

TOWARDS A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF 'SWEARING' AND THE LANGUAGE OF ABUSE IN AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH

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0. INTRODUCTION

The term 'swearing', as employed in Australia, is used to refer to the inclusion in a speech act of one or more of a restricted set of lexical items, 'swearwords', which have a certain loading of taboo. Etymologically this taboo loading derives from the fact that most 'swearwords' once denoted - and the majority of these still denote - the activities of sexual intercourse and elimination or parts of the body and substances associated with these activities. A large proportion of such 'swearwords', while they are used in the 'literal' senses just referred to, occur by extension as terms of abuse (cf. DeArmond, 1971, for a parallel phenomenon in Russian) and in these extended or 'figurative' senses they are still considered by the populace at large to be 'swearwords' and the speech events incorporating them are similarly regarded as 'swearing'.

The investigation from which the present essay derives¹ was originally undertaken because of the paucity of linguistic studies so far done on the kind of language being dealt with here.² In this essay I have confined myself to a consideration of some of the sociolinguistic aspects of 'swearing' and have limited my analysis to Australian English (though much of it will hold for British and American English too); if pressed, I would really only be prepared to assert its validity for the variety of Australian English spoken in the Sydney working-class suburb of Balmain during the period from the mid-1940's to mid-1950's. This is because I have acted as my own informant and they are the place and time of my growing up from childhood to adolescence. Given the relative homogeneity of Australian speech (Mitchell, 1946:10)

such narrow restriction of place is probably not necessary, though because of the 'drift' undergone by taboo language in more recent years the restriction of period might better be borne in mind.

Finally, because the data is Australian and for the sake of a number of items that have no generally acknowledged orthographic form all items and examples will be cited in a phonemic transcription based on that developed for Australian English by A.I. Jones (Jones, n.d.:6.1 ff.).

1. PARADIGMS AND CATEGORIES OF 'S' LANGUAGE

So far I have talked of 'swearwords' as words with a taboo loading. This definition needs some elaboration. 'Swearwords' fall into a number of sets or paradigms of synonyms which respectively share the same denotation but which often differ connotatively according to their taboo loading. There are, further, in paradigmatic distribution with these certain other items which would not generally be considered 'swearwords', since they do not have a sufficiently heavy loading of taboo, but which in some cases may still have some taboo loading - so that their use would be disapproved of in some company - and in other cases not have any taboo loading at all. (Words from the standard language are excluded from consideration here.) That such a situation obtains with regard to relative taboo loadings is supported by the existence in popular usage of the graded series of terms: 'harmless language', 'strong language', 'bad language', 'filthy language'. Only the latter pair would include 'swearwords'. I shall therefore at this point introduce the term 'quasi-swearwords' to cover those items referred to in the former pair of terms. In the rest of this essay I shall use the symbol 'S' to refer to the kind of language under investigation, so that, for example, 'swearwords' and 'quasi-swearwords' will be called generically 'S' items and the language as a whole 'S' language.

While the existence of the various paradigms is easily verifiable by reference to a sufficient number of native speakers, the relative taboo loadings might be less easy to determine. Clearly the popular metalinguistic terms discussed in the preceding paragraph suggest that there are possibly four differentiable taboo categories, one of which - 'harmless language' - would contain items carrying no taboo loading at all. Intuitively, however, I feel that for some speakers, including myself, the categories could be refined to seven and that taboo loading could thus be quantified over a range from 0 - no taboo loading - to 6 - maximum taboo loading, for the so-called 'unprintable words'. The

results of this analysis along the two axes, paradigmatic (denotation) and categorial (taboo loading), can be seen in Tables A ('literal' uses) and B ('figurative' uses).³ The cut-off point between 'swearwords' and 'quasi-swearwords' would, for probably most speakers, fall between Categories 3 and 4.⁴

1.1. SUBJECTIVE VALIDATION OF THE CATEGORIES

While the existence of the paradigms is, I think, beyond dispute, the reader may still have serious misgivings about the validity of the categories set up. Evidence of their existence and grading has so far been based only on my own intuitions and, to a degree, on popular metalinguistic usage. My intuitions, however, are paralleled by the observation that there are groups in the community who will use the items listed in one particular category but avoid using and may well disapprove of others using items from above that one. For example, my notional informant for the lowest category, where items carry no taboo at all, would be an average devout Protestant, for whom there are a number of unequivocal Biblical injunctions against the use of 'intemperate' language.⁵ By 'devout Protestant', hereafter abbreviated to d.P., I mean here a 'believing' adherent of one of the 'Nonconformist' denominations (Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, etc.) or of the Low or Evangelical (i.e. Fundamentalist) variety of the Anglican denomination in Australia. The same degree of avoidance is not apparent, from my observation, amongst equally devout Catholics (and Anglo-Catholics), including clergymen, which is why I have specified Protestant linguistic behaviour throughout as being the most predictable. Doubtless there are Catholics, certainly Catholic women, who are no less strict in this regard than Protestants.

Where there is no item at all listed for a particular denotation in a particular category, this means that either an item from the next lowest category or, failing that, an item from the standard language would be used, or else an idiosyncratic item restricted to a relatively small group of idiolects.⁶ This is frequently the case for Category 0.

Category 1 items are those that, say, a d.P. male speaker might use amongst less sensitive fellow believers or to speakers outside his religious group. Amongst workmates he may be prepared to move up to Category 2 or even Category 3 items, but not beyond. It is here, between Categories 3 and 4, that I have located the cut-off point between 'strong language' and 'bad language', or 'quasi-swearings' and 'swearings'. Women were, at the time specified for this analysis, generally assumed to range between Category 0 and Category 3 items at

the extreme in normal conversation, though in anger they might use one or two Category 4 items (usually /bladi/ and /bagə/). In general, however, there was, even among working men, a fairly strong restriction on using items from Categories 4 to 6 'in front of', i.e. in the presence of, women and children. I doubt that this is any longer the case, except perhaps for Category 6 items.

There are speakers who will 'swear' to the extent of using Category 4 items but not Category 5, others will go as far as 5 but not 6, and there are those who will use Category 6 items in the 'literal' but not the 'figurative' senses.

The handful of Australian colleagues consulted about the accuracy of these observations have all agreed in principle with the categorization of the items but not always in detail.⁷

1.2. OBJECTIVE VALIDATION OF THE CATEGORIES

It will, of course, be argued that all the criteria adduced for the validity of the categories so far are essentially subjective and it may be wondered whether no more objective methods of validation are available. Although I myself have not been in a position to attempt it, I should think that the Galvanic Skin Reflex Test might provide such a method. Perception, whether auditory or visual, of an 'S' item will produce physiological changes in some individuals, e.g. will make a maiden blush. While I have worked out a number of possible procedures for an experiment using the G.S.R. Test, space does not permit me to say anything further about them here.

2. CONNOTATIVE CONTENT OF 'S' ITEMS

As already indicated, 'S' items have as well as denotative content a shared connotative content. This latter resides in their content of 'taboo' and 'vehemence', for which the term 'sociolexical features' has been suggested.⁸

2.1. TABOO INHERENCE

It may be as well to consider at this point the question as to what the oft mentioned taboo loading of 'swearwords' actually inheres or resides in. In the case of both Category 6 words and some items from other categories, mainly 5 (e.g. /æəs/, /ʃɪt/, /pɪs/, /fæət/), the linguistic sign itself is imbued with a particular loading of taboo in both its conventional phonic and its conventional graphic realizations. (There are ways of reducing this taboo loading; one is, of course, to

use phonemic transcription.) Naturally this has to do in part with their 'literal' denotative meaning, but beyond this the taboo appears to be arbitrary, since other items with the same denotation are not thus imbued.

In the case of other items taboo may be absent or only vaguely present where context or situation make it clear that a homonym or homograph is being used, e.g. 'a bloody battle', 'the new plants would not root properly', 'the poop (/peup/) of the ship'. This is not to say that a taboo-conditioned reaction will not be produced in some speakers (the sniggering of schoolboys, for instance).

2.2. 'VEHEMENCE'

This is a most interesting property of 'S' language from the point of view of our analysis; it applies in particular to the items in Table B. Since 'S' items are so intimately bound up with the language of abuse, it is obvious that they will often carry as well as a taboo loading a loading of what I have called, for want of a better term, 'vehemence'. This 'vehemence' may be generalized and indicate the speaker's general mood at the time of the utterance, or it may be specific and indicate his attitude to the addressee or to the referent of the utterance (this will be discussed further below in terms of 'speech functions'). This distinction is already implicit in my term 'mood or attitude marker' for the Table B:a-d items.

The following comparison may serve to exemplify these remarks: most speakers would agree that /jəu kant/ (Table B:a6) carries a greater 'vehemence' loading, and so insult, than /jəu bæstəd/ (B:a5), and so on down to /jəu kəu/ (B:a1), which is relatively weak in Australian English (though stronger and marked for [+female] in British English), and finally to /jəu begə/, which is definitely the weakest, yet is not without a degree of 'vehemence'.

It would therefore seem that we could quantify this 'vehemence' loading very conveniently also over a seven point scale of categories which would correspond quite neatly to our scale of taboo categories except that, because of the point made at the end of the previous paragraph, this scale would extend from 1 to 7 instead of from 0 to 6. There are, however, certain difficulties in the way of this grading. One is that such 'vehemence', while it is usually negative, i.e. expresses disapproval, may sometimes be positive, i.e. indicate approval.⁹ Another is that not all speakers draw from the whole range of possible categories; this difficulty will be considered further in 3.1.6.

3. 'S' ITEMS IN SPEECH EVENTS

3.1. SELECTIONAL CRITERIA OR 'DETERMINANTS' OF USE

The criteria or, better, 'determinants' for the selection of 'S' items by a speaker in an utterance are a) personal beliefs, b) company, c) locale, d) role, e) topic, f) mood/attitude.¹⁰ They usually interact to some extent or other in determining the selection.

3.1.1. Personal beliefs

One could, as indicated earlier, predict with almost 100% certainty that a d.P. would in no circumstances use items beyond Category 3, so that here religious belief would be the overruling determinant for an absolute upper limit. Cases in which this determinant fails are rare and do not usually go unremarked, as is borne out by this anecdote from the late 1940's about Mr. Dedman, a member of Prime Minister Ben Chifley's government, retold recently in an Australian newspaper article:

It was at Question Time while [he was] Chifley's Minister for Post-war Reconstruction that a member accused Mr. Dedman of calling him a "bloody bastard".

"It wasn't quite as direct as that, but I had to withdraw [the alleged remark]. Ben was married to a Presbyterian and of course knew that I was a Presbyterian church leader, too.

After Questions [i.e. Question Time] he made a point of consoling me and said the remark would show the other parishioners that I was human and could lose my temper."

(The Australian, 11th May, 1973, p.13)

Whether Mr. Dedman was so readily forgiven his transgression was probably more of a moot point than Mr. Chifley assumed.

There will of course be other speakers who have personal or religious beliefs that preclude them from using higher category 'S' items without their being d.P.'s, e.g. middle class or professional people. Their linguistic behaviour in this respect might be predictable on the assumption that they would consider that 'swearing is not respectable', but the predictability of behaviour arising from such a social belief would not be expected to be as high as that arising from Protestant religious belief.

It was mentioned earlier that women were not expected to use 'S' items beyond Category 3. This might at first appear to be related to role but seems rather to be founded on the social belief that 'ladies (i.e. self-respecting women of any class) do not swear'. Again, however, the predictability of behaviour is not as high as if it is

motivated by religious belief, that is to say, it is more predictable that a d.P. male will not 'swear' than that a woman who is not a d.P. will not.

3.1.2. 'Company'

The next most powerful determinant is probably 'company'. In choosing to adopt this word as a technical term here I am using it in a sense close to its non-technical one, viz. it includes both addressees, i.e. those who from the speaker's point of view have a right to be listening, and 'hearers', i.e. those whom the speaker is not necessarily intending to address but who may be within sufficient earshot to hear and understand him to some degree or other. The principle of not 'swearing in front of women and children' would normally be a reference to the former circumstance and as such suffice to cause the user of higher category 'S' items to restrict his use of them to below Category 4. The latter circumstance, which could be expressed in the principle of not 'swearing when women and children are about', might well be a weaker aspect of this determinant in that the speaker may feel that since they are not addressees they have no right to be listening anyway.

3.1.3. Locale

Locale may be an important determinant when the two foregoing determinants are held constant. For instance, a Protestant clergyman may never, because of his religious beliefs, exceed Category 3, may restrict himself to Category 0 and 1 items in the presence of female believers and children, but limit himself to Category 0 items or, more likely, even exclude 'S' items from his linguistic behaviour altogether when conducting a service in his church. On the other hand, a group of male members of a certain lodge might be expected to limit or avoid the use of 'S' items during their lodge ritual but use high category 'S' items in their drinking session afterwards. The pub is normally considered an appropriate locale for the use of Category 6 items.

Fishman has drawn attention to the importance of locale in linguistic behaviour generally and his example of the clergyman at the racetrack throws up an interesting instance of the clash of determinants (Fishman 1972a:21f.).

3.1.4. Role

Role is often difficult to distinguish from company and locale. For example, a teacher may confine himself to low category items in the classroom in the presence of his pupils, but he may allow himself higher

category items in the staffroom among other male teachers. Is this a reflection of different locales, a difference of company or a difference of roles, viz. of teacher and colleague?

The myth of 'mateship' looms large in Australian life and lore and one would expect the role of 'mate' (= 'pal', 'buddy') to be a significant determinant, e.g. 'I always swear when I'm with my mates', but again other determinants like company suggest themselves too. Role does, however, seem to be significant in the phatic use of /gədaɪ jəʊ aʊl bæstəd/ mentioned in 3.2. below.

3.1.5. Topic

Topic is not so much a determinant of category use as of paradigm use. Clearly the use of the items in Table A will be very much determined by the degree to which the activities, parts of the body, etc. denoted by the items there bear on the topic of the utterance. This is not the case with many of the items in Table B, especially those in paradigms a-d, whose occurrence cannot be predicted in terms of topic except insofar as that topic is the expression of disapproval (or, sometimes, approval; cf. 2.2.).

3.1.6. Mood and attitude

Both mood and attitude are to some extent or other reflections of the speaker's emotional state. Usually they are negatively marked, viz. for angry mood or attitude of disapproval, but may, less commonly, be positively marked; thus /jəʊ blɑdɪ bæstəd/ would always be negative, while /jəʊ blɑdɪ bjəʊtɪ/ is positive.¹¹ While they are not predictors of absolute usage, in that religious belief, company, etc. may be stronger determinants of the upper limits of category usage, their strength will normally predict the category used by a speaker within his own range in a given utterance situation. Thus a 'hard swearer', i.e. a speaker who characteristically uses 'S' items from the high categories, will use Category 6 items as a reflection of an intensely negative mood or attitude. This was, of course, implicit in our suggestion above that 'vehemence' could be quantified over essentially the same scale as taboo (2.2.). Such quantification breaks down, however, when we consider that some speakers are precluded by other determinants from using certain categories. Used by a d.P. a Category 3 item may reflect the same degree of 'vehemence' as a 'hard swearer's' Category 6 item, for whom the Category 3 item might be very mild indeed. Moreover, in some cases, such as in the newspaper anecdote quoted above in the case of women, the intensity of mood or attitude

may be sufficient to overcome determinants like 'belief' and 'company' and cause the speaker to select from a category - usually 4 - that he would never normally draw upon; this in turn will, to 'company' acquainted with the speaker's range, be far more revelatory of 'vehemence' loading than would a Category 6 item used by a 'hard swearer', who may have to resort to unusual or striking collocations or to exaggerated phonetic and intonational features as a vehicle for his vehemence. The following single example may suffice to illustrate all three of these

[dʒəi::zəz fə::k^hən k^hər:aist^h].
14 1 14 1 1 14

In this utterance, which is an elaboration of the Table B:f5 item boosted to Category 6 by the inclusion of the element /fak/, each of the underlined syllables is a tonic (whereas usually only the last would be) and, taking the normal intonation points as 1 - low, 2 - mid, and 3 - high, there is a rising tone on each from low to beyond the normal high. The shwa-containing syllables (note the extraordinary insertion of shwa into the last word) drop back to the low in each case.

While mood and attitude are normally determinants in the use of the 'figurative' items of Table B rather than of the 'literal' items of Table A, they may sometimes play a part in the selection of the latter. For example, a speaker wishing to instruct the addressee to stand up may begin by saying /get af jə bæihəind/, and if ignored may repeat the instruction with a greater 'vehemence' loading by saying /get af joər æs/, which may, in turn, be realized with an even higher 'vehemence' loading as [get af joə ?æs], i.e. using a glottal stop, which is neither a phoneme nor even normally a phonetic feature of Australian English.

These then are some at least of the determinants underlying the Australian English speaker's expectations of who will swear how and when.

3.2. SPEECH FUNCTIONS AND 'S' ITEMS

The foregoing discussion of determinants leads us readily into a consideration of the function of 'S' items in speech events. To do this it seems most useful to employ the now widely regarded set of six categories developed by Roman Jakobson (Jakobson, 1960). (The elaboration of these by Hymes - as outlined in Hymes, 1972:37f. - is unnecessarily delicate for 'S' language, though a couple of his terms are preferable to those put forward by Jakobson.) Jakobson's terms were,

of course, created for the characterization of utterances, not individual lexical items, and so would be more applicable to the schemata, particularly the sentence schemata, presented in Taylor, forthcoming. We can, however, use Jakobson's categories to some extent to indicate the function of 'S' items within utterances they occur in.

The Table A items are capable of functioning referentially and may vary from being strongly referential to being weakly referential depending on the utterance itself. For example, some years ago in Balmain I overheard the following snatch of conversation from two teenagers:

A: /wat də ðaɪ dəu/

B: /ðaɪ fak/.

From this I deduced little more than that some persons copulated regularly. Had I heard only an utterance /ðeə faken/, I would have assumed that some persons were copulating at that moment. If, however, I had heard an utterance /ðeə faken daɪgauz/, I would not have assumed that the speaker was saying the equivalent of 'They're Italians who copulate/are copulating' (though it would be possible to take it as 'They're copulating with Italians'), but simply the equivalent of 'They're Italians and I don't like them/Italians'. In the former two utterances the element /fak/ is strongly referential, in the last one, however, it is only weakly referential, and the emotive, or expressive, function comes to the fore, as the 'S' item /faken/ is here little more than an attitude or mood marker, i.e. it reveals the feelings of the speaker towards the referent of the NP.

I once encountered what I consider a pure example of the expressive function of this particular element when I was working in a Balmain factory. An elderly employee had been leaning against a pillar behind me for quite some time staring into space, when all of a sudden he uttered [fa::k] and continued to stare into space. My conclusion at the time was that he must have been trying to 'get something off his chest', i.e. it was a cathartic utterance without any referent identifiable to his audience (who, on this occasion, were not even addressees).

Thus Table B items will almost always have a more or less strongly expressive function, whereas Table A items will tend to be strongly referential, e.g. /dɪd jə hɪət jər æs/, rather than strongly expressive, e.g. /get əf joər æs/.

Where they occur in structures involving the vocative or the imperative and focussing on the addressee, 'S' items - chiefly those from Table B - will usually have a conative, or directive, function. Thus the 'true imperative schemata'¹² are strongly directive, e.g. /(gau

ən) get fakt/ and /gau tə bagəri/, as are the imperative forms of the Table B:j items, e.g. /pis af/, for all of these mean simply 'go away', but they are at the same time more or less strongly expressive. The same blend of functions occurs in such apparently sentential utterances as /jəu bæstəd/.¹³ The 'pseudo-imperative schemata'¹⁴, on the other hand, are not directive but expressive (and, incidentally, referential), e.g. /fak smiθ/, meaning little more than 'I disapprove strongly of Smith', and /bage məi if all iet im kam/, meaning 'I certainly will not let him come'. These schemata would, in fact, be more accurately described if they were called 'pseudo-directive' rather than 'pseudo-imperative'.

In certain locales the use of 'S' items may have a phatic function. The very frequent use of high category items, especially the Category 6 ones, in the pub for instance seems not to be so much expressive in function but rather a sign of group solidarity, i.e. 'here we men can use men's language in an exclusively men's locale.' One informant in fact told me: "If you don't use it, they'll think there's something funny about you."

Some unexpected uses of 'S' items can probably be explained best in terms of the phatic function. If a man greets a friend with the words /gədaɪ jəu aʊl bæstəd/, this is interpreted as a positive, not a negative attitude marker and seems to imply 'we're such good mates that I can use a word to you that would cause a fight with someone else'; the apparent paradox serves as a sign of group solidarity.

There are times when a poetic function is also discernible in 'S' items. The use of certain collocations and the avoidance of others¹⁵ suggest this. Examples are the use of assonance in the quasi-proper nouns /fæstaəs/ and /bagəlagz/ or the rhyme in the strongly directive pseudo-vocative cum pseudo-question utterance /smæst faet | əu bliə jəu/ (which is little more than an attitude marker addressed to a person who has 'spoken out of turn'). When people praise others or, more usually in my experience, themselves as 'great swearers', this is probably ideally a reference to the ability to combine items poetically in a stretch of discourse, but on examination may be referring to little more than the (often monotonous) frequency of occurrence of 'S' items, especially high category ones, in the discourse.

This seems to exhaust the possible functions of 'S' items as such, but it is worth repeating in this context that there is a body of items that can function metalinguistically to refer to 'S' items, though they are not themselves 'S' items, thus 'swear', 'swearword', 'harmless language',....., 'filthy language', along with a plethora of legal terms such as 'obscene language', 'indecent language', 'unseemly language', etc.

3.3. 'S' ITEMS AND INDEXICAL INFORMATION

It will have been implicit in much of the discussion so far that the presence of 'S' items in a piece of discourse will provide the hearers with a certain amount of indexical information. For example, if someone is heard to use 'S' items beyond Category 3, a d.P. will inevitably conclude that the speaker is not a fellow-believer. That the speaker is not a d.P. will also be apparent to non-believers, who are usually aware of the linguistic strictures on the d.P. (not least because he will try to impose them on them, too), and will be expressed in some such observation as: 'he can't be religious (or: a churchgoer), he swears'. Conversely, a speaker who does not use high category 'S' items, particularly in appropriate company or locales, may well be assumed to be a fellow-believer by the d.P. and 'religious' (if not 'a bit funny') by others.

During the period in question it was not at all uncommon to hear a woman say words to the effect: 'My girl's going with a nice boy: he doesn't drink, smoke or swear'. Thus the non-use of 'S' items, as well as suggesting religious affiliation, could indicate to some hearers the speaker's possession of certain acceptable social attitudes, while the use of them would mark him as socially undesirable. In other company and particularly in certain locales such as the pub, as we have already observed, the failure to use the higher category items would indicate a kind of social deviance, a failure to identify with the group.

Finally, the use of 'S' items, especially from Table B, provides information about the speaker's mood or attitude, though the accuracy with which this is interpreted by the hearer will depend on his being acquainted with the range of categories within which the speaker customarily operates (as in 3.1.1., where Mr. Chifley's assumption that Mr. Dedman 'lost his temper' seems to be based on the category of 'S' items he used). Phonetic and intonational effects of the kind mentioned in 3.1.6. may be involved in his interpretation too, of course.

4. CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in this essay to apply or adapt established frameworks and to suggest new ones for the sociolinguistic description of an important but neglected part of the spoken English language. If native speakers find the conclusions drawn trivial, because obvious, non-native users of English, who can suffer in a number of ways for their ignorance of the subtleties of 'S' language, may be grateful for the insights offered.

SYMBOLS USED IN TRANSCRIPTION

PHONEMES

(1) Consonants:

p as in pay
 t tea
 c cheese
 k key
 b bay
 d day

 g gay
 f fee
 θ think
 s see
 ʃ she
 v vow
 ð though
 z zone
 ʒ rouge
 m sum
 n sun
 ŋ sung
 w wet
 l let
 r rot

 j yacht
 h hot

(2) Vowels:

i as in pit
 e pet
 æ pat
 ɪ See (3) below
 ə potato
 a putt
 u put
 o See (3) below
 ʌ pot

(3) Vowel combinations:

eɪ as in bee
 aɪ bay
 oɪ boy
 aɪ buy
 əu boo
 au beau
 əu bough

 iə beer
 eə bare
 æə bad
 ɪə burr
 aə bar
 uə endure
 oə bore
 ʌə gone

TABLE A
'LITERAL' USES OF 'S' ITEMS

	taboo load	copulate (with)	masturbate	female pudenda	female breasts	penis	testes	buttocks/ /anus	defecate	pl. faeces/ sg. /faex	n. anal wind/ v. /break wind	n. urine/ v. /urinate	male homo- sexual
	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	
← 'swearwords' →	6	fak		kant									
	5	rəut ʃæŋ		twat	tits	prik	boəlz	aəs /'aəsaul	ʃit	ʃit/ /tiəd	faət	pis	
	4	staf (skrəu)	frig	(colt) (snæc)	(bəubz)	kak stif } = penis stifi } erectus	kadz	bam /(h)aul	pup	pup/			puf puf
	3	(lai)	pul			hoən stoək təul (dɑŋk)	nats	dait /kræk	kæk	kæk/	paŋ		kwəln
← 'quasi-swearwords' →	2			pusi	hedlɔits	dik fæt = penis erectus	nækəz	aikə bæk'said/	(kræp)	(kræp)	flaf	/ləik /hæv ə ləik	
	1	dəu		fəni	təits	tami tasəl 'sasidʒ	baləks staunz	bəi'haind batəm	(hæv ə kræʃ)	/naget	/drap wan	pəl pidəl	(feəri)
	0	hæv			cest	diki		bəhaind ramp/	pəu	biznəs/ pəu/ 'pəupəu/ nambe təu/	/malk ə smel	wəl 'wəiwəl/ widəl /wet nambe wan	

NOTES: (A) Brackets around an item indicate that it was not part of the language specified in the Introduction.

(B) In paradigms g and i-k the absence of a 'slash' indicates the item has both meanings specified.

(C) Syllables preceded by ' are stressed where not otherwise obvious.

TABLE 8
'FIGURATIVE' USES OF 'S' ITEMS

	taboo load	attitude or mood markers				'nonsense' noun/ /exclamation	exclamation of (a) surprise (b) disgust (c) disappointment	verb 'break'	verb: 'ruin' noun: 'chaos'	verb 'dither'	verb 'go away'
		noun + animate	noun (+ human?) + male	noun (+ human?) + female	adj./adv.						
		a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
↑ 'swearwords'	6	kant			fakən		fak	fak	fak ap	fak {əbæut ərəʊnd}	fak af
	5	baestəd	tʃəd pufte puf prik			'bulʃit	ʃit kraist	rəʊt	aəs ap (not noun, but pred. adj.)	aəs {əbæut ərəʊnd}	pis af
	4	bagə	pʰæv	slat	bladi	pup	dʒəlzəz	bagə	bager ap	'bagərəlz (t əərəʊnd)	bager 'af
↑ 'quasi-swearwords'	3	bladʒə		bic	frigen	krəp	gad dʒəiz	frɪg	frɪg ap	frɪg {əbæut ərəʊnd}	soəf
	2	swain rət stɪŋkə	mæŋgrəl həʊnd	taət	blæstəd stɪŋkən	/boəlz (exclam.)	goəd blæst (b & c) goəd strəʊθ hel				
	1	dag kəʊ pɪg kəʊt bɛɪ deʊəl	mæŋ	wɪc bæəg	rətən bɛɪ dæm(d) flaɪmən	bul /bələks (exclam.)	strəʊθ kraɪps straɪk blaɪmɪ dæm (b & c)		boəlz ap	mak {əbæut ərəʊnd}	bɛɪt 'ɪt
	0	bɛɪst beɡə			bləʊmən blɪŋkən blesəd dʒəli fləpən flɪpən pləri dæm(d) dæʃ(t)	rət traɪp drɪvəl	ɡəʃ dʒəɪ kraɪki kramz help ʃuɡə ʃɪvəz ɡəli dʒɪŋɡɪz	dʒɪɡə	dʒɪɡər ap (not noun) bæm ap bæc (ap)	mɒs {əbæut ərəʊnd}	bæz af

N O T E S

1. The original investigation was presented as a paper at the 1973 Conference of the Linguistic Society of Australia. It was subsequently developed into an article on the one hand dealing with the structural and lexical aspects (Taylor, forthcoming) and revised and expanded on the other into a paper dealing with the psycho- and sociolinguistic aspects which was submitted to the Department of Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh. The present essay is extracted from this latter paper. I wish here to thank Dr. R.D. Eagleson (Sydney), Dr. Marlene Norst (Macquarie) and, especially, Dr. Alan Davies (Edinburgh) for their encouragement and advice at various stages.

2. A number of interesting syntactic studies may be found in Zwicky et al., 1971, though most of these, like Quang Phuc Dong, 1971, were written tongue in cheek. E. Sagarin's work (Sagarin, 1969) purports to be based on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (v. *ibid.*:11f.) but, while it brings a wealth of data and a considerable bibliography of published and unpublished material, it is so unsystematic as to be disappointing. A succinct and up-to-date statement of the lexicographical treatment of taboo words is to be found in Burchfield, 1973, though for Australian English one might add Baker, 1945, which is omitted there. Otherwise there are the interesting, if peripheral studies by Haas (1964), which contains an extensive bibliography on taboo in general, and Jaquith (1972). The note by G.W. Turner on the function of bloody in Australian English is also worth mentioning (Turner, 1966:93f.).

3. A not dissimilar biaxial system of lexical items exists in Thai, except that it takes in a much wider range of paradigms than the English one (see Haas, 1964:491).

4. It may be inferred that the categorial axis is in fact a syntagmatic one in that there would be a tendency for items in the same category to collocate in the same utterance. While this might be true for some speakers and situations, the following comment made by Fischer about a somewhat related field of language doubtless holds here too: "Even where the same factor determines the choice of alternants in several series of variants, the breaking point for each series will probably be different" (Fischer, 1964:487). See also Taylor, forthcoming: Section 2.1.

5. Such texts are: Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 19:12; Matthew 12:31; Matthew 5:22,33-37.

6. Nuclear and extended family groups often use lexical items private to themselves for such concepts as 'urine', 'urinate', 'faeces', etc.

7. Some felt there were too many categories and a couple disputed the location of particular items relative to each other. One colleague who agreed fully with my analysis, a linguist whom I had just met for the first time, proved, interestingly, to have had the same early religious training as I had, viz. Fundamentalist Protestant.

8. See Taylor, forthcoming: section 3.4.

9. Cf. Taylor, forthcoming: section 3.4.

10. In setting up this series of what I call 'determinants' I am, of course, adapting and adding to a set of terms already widely used by sociolinguists (cf. Fishman, 1972b;44ff.).

11. See Taylor, forthcoming: section 3.4.

12. Treated in Taylor, forthcoming: section 1.3.3.

13. Taylor, forthcoming: section 1.3.2.

14. Ibid.: section 1.3.4.

15. Ibid.: section 2.

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