes. Men and women are socially different in that society lays down different social roles for them and expects different behaviour patterns from them (Trudgill, 2000:79). Sex differences are fundamental fact of human life and it is not surprising to find them reflected in language. Sex refers to biological features that determine male and female, but gender is the social role played by people in society, the way they interact with others. As a social animal, human are influenced by the surroundings. It is obvious that our language style is formed through both sex and gender, and “language is also an important part of our personal and social identity;...linguistic habits reflect our individual biographies and experiences” (Graddol & Swann, 1991:7).

Previous studies carried out by scholars consistently show that men use various interactional means to seize and maintain control over the progress of conversation. Women, on the other hand, tend to use several devices to increase the probability that their contributions will be attended to and supported by their conversational partners. Compared to men, women tend far more to support the conversational agendas of the people they are talking with (Fasold, 1990:116).

Different speech pattern exists is a matter of what language means to women and men. For most women, the language of conversation is primarily a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships. Emphasis is placed on displaying similarities and matching experiences. However, for most men, talk is a means to preserve independence and maintain status in a hierarchical social order. This is done by exhibiting knowledge and skill, and by holding center stage through verbal performance (Tannen, 1992:77).

That is a general summary of language and gender, in the following paragraph, the taboo language and gender is specifically discussed.

2.6 Taboo Language and Gender

It is widely agreed that “men curse more often than women; men use a larger vocabulary of curse words than do women; and men use more offensive curse words than do women” (Jay, 1999:166). In Lakoff’s theory, one feature of women’s language is that, “superpolite forms, e.g. indirect requests, euphemisms; and avoidance of strong swear words” (Lakoff, 2004:78). However, Coates (2004) mentions Gomm’s research (1981) in her book, which shows that “both men and women swear more in the company of their own sex;” and “male usage of swear words in particular drops dramatically in mixed-sex conversations” (Coates, 2004: 97).

Men and women also employ taboo words differently. Gender differences can be found in the use of insult terms, sexual terms, joke telling, verbal dueling, harassing speech, and fighting words. According to some studies, men use more racist and aggressive sexual terms than women, and they are easier to be provoked into fighting when they are insulted.

2.7 The Nature of the Language Used in Chat Rooms

We should notice that, though the language people use in chat room is written, in other words, nonverbal language, people write them so quickly according to the conversation development as they chat in real world, in spite of the grammar and forms. The Informal forms and abbreviations are extensively used. It is reasonable that we define the language in chat room as verbal language. And the participant in chat room can be called as speaker.

3 Analysis and Discussion

The analysis focuses on quantitative data so as to demonstrate whether females and males use taboo language when they are chatting online without been known their

identities, how they use taboo language respectively, and the reasons why they do so. The analysis is divided into two parts: the first part is about the gender difference in using taboo language in all the conversations, words selected from taboo topics from both gender will be presented in tables to show gender difference. And in the second part, the usage of various categories of taboo language in three different contexts will be analyzed.

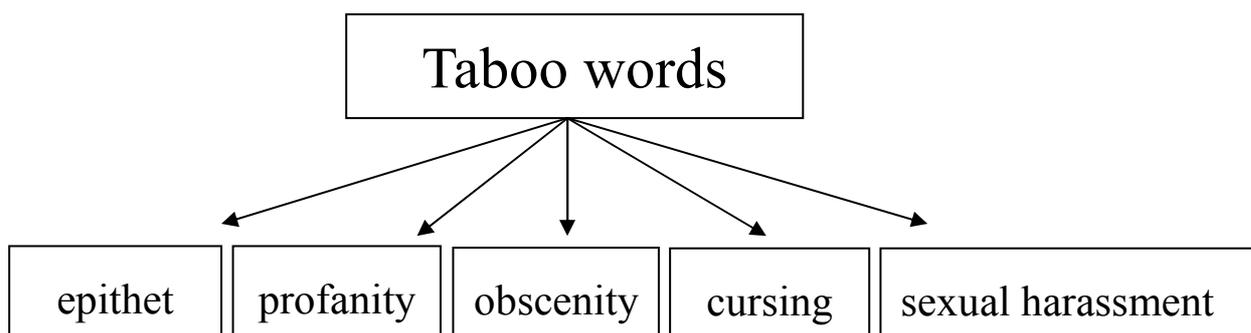
3.1 Definition of Taboo Language in This Study

Taboo language is the utterance of emotionally powerful, offensive words and phrases or emotionally harmful expressions that are understood as insults. Taboo language allows a speaker to express strong emotions or have an emotional impact on a listener. The impact can be both positive and negative, as telling a joke or sexual harassment.

3.2 Model of Analysis of Taboo Language

This section aims to analyze the primary material by following the model shown in diagram1. Taboo related words are selected from conversation with taboo topic in the first place. And then according to the semantic categories of taboo language, taboo words are categorized into five types: epithet, profanity, obscenity, cursing, and sexual harassment. All these five types of taboo words are defined and explained in the theoretical background. Gender difference in use of taboo language are the demonstrated through figure contrast and comparison of occurrence frequency of each type.

Diagram 1. The model of categorize taboo words



The first conversation text, which is collected from the first mixed gender chat room, will be named text 1 in the following paragraphs. The second conversation text collected from the second all female chat room will be named text 2, and the third conversation text taken from the third all male chat room will be called text 3.

3.3 A General View of the Conversation Texts

First of all, the taboo words in all the texts are selected and examined.

Table 1. Total number of taboo words in the conversations

	All 3 texts
Total words number	3216
Taboo words number	123

Table 1 shows that there are 123 taboo words in the three conversation texts, which consist of 3216 words. People's average use of taboo words in the chat rooms is one taboo word in every 27.13 words.

The taboo words in these chat rooms occur casually, depending to the topics and the gender of the participants. It is understandable that the numbers of taboo words differ in these three rooms, which are listed in the table 2.

Table 2. Total number of taboo words in each conversation

	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
Total words number	1179	664	1373
Taboo words number	50	33	40

All these 123 words are selected according to the definition and the context, including the single taboo word and short phrase. In the chat room, participants write in an

informal way, using several kinds of abbreviations instead of full spelling. The abbreviations are officially spelled in the following table, and the plural of the words is ignored.

Table 3. Compilation of all the taboo words in the collected texts.

mother fucking	anus	white chras	mother I'd like to fuck (8)
oh, my God(8)	clown (4)	hawky	dad I'd like to fuck
hater (2)	hulky	bre	grandmother I'd like to fuck
fuck (7)	whore	shit (6)	laugh my ass off (12)
bitch (2)	nigger	Jesus (2)	ass (4)
stupidity	damn it (2)	Damn (2)	butt (2)
coota	lynds	cun	cooch
suck it	hell (3)	fucking (4)	What the fuck
piss off	dick (2)	cunt	kick dat hoe
fuck off	fuck up (3)	shite	laugh my fucking ass off (2)
dork	stupid	fucker (2)	dumbass
bullshit	fucked	suck (2)	Damn fuck
nigga	wigger	chest	mn(3)
pussy (2)	make out	pist (2)	shut the fuck up
sucked	dumb	asshole	shit it
coochie (2)			

Table 3 is a compilation of all of the 123 taboo words found in the three texts. If one taboo word has occurred more than one time in the text, such as *hell*, which has been used three times, the number is shown within brackets. Various or wrong spellings of a same word are viewed as one same word. For example, *jeeesus* is regarded as *Jesus*. But different words referring to a same thing are regarded as different taboo words. For example, *nigga* is a negative word people on the chat room used to refer to black people. It can be found in dictionary, and carries the same meaning with *nigger*. So

nigga and *nigger* are counted as two different words. Another example, *shite* is another word used to say *shit*. The most popular taboo words in all the three texts together are: *laugh my ass off* (12), *mother I'd like to fuck* (8) and *oh my God* (8). In the following paragraphs, the text of each chat room will be examined individually. The three chat rooms represent three types of talk: mixed-gender talk, women's talk and men's talk. The taboo words in all these three texts will be closely investigated to see how men and women use them differently in the virtual world.

3.4 The Mixed-Gender Chat Room

The first text which is collected from the mixed gender chat room is examined in the first place.

Table 4. Compilation of all taboo words in text 1

mother fucking	anus	white chras	mother I'd like to fuck (8)
oh, my God (2)	clown (4)	hawky	dad I'd like to fuck
hater (2)	hulky	bre	grandmother I'd like to fuck
fuck	whore	shit (2)	laugh my ass off (5)
bitch	nigger	Jesus	ass
stupidity	damn it	damn	butt (2)
coota	lynds	cun	cooch
suck it	hell	coochie (2)	

Table 4 shows that there are 50 taboo words in the text 1, which consist of 1179 words. During one hour, there are 11 speakers involving in the conversation in this chat room. According to the pictures and nicknames given, 5 of them are male and 6 of them are female. The frequency of using taboo words differs greatly according to different gender, which is listed in table 5.

Table 5. Number of taboo words in the female's and male's utterances in text 1

	Men	Women
Taboo words	43	7
Total words	774	405

Table 5 shows that in all these 50 words occurred, men use 43 of them, accounting for 86% of the taboo words, while the 6 women only use 7 taboo words, accounting for 14% of the taboo words. In this conversation, men contribute 65.6% of the words, while women only supply 34.4% of the words. In the mixed gender conversation in the chat room, men's average use of taboo words is one in every 18 words. On the other hand, the women's average use of taboo words is one in every 57.9 words.

From the figures given above, it is clear that men are in the dominant place in this mixed gender talk, even though there are more women. They contribute more than two thirds of the utterances. In their utterances, males use larger vocabulary of taboo words than do women, as well as men use taboo words much more frequently than do women. In addition, the taboo words used by both genders are very different. The comparison of categories of taboo word used is listed in chat 1.

Chart 1. The categories of taboo words used by men and women

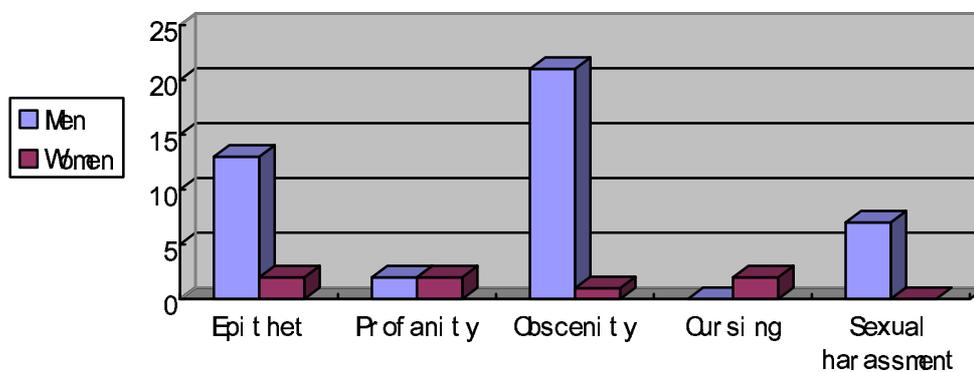


Chart 1 shows that men use much more epithets, obscenities and sexual harassments than do women. The most popular taboo word they use is *mother I'd like to fuck*,

which appears 8 times in the conversation. To insult the females, men use *whore*, *bitch* and *coota*, which are extremely offensive words. On the other hand, the most frequent taboo word women use is *oh, my God*, which occurs 2 times. It is used to express their surprise without an offensive meaning. When women refer to the men, the most vulgar word they use is *hater*. In addition, men use some sexual harassments, which are mostly related to the body parts, while women do not mention this kind of taboo words at all in mixed talk.

This phenomenon confirmed the conclusion Jay carried out in his work, that is “women are expected to exhibit control over their thoughts, while men are more free to exhibit hostile and aggressive speech habits” (Jay, 1999:165). Using taboo language has a symbolic association with masculinity, not femininity. In the virtual world, apart from the name and picture given, men portray their gender through using taboo language. At the same time, women show one feature characterizing women’s speech: superpolite forms. They try to avoid strong swear words or indelicate expressions. In mixed talk, same as the real world, women talk in a ladylike way. Without a real identity, females play their social roles as the usual. There is an example.

Example 1

doomsaer: *middle aged whores claim milf*

lois lane: *whats milf*

lois lane: *^translator*

doomsaer: *mother id like to fuck*

doomsaer: *v*

lois lane: *oh*

DoWnAzZIEtTe86: *lol*

In example 1, **doomsaer** and **DoWnAzZIEtTe86** are male, and **lois lane** is female. All the participants are talking about movie and one of them uses a taboo word--*milf*.

Then, **doomsaer** and **DoWnAzZIEtTe86** start to discuss this phrase. **Lois lane** does not know its meaning and asks. After she gets the answer, she shows her surprise and then keeps silent. But the two men find it is interesting, so **DoWnAzZIEtTe86** says *lol*, which means laugh out loud. It embodies a feature of women language, “super polite forms e.g. indirect requests, euphemisms – avoidance of strong swear words” (Lakoff, 2004:78). However, males preferred to use taboo word, because it shows a sense of humor. In mixed talk, men achieve humorous effect and active the atmosphere by using taboo words.

3.5 The Female Chat Room

The second text is collected from the all female chat room. Because of playing the change outfit game, the women speak relatively fewer words than do the females in the other two chat rooms.

Table 6. Compilation of all taboo words in text 2

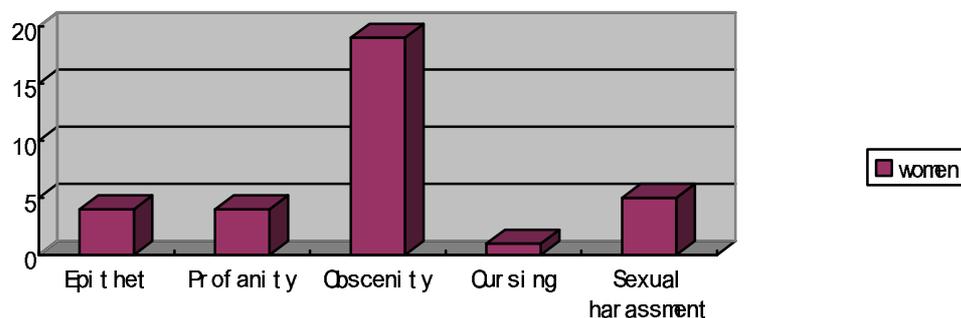
oh, my God (3)	hell	shit	what the fuck
fuck (3)	ass (3)	laugh my ass off (7)	fucking
piss off	bitch	cunt	kick dat hoe
fuck off	fuck up (2)	shite	dick
laugh my fucking ass off (2)	dork	damn it	

Table 6 lists 33 taboo words occurred in text 2, which consist of 665 words. In same sex talk, women’s average use of taboo words is one taboo word in every 20.1 words. The most popular word in text 2 is: *laugh my ass off*, which is used for 7 times.

Compared to those females in the first chat room, women in the second all female chat room contribute more taboo vocabularies and use taboo words in higher frequency. Without the participation of males, females talk in a more free way.

Gomm's research (1981) gives out the same result. Women swear more in the company of their own sex (Coates, 2004: 97). Besides Gomm's research, Coates also writes that the narrative produced by women in a mixed gender conversation contain far more taboo language than in a single-sex context. It is because female speakers seem to accommodate the perceived norms of the other gender (Coates, 2004: 98). However, the findings of this study do not support Coates' theory. It could be attributed to the fact that the topics in this conversation involved in competition. Females tend to use powerful language to support their confidence and show masculinity, which is an important function of taboo language. For example, women use *bitch* and *dork* to insult each other. The categories of taboo words used by females are listed as follows.

Chart 2. The categories of taboo words used in text 2



As chart 2 shows, the number of obscenities and sexual harassment is greatly increased compared to chart 1. The avoidance of using obscenity and sexual harassment is revised with the absence of males. Obscenities such as *shit*, *fucking* and sexual harassment such as *ass*, *dick*, become the most and the second most frequently taboo words occurred in text 2. However, there is a difference existing in males and females for the usage of the two kinds of taboo. Sometimes, women use them for making fun of each other instead of serious insulting, as the example 2.

Example 2

w syke: *pick something creative, boring ass cats.*

;kärmá police: *LOL*

w syke: *pissin me off*

»prádâ prêz; Alyssa: *i luvv baby blue*

The participant **w syke** uses taboo words and phrases, which is not seriously attacking anyone. At the same time, other females are not annoyed. **;kärmá police** says *lol*, and **»prádâ prêz; Alyssa** continues talking about her opinions. The conversation is developing smoothly. To a certain degree, women use taboo language to display humor and increase the intimacy between each other. Only a few words are really offensive and spoken with negative emotion. This finding is consistent with Jay & Richard (1995). They find that women seem to be more sensitive to what kinds of speech constitute verbal sexual harassment (Jay, 1999: 168).

3.6 The Male Chat Room

The third chat room is a male chat room. The taboo words in text 3 are listed as follows.

Table 7. Compilation of all taboo words in text 3

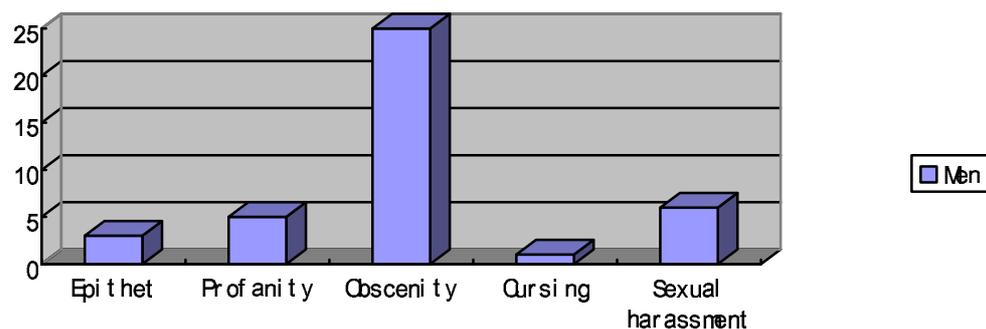
shit (3)	stupid	fucker (2)	dumbass
bullshit	fucked	suck (2)	damn fuck
hell	nigga	wigger	fuck(3)
chest	jesus	mn(3)	pussy (2)
make out	pist (2)	dick	oh, my God (3)
fucking (3)	shut the fuck up	damn	sucked
dumb	asshole	fuck up	shit it

Table 7 shows that there are 40 taboo words in the text 3, which consist of 1373 words. The males' average use of taboo language is one in every 34.3 words. There are five

taboo words equally popular in text 3. Those are *mn*, *oh mg God*, *fuck*, *shit*, and *fucking*. All of them are used three times.

Men in chat room 3 use larger vocabulary of taboo words than do the men in the chat room 1. The frequency of using taboo words is much lower than in text 1. It is opposite to the Gomm’s research (1981). According to his study, male usage of swear words in particular drops dramatically in mixed-gender conversation (Coates, 2004: 97). Another study also shows that “the narratives produced by male speakers in a mixed context contain for less taboo language than in a single-sex context” (Coates, 2004: 98). One possible reason could be that they are talking about taboo topics such as sell drugs and lesbians, and the taboo topics are not dealt with in this study. Words like drugs and lesbian themselves can not be divided in to any categories of taboo language given by this paper. So the number of taboo words used by men is smaller. It also could be attributed to the fact that men usually state longer sentences to present their point of views, so that the percentage of taboo words becomes lower in the whole text 3. The categories of taboo words used by males are listed as follows.

Chart 3. The categories of taboo words used in text 3



According to chart 3, in the single-sex context, it is obvious that men use fewer epithets and more cursings. In text 1, most epithets are used to interact with women, and without the participation of women, epithets decline sharply. However, the features of usage of other categories of taboo words are similar with those in chat room 1. Males speak a lot of obscenities and sexual harassments such as *pussy*,

asshole, and *bullshit*. Male speakers keep insulting each other until one of them either clearly wins the contest or the others give in. Men can easily be provoked into fighting by threatening speech, as the example 3 shows in the following.

Example 3

Beaucifer: *stupid fuckers*

NUKES!: *lol*

Ɓ^açhèl^or of Sc;énçé; *Dumbass.*

The participant **Beaucifer** say the taboo phrase to all the males in the room, and **Ɓ^açhèl^or of Sc;énçé;** immediately becomes angry and replies another taboo words because he thinks that his face is threaten and wants to show his power. It is easily happen in a male chat room. The reason is that it is important for males to maintain their status in a hierarchical social order. In Timothy's work, he mentions one result carried out at 1990 is that men are more sensitive to what constitutes fighting words (Jay, 1999: 168). The findings support the theory perfectly. However, taboo words are not always use in negative way. When men are the process of discussion of same thing, they contribute some taboo words to support each other's views, just as in example 4.

Example 4

Pwndemonium.: *looks so lame.*

Ɓ^açhèl^or of Sc;énçé; *Yikes.*

Beaucifer: *-.--- jeeesus.*

The participants in the room are talking about a picture. **Pwndemonium.** thinks it is lame. The **Beaucifer** agrees with him and uses a profanity to support his point of view.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study seem to confirm that both male and female features use taboo words on the Internet in differentiated way.

Firstly, in mixed-sex conversation, male characters use far more taboo words than female characters do, which had been proved by other previous scholars. Men's vocabulary of taboo words is larger than women's, and men use them in higher frequency. Using taboo words represent masculinity, which is preferred by men. At the same time, men and women have great different in the use of different types of taboo words. Female participants use profanity most frequently and do not use sexual harassment at all, while male speakers use every type of taboo words and use obscenity mostly.

Besides, data shows the female use more taboo word in same-sex context, which had been proved by other previous scholars; while the male use less taboo words in single-sex talk, which is opposite to the results carried out before. It is probably because of the topics and the males' relatively long statement habit in chat room. In addition, both women and men's use of different categories of taboo words are similar in same-sex talk. But the aims of using them differ. Females use taboo words for increasing the connection with others, while males use taboo words for independence and maintaining status in a hierarchical social order.

Finally, it should be made clear again that what have been done in this study is still limited. First of all, the primary material is three texts collected from the chat room, which could not represent the whole Internet. Then, this study used all the conversation without categorizing them into detail. However, people will use taboo language in both taboo and non-taboo topics, and there exist possibilities that people will use taboo language differently in taboo and non-taboo topics. Thirdly, on the Internet, no certainty is placed on the gender of the speakers. It is also worthwhile to

make a follow-up study in this direction.

List of References

Primary material

Three texts collected from three chat rooms in the Palace chat box website, and the address is <<http://www.thepalace.com/>>. The three chat rooms' name is Ato, Kitty things and Tattoo.

Secondary material

Battistella, Edwin.L. 2005. *Bad Language: Are Some Words Better than Others?* New York: Oxford University Press.

Coates, Jennifer. 2004. *Women, Men and Language. Third edition.* London: Pearson
ESL

Fasold, Ralph. 1990. *The Sociolinguistics of Language.* Oxford: Blakwell Publishers
Ltd

Freud, S. 1999. *Totem and Taboo.* Trans. James Strachey. London: Routledge.

Graddol, David & Swann, Will. 1991. *Gender Voices.* New York: Wily-Blackwell.

Hayahawa, S. I. & Hayakawa, A. R. 1990. *Language in Thought and Action.* New
York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich

Jay, Timothy. 1996. *What to Do When Your Students Talk Dirty.* Atrium Publishers
Group.

Jay, Timothy. 1999. *Why We Curse.* Philadelphia, PA, USA: John Benjamins.

[Online] Available: Ebrary

<http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.bibl.hkl.se/lib/kristianstad/Top?layout=document&id=5000152&?nosr=1> [Accessed October 28, 2010]

Lakoff, Robin. 2004. *Language and Woman's Place: Text and Commentaries*. London: Oxford University Press.

Malinowski, B. 2002. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge Publishing Company.

Montagu, Ashley. 2001. *The Anatomy of Swearing*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Oxford English Dictionary. [Online]. Available from World Wide Web:

<<http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.bibl.hkr.se/>> [Accessed October 25, 2010]

Spears, Richard A. 1992. *Forbidden American English: A Series Compilation of Taboo American English*. Illionis USA: Passport Books.

Tannen, Deborah. 1992. *You Just Don't Understand*. London: Virago Press

Trudgill, Peter. 2000. *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*. Fourth edition. London: Penguin.

Wardhaugh, R. 1984. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.