

**The use of taboo language in quarrels:
The difference between men and women:
A cross-cultural perspective**

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Abstract

The present study falls within the realms of sociocultural linguistics and pragmatics. It focuses on the exploration of the intersection of taboo language, culture and the social index of gender in contemporary British and Russian drama. Thirty conflict episodes comprise the materials for the present study. The investigation aims at (1) establishing the taboo repertoire (both semantic and functional) employed by men and women having a row in the context of the aforementioned cultures; (2) establishing the correlation between the employment of taboo language and the observation of the politeness constraint.

On the basis of the analysis carried out in the study the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) despite different cultural contexts, the personages demonstrate similar semantic and functional patterns; i.e. the personages (both men and women) involved in conflicts, or quarrels, employ a similar repertoire of taboo items; (2) a wide spectrum of negative emotions experienced by the personages in the quarrels is rendered through the extensive use of taboo language, whose function is non-interactive, i.e. intended to mirror the speaker's emotional involvement; (3) it can be claimed that face as the most valuable personal

possession is devalorized in both cultures under analysis, politeness as a constraint ensuring communicative concord and comity is not observed.

Keywords

drama, quarrels, taboo language, the social index of gender, cultures

Używanie języka tabu w kłótniach: różnice między mężczyznami i kobietami. Perspektywa międzykulturowa

Abstrakt

Niniejsze badanie mieści się w obszarze językoznawstwa socjokulturowego i pragmatyki. Koncentruje się na badaniu przecięcia się języka tabu, kultury i społecznego wskaźnika płci we współczesnym dramacie brytyjskim i rosyjskim. Materiał do niniejszego badania stanowi trzydzieści epizodów konfliktu. Badanie ma na celu (1) ustalenie repertuaru tabu (zarówno semantycznego, jak i funkcjonalnego) stosowanego przez mężczyzn i kobiety kłócących się w kontekście wyżej wymienionych kultur; (2) ustalenie korelacji między stosowaniem języka tabu a przestrzeganiem ograniczenia grzeczności.

Na podstawie przeprowadzonej analizy można wyciągnąć następujące wnioski: (1) pomimo odmiennych kontekstów kulturowych, osoby wykazują podobne wzorce semantyczne i funkcjonalne, tj. osoby (zarówno kobiety, jak i mężczyźni) zaangażowane w konflikty, czyli kłótnie, posługują się podobnym repertuarem pozycji tabu; (2) szerokie spektrum negatywnych emocji doświadczanych przez osoby w kłótniach jest oddawane poprzez szerokie użycie języka tabu, którego funkcja jest nieinteraktywna, tj. ma odzwierciedlać osobę mówiącą; (3) można stwierdzić, że w obu analizowanych kulturach twarz jako najcenniejsza własność osobista jest dewaloryzowana, a grzeczność jako ograniczenie zapewniające komunikacyjną zgodność i komitywę nie jest przestrzegana.

Słowa kluczowe

dramat, klótnie, język tabu, społeczny indeks płci, kultura

1. Introduction

Having in mind the fact that Otto Jespersen's work "The Woman" saw the light of day in 1922, it can be claimed that research on language and gender has been carried out for at least a century. What is more, the issue has been a source of perennial inspiration for linguists for all these years.

Before the appearance of Robin Lakoff's booklet *Language and Woman's Place* in 1975 academic research was dominated by white, well-educated males, whose androcentrism sprang from a sense that men and people were the same thing (this is sometimes called men-as-norm approach). In her research Lakoff (1975) made the subject of linguistic sexism visible and argued that gender differences in language were directly related to the relative social power of male speakers and relative powerlessness of female speakers. The approach advocated by Lakoff is labelled the deficit approach and it claims to establish something called "women's language". It is definitely Robin Lakoff's investigation that marked a turning point in sociolinguistics and sparked off a spate of further language and gender research. Prolific research in the sphere revealed certain facts concerning the peculiarities of "women's language". Thus, women tend to use more standard forms, that is, more overtly prestigious forms (Holmes 2001: 154–159; Trudgill 1974: 94–95). It is noteworthy that the study into linguistic behaviour in the three largest cities of Lithuania yielded similar results, that is, the number of men that do not have a command of the Lithuanian language being the state language of Lithuania is slightly bigger than that of women (Ramonienė 2010: 281). Women are reported to be more status-conscious. Standard or prestige forms represent linguistic capital which people can use

to increase their value or marketability, whereas vernacular forms preferred by men are associated with masculinity, toughness, coolness and authority (Holmes and Wilson 2017: 174–175). According to Lakoff (1975: 55), women are

supposed to speak more politely than men. This is related to their hypercorrectness in grammar, of course, since it is considered more mannerly in middle-class society to speak ‘properly’, but it goes deeper: Women are the experts at euphemism: more positively, women are the repositories of tact and know the right things to say to other people [...]. Women are supposed to be particularly careful to say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ and to uphold the other social conventions.

However reasonable the author’s observations are, it should be pointed out, that they may seem lacking grounds and basis since the concept of politeness was not clearly defined at that time, and the seminal works in the sphere of pragmatic politeness appeared later.

As the deficit approach is now seen as outdated by researchers, the social constructionist approach is now the prevailing paradigm. Within the realms of the approach, gender identity is seen as a social construct rather than as a “given” social category identical with biological sex. As West and Zimmerman (1987: 4) eloquently put it, speakers should be seen as “doing gender” rather than statically “being a particular gender”. The linguists’ idea was that gender should be understood as the product of social doings, more specifically “as a routine, methodological, and recurring accomplishment” rather than a set of traits or a role.

The present study adopts the social constructionist approach and falls within the realms of interactional sociolinguistics, sociocultural linguistics and pragmatics.

It tends to explore taboo language through the prism of gender differences (within and across Anglo-Saxon and Russian cultures) and politeness being both social and cultural constraint exerting influence on speech practices. The investigation

focuses on the exploration of the intersection of language (taboo language), culture and the social index of gender. It aims at 1) establishing the taboo repertoire (both semantic and functional) employed by men and women having a row in the context of the aforementioned cultures; 2) establishing the correlation between the employment of taboo language and the observation of the politeness constraint.

2. Materials and methodology

Thirty conflict episodes, or quarrels (the longest episode contains 79 lines, the shortest episode contains 5 lines) identified in contemporary British and Russian drama (i.e. plays written by the representatives of *In-Yer-Face* theatre Philip Ridley and David Eldridge and plays written by the representatives of *новая драма* [new drama]¹ Ivan Vyrypayev, the Presniakov Brothers and Aleksey Zhitkovskiy) comprise the sampling for the present study. Contemporary drama (written during two first decades of the 21st century) has been chosen as the materials for the study due to the following reasons: first, it always “forces us to look at ideas and feelings we would normally avoid because they are too painful, too frightening, too unpleasant or too acute” (Sierz 2000: 6); second, drama being a secondary speech genre, which in the process of its formation “absorbs and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communion” (Bakhtin 1986: 62), is the only literary genre which successfully creates the illusion of human interaction taking place *impromptu*.

By a quarrel, or a conflict, defined as a situation “in which actors use conflict behaviour against each other to attain incompatible goals and/or to express their hostility” (Bartos and Wehr 2002: 13) we mean an episode of confrontational or disharmonious interaction among personages (e.g. family members, spouses, friends, lovers) which is initiated by the speaker

¹ Here and further the translation from Russian into English is mine – J.K.

demonstrating his/her hostile or aggressive intention towards the hearer, or when the speaker sends the signal to the hearer concerning the incompatibility of his/her and the hearer's certain cognitive structures.

The qualitative method embracing both the elements of the speech-act approach and the elements of the sociolinguistic approach alongside with the method of non-experimental data collection were applied in the study.

3. Theoretical background

The theoretical background upon which the discussion expands is provided by: first, P. Brown and S. Levinson's (1987) ideas concerning politeness being a constraint observed in human communicative behaviour intended to maintain or enhance communicative concord or comity. The authors' conception of politeness revolves around the notion of *face* as a positive image derived from Erving Hoffman (1967). According to the scholars, it splits into "negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom of imposition" and "positive face: the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of claimed by interactants)" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61). In polite interaction both the speaker's face and the hearer's face have to be attended to, face-threatening acts should be avoided; despite the fact that "the content of face will differ in different cultures" mutual knowledge of members' face and the social necessity to orient oneself to it in interaction, are universal (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61–68); second, the ideas concerning the dimensions intended to measure different cultures with the Uncertainty Avoidance dimension being of great relevance to the study (Hofstede et.al. 2010: 187–234). It is the Uncertainty Avoidance dimension that correlates with expressivity, aggression, and open manifestation of one's emotions; third, semantic and functional categorisation of expletives (Stenström 1991). As for the

semantic classification of taboo items, Stenström divides them into three broad categories – these related to *religion* (*heaven* and *hell*), *sex* and the *human body*.

In terms of the functions expletives can have, Stenström (1991) and Crystal (2019) have similar ideas; thus, Stenström differentiates between *interactive*, or “*reaction signals*”, which show the hearer’s reaction to a message, and “*go-on signals*”, which encourage the current speaker to continue, or indicate social solidarity, and *non-interactive* that are used mainly as emotional amplifiers that give relief to surges of emotional energy. But regardless of whether they have an interactive or non-interactive role, they always mirror the speaker’s emotional involvement to some extent. Crystal (2019: 185), in his turn, highlights two important social functions of swearing, that of social distance, as “when a group of youths display their contempt for social conventions by swearing loudly in public or writing obscene graffiti on walls” and that of marking social solidarity, as “when a group develops identical swearing habits”.

4. Some notes on the term *taboo* and the previous research

Since the study focuses on the use of taboo language, it seems that the term needs further elucidation. As pointed out by Magnus (2011: 5),

the word *taboo* is Tongan in origin and was used in that social framework in rather complicated ways to refer to sacred places reserved for gods, kings, priests and chiefs. The word was borrowed into English by Captain James Cook in his 1777 book *Voyage into the Pacific Ocean*. Whatever the original meaning, it rapidly became used in English to denote something forbidden.

According to Hughes (1991: 462–3), the term has now come to denote “any social indiscretion that ought to be avoided and has acquired the modern meaning of ‘offensive’ and grossly impolite

rather than strictly forbidden”. Various lexical items whose use is restricted due to certain social and cultural constraints may be referred to as expletives, swearing, curse words, obscenities. In order to qualify as swearing, an utterance must violate certain taboos that are or have been regarded as in principle inviolable in the cultures concerned. According to Hughes (1991: 4), “swearing shows a curious convergence of the high and the low, the sacred and the profane. In its early stages swearing was related to the spell, the charm, the curse, forms seeking to invoke a higher power to change the world or support the truthfulness of a claim”. A similar definition of swearing is found in Kusov (2004: 74): “Брань – злоупотребление божественным, так как священное слово используется на „бытовом” уровне в сугубо личных, „корыстных” целях, причем не в отведенное ритуальным актом время на упоминание священного имени” [‘Filthy language is the overindulgence in the divine, since a sacred word is being used in an ‘everyday’ context and serves to achieve one’s personal, ‘selfish’ goals at the moment which is not circumscribed by a ritual act as appropriate for such a word to be uttered’]. Cliff Goddard (2015) emphasizes the fact that “swearing stands at the crossroads of multiple fields of study: pragmatics, including interactional pragmatics and impoliteness studies, sociolinguistics, social history; descriptive linguistics, psycholinguistics, and the philosophy of language”. The linguist differentiates between “swear words” and “curse words” by saying that “for *swear words*, the situation is that someone ‘feels something bad in one moment’, while with *curse words*, the situation is that someone ‘feels something bad towards someone else’. In other words, *swear words* are thought of primarily in terms of ‘venting’ a speaker’s immediate bad feelings, while *curse words* are thought of as being used ‘against’ someone else”, noting, however, that there is that component of “offensiveness” that both curse words and swear words share as “many people feel something bad when they hear words of this kind”. Murphy (2010: 164) emphasizes the uniqueness of curse words “because they

provide an emotional intensity to speech that noncurse words cannot achieve”.

Expletives also fall under the term taboo and are defined by Stenström (1991: 240) as a “set of words and expressions that are sometimes referred to as ‘swearwords’. Words of this type that are totally or partly prohibited in social intercourse are often referred to as ‘taboo words’”.

Crystal’s (2019: 184) definition seems to be congruent with the ones provided earlier. According to the scholar,

a few dozen lexemes comprise the special category of taboo language – items which people avoid using in polite society, either because they believe them harmful or feel them embarrassing or offensive. The possibility of harm may be genuinely thought to exist, in the case of notions to do with and the supernatural, or there may be merely a vague discomfort deriving from half-believed superstition. Embarrassment tends to be associated with the sexual act and its consequences. Offensiveness relates to the various substances exuded by the body, and to the different forms of physical, mental, and social abnormality.

Taboo language, expletives and swearwords have been extensively studied by a number of linguists (Jay 1999, Stenström 1991, McEnery and Xiao (2003) 2004, McEnery 2005, Allan and Burrige 2006, Goddard 2015, Kusov 2004, Zhelvis 1997). Magnus Ljung’s (2011) book *Swearing: A Cross-Cultural Linguistic Study* appears to be a most exhaustive study of the forms, uses, and actual instances of swearing in English and twenty-four other languages of the Germanic, Romance, Slavic, and Finno-Ugric language families, among others. The author elaborates on the subcategories of swearing. He uses the distinction between function and theme as the main aspects of the taxonomy provided in his study. When it comes to gender differences, it is Stenström (1991: 240–242) who investigates into male and female expletive repertoires and concludes that female speakers were more inclined to use expletives related to “heaven”, their expletives were more “other-oriented” as women typically use

expletives to give feedback, whereas men preferred expletives related to “sex” and “hell”, and were more self-oriented thus lending extra weight to their words. Murphy’s (2010) book *Corpus and Sociolinguistics: Investigating Gender and Age in Female Talk* could be given as an example of impressive and thorough study providing an account of the degree of variation in taboo language, in terms of frequency and use, which exists within and across different age groups.

Despite the aforementioned studies into taboo language, it would seem that further cross-cultural investigation is needed, as research of this kind is extremely scarce.

5. Discussion and results

5.1. Semantic and functional patterns in the English corpus

On the basis of the identified conflicts, or quarrels, in the English corpus (the total number of lines is 466) 74 instances of the use of taboo language (50 were used by the men, 24 were used by the women) have been detected. Semantically, following Stenström’s (1991) classification, the instances found in the male corpus can be attributed to the following categories:

- (1) out of 50 taboo vocabulary items used by the men 28 items pertain to the *sex* category (e.g. *f...cking dirty world, f...ck off, I could f...cking kill you*);
- (2) 14 items pertain to the *body* category (e.g. *there’s not a pissing soul I can call a mate, shit, c...nt*);
- (3) 7 items fall under the category of *religion, hell* in particular (e.g. *bloody hell, What the hell’s this about?*);
- (4) 1 item pertains to the category of *religion, heaven* in particular (e.g. *For God’s sake*).

Semantically the instances found in the female corpus can be attributed to the following categories:

- (1) out of 24 taboo vocabulary items used by the women 11 items pertain to the *sex* category (e.g. *f...cking* that important, that's *f...cking* rich);
- (2) 6 items pertain to the *body* category (e.g. *You are still fart-arsing*, *You are just pissing me off*);
- (3) 2 items pertain to the *religion* category, *hell*, in particular (e.g. *bloody hell*);
- (4) 2 items pertain to the *religion* category, *heaven*, in particular (e.g. *For Christ's sake*, *Jesus*);
- (5) 2 items 'bitch' and 'cow' should be attributed to the animal category, which is not present in Stenström's classification.

It is noteworthy that the items falling under the *sex* and *body* category outnumber the items pertaining to the *religion* category in the corpora of both genders under analysis with women being slightly more sensitive towards religion. The results obtained coincide with the results reported by Murphy (2010: 132–177). According to the author, *f...cking* appears to be the most frequent amplifier in male corpus and the second most frequent in female corpus, what is more, *f...ck* followed by *piss* and *shit* is the most common expletive in the female corpus.

The examples falling under the *religion* category are less numerous, which can be accounted for by the fact that religion as a theme is tabooed to some extent. As pointed out by Hughes (1991: 56), the stronger the taboo, the larger the number of avoidance forms. Thus, for example, the number of euphemistic expressions based on God is quite impressive. The list of euphemisms involving the word God, and the year of their earliest recorded use in the Oxford English Dictionary, would begin with *gog* (1350s), *cokk* (1386), *cod* (1569), and include such later forms as *gosh* (1743), *golly* (1734), *gracious* (1760s), by George (1842), *Drat* (= God rot) (1844), *Doggone* (=God-Damn) (1851), and *Great Scott* (1884). The strongest taboo word, *c...nt*, in its turn, has accumulated around 700 avoidance forms. McEnery (2006: 36) also refers to *c...nt* as the strongest-rated swearword

in English. Two examples of *c...nt* have been detected in the male corpus. It should be pointed out, however, that the word for the female sex organ in Russian is also rated as the strongest. As Zhelvis (2003) points out, «в сравнении с этим словом бледнеет даже пресловутый русский мат в его узком понимании, довольно прочно занявший позиции даже в современной художественной литературе» [‘even the notorious Russian foul language, which has become firmly positioned in contemporary fiction, fades, when compared to this word’]. The reason for such a cross-linguistic coincidence should be looked for in religious and mythical cosmology. According to Kusov (2004: 69),

именно Вода, считавшаяся первоэлементом перерождения, и Рыба-прародительница, являвшаяся верховным божеством у язычников в праиндоевропейскую общность, дали львиную долю семасиологических единиц, используемых в настоящий момент в качестве основы современного инвективного словопотребления ряда индоевропейских языков
[it is Water considered as a basic element of regeneration and Fish the Progenitress being a superior pagan deity in the times of the Proto-Indo-European past that have yielded a huge number of semasiological items now being used as the basis of the contemporary invective vocabulary in a number of Indo-European languages].

Rawson (1989: 107 cited in Zhelvis 2003) traces the word *c...nt* back to the 11th century, and ultimately to the primeval designation of the “quintessence of femininity”, probably, *kuni*, “wife” or “woman” in a hypothetical protolanguage. His other assumption is made on the basis of the Heritage Dictionary; the word could have originated from the Indo-European root *ku-*, which initially had a meaning of “empty space”, “a round object”, “an object embracing something”, “a lump, a protrusion” in Germanic languages.

Bastard and *bollocks* would be among the ones least frequently used and detected only in the male corpus. As Magnus (Magnus 2011: 172) points out, *bastard* came to English via

French ultimately from Latin *bastardus*, itself a derivation from Latin *bastum* “packsaddle”. Like the Old French expression *fiis de bast* “son of the packsaddle”, it suggests that somebody’s father is a mule driver “who uses his saddle for a pillow and is gone by morning” as the *ODE* puts it. It is an etymology which lies close to similar terms in other languages, for instance, Arabic and Mandarin.

In terms of functional definition, it can be claimed that no taboo items were used as “go-on” signals, that is, none of the items were used as an interactive device, what is more, they did not mark social solidarity either.

The function the taboo items fulfilled in the quarrels could be defined as the demonstration of the emotional involvement of the speaker, which could be further divided into: (1) revealing one’s feelings and (2) expressing one’s negative emotions towards the hearer/interlocutor. To put it another way, “taboo words are seen to serve an over-ridingly emotive or expressive function, being used most often to get rid of nervous energy when under stress, especially when one is angry, frustrated or under stress” (Murphy 2010: 168).

When it comes to revealing one’s feelings, the taboo items function as a part of “emotion leakage”, which is referred to as face-threatening act damaging one’s positive face (Brown and Levinson 1987: 68). The expression of one’s negative feelings towards the hearer embraces such speech acts as the speech act of insult, criticism, accusation, disapproval and create atmosphere dangerous to the hearer’s positive face. Speech acts of threat and order are said to attack the interlocutor’s negative face. Let us consider the following example:

- (1) BETH: That’s your bloody fault! I was trying to help you and you have to go and cause an argument!
- (2) SHERRY: Why can’t you just let me get on?
- (3) BETH: You *bloody pig-headed cow!*
- (4) SHERRY: You can’t just let me get on with my life!
- (5) BETH: I was just trying to help you.
- (6) SHERRY: You have to interfere.

- (7) BETH: I have just had enough of you, young lady!
 (8) SHERRY: I'm twenty-three years of age, for *Christ's sake*!
 (9) BETH: And you treat this place like a hotel.
 (10) SHERRY: Well, why don't you *fucking* throw me out then?
 (11) BETH: Well, why don't you just pack your bags and go then?
 (D. Eldridge "Summer Begins", act 2, sc. 3, 2005)

Line (3) is an example of the speech act of insult aggravated by the amplifier *bloody*. By performing the act, Beth attacks her daughter's positive face. By expressing her irritation in (10) and making a suggestion spiced with the taboo item *f...cking* Beth threatens her mother's negative face.

According to the Uncertainty-avoidance dimension formulated by Geert Hofstede et al. (2010: 187-234), Russian culture should be regarded as "anxious" and expressive, where emotions are shown openly. Whereas, in Anglo-Saxon culture, on the contrary, aggression and emotions are not supposed to be displayed. Any display of emotions, negative, in particular, is met with social disapproval. The expression of negative emotions when having a row definitely means that taboos are being smashed and politeness norms are being ignored.

5.2. Semantic and functional patterns in the Russian corpus

On the basis of the identified conflicts, or quarrels, in the Russian corpus (the total number of lines is 473) 65 instances of the use of taboo language (44 were used by the men, 21 were used by the women) have been detected. Semantically, following Stenström's (1991) classification, the instances found in the male corpus can be attributed to the following categories:

- (1) out of 65 taboo items 20 fall under the *sex* category (e.g. *е... твою мать, б...дь* 'f...ck');
 (2) 14 pertain to the *body* category (e.g. *на хрен* 'f...ck off', *х...й его знает* 'who the hell knows', *дерьмо* 'shit');

- (3) two items pertain to the *religion* category, *hell*, in particular (e.g. черт ‘devil’); no instances of the items pertaining to *heaven* have been detected;
- (4) eight pejoratives that do not fall under any categories defined by Stenström have been detected in the corpus (сука ‘bitch’, щенок ‘puppy’, пидарас ‘faggot’, идиот ‘idiot’, мудака ‘dickhead’, подонок ‘scoundrel’, сопляк ‘whelp’, тряпка ‘softie, milksop’).

Semantically the instances found in the female corpus can be attributed to the following categories:

- (1) out of 21 taboo vocabulary items used by the women 12 items pertain to the *sex* category (e.g. е... твою мать , б...дь ‘f...ck’, семь е...нутых лет ‘seven f...cken years’);
- (2) four items pertain to the *body* category (e.g. х...ня ‘f...cken shit’);
- (3) no items pertaining to the *religion* category have been detected in the corpus;
- (4) five pejoratives have been detected in the corpus (e.g. урод ‘freak’, дрянь ‘nit’, дура ‘fool’, слюнтяй ‘driveller’).

It is noteworthy that the items falling under the *sex* category outnumber the items pertaining to the *body* and *religion* category with б...дь ‘f...ck’ being the most frequent amplifier in the corpuses of the two genders under analysis. Items falling under the *religion* category are the least frequent and no instances of taboo items referring to *religion* used by women have been detected in the corpus. The importance of religion for “anxious” cultures is undisputable, since it “is a way of relating to the transcendental forces that are assumed to control people’s personal future. Religion helps followers to accept the uncertainties against which one cannot defend oneself” (Hofstede et. al. 2010: 189). Most probably, this fact could account for a certain degree of sensitivity of Russian culture towards religious topics and their being taboo.

In terms of *functional* definition it can be claimed that no taboo items in the Russian corpus were used as “go-on” signals, that is, none of the items were used as an interactive device, what is more, they did not mark social solidarity either.

The function the taboo items fulfilled in quarrels could be defined as the demonstration of the emotional involvement of the speaker, which could be further divided into: (1) revealing one’s feelings and (2) expressing one’s negative emotions towards the hearer (primarily through the use of pejoratives). Let us consider the following example:

(1) ОТЕЦ: Да как ты смеешь?

(2) СЫН: Засадить Ларисе Петровне! Да чему ты вообще можешь меня научить? Врать? Плевать на семью? Да меня тошнит от этого, прям в эту яму тошнит!

(3) ОТЕЦ: Что ты в этом понимаешь, *щенок*!

(4) СЫН: А что тут понимать? Что? Говно вы все. Вот что я понимаю. Все вы мужики – говно. Фрезеровщики, токари, офицеры, инженеры, футболисты – все вы врете! Врете всю жизнь!

(5) ОТЕЦ: Тряпка! Ты, тряпка, молчи!

(6) СЫН: Лучше быть тряпкой, чем говном!
Отец берет лопату замахивается на сына.

(7) ОТЕЦ: Я тебя сейчас!..

(8) СЫН: Ну, давай, давай! Заруби меня здесь!

(9) ОТЕЦ: И зарублю! Зарублю!

(10) СЫН: Давай, руби!

(11) ОТЕЦ: Зарублю!

(А. Житковский «Посадить дерево», сцена 1, 2015)²

² (1) FATHER: How dare you?

(2) SON: You fucked Larisa Petrovna! What can you teach me? How to lie? How not to take care after your family? I am fed up with all this stuff.

(3) FATHER: You don’t get the point, whelp!

(4) SON: What point should I get? You all are a shit. That’s what I understand. All men are a shit. Millers, turners, officers, engineers, footballers; you all lie! You’ve been lying all your life!

(5) FATHER: Milksop! You, milksop, just shut up!

(6) SON: It’s better to be a milksop than a shit!

The father takes a shovel and tries to take a swing at the son.

(7) FATHER: I’ll...!

Lines (3) and (4) are mutual father's and son's positive face attacks. The father uses the pejorative *щенок* 'whelp', 'puppy', whereas the son employs the scatologism *говно* 'shit'. Both items indicate a certain degree of anger and irritation.

Despite the fact that Russian culture is more tolerant towards open demonstration of emotions, it is taboo vocabulary that matters a lot. As pointed out by Zhelvis (1997),

профанизация речи, обращенной к оппоненту, это, как правило, средство унижить оппонента, выразив свое презрение к нему. Чтобы добиться этого всего говорящий стремится эмоционально расцветить высказывание, придав ему своеобразные непристойные «детонирующие запятые» [‘profaning the speech directed at the opponent is, as a rule, a means to humiliate the opponent by expressing one’s contempt towards him/her. In order to achieve this, the speaker attempts to colour his words by adding certain indecent ‘detonating’ commas’].

What is more, it should be pointed out that when performing speech acts of insult, criticism and accusation Russian interactants employed a wider spectrum of pejoratives calling the hearer names. These are examples of linguistic behavior that can be hardly referred to as polite. It is noteworthy that Russian interlocutors demonstrated a tendency towards “weaker” expletives and used a number of euphemisms (e.g. *хер* ‘willie’, *гребаный* ‘bloody’, *трындец* ‘sharks’).

6. Conclusions

On the basis of the analysis carried out in the study the following conclusions can be drawn:

(8) SON: Go ahead! Go, go! Just chop me down!

(9) FATHER: I will! I will!

(10) SON: Do it!

(11) FATHER: I will! (A.Zhitkovsky “To Plant a Tree”, sc. 1, 2015)

(1) Despite different cultural contexts, the fact that Anglo-Saxon and Russian cultures score differently on the Uncertainty Avoidance dimension and the supposedly different content of face in the two cultures, the personages demonstrate similar semantic and functional patterns; i.e. the personages (both the men and the women) involved in conflicts, or quarrels, employ a similar repertoire of expletives: a) taboo items falling under the *sex* and *body* categories outnumber the taboo items in the *religion* category in both corpora under analysis; b) taboo items pertaining to the *religion* category are the least numerous in both corpora and include both items falling under the *heaven* category (used by the women in the English corpus), the *heaven* and *hell* category (used by the men in the English corpus), the *hell* category (used by the men in the Russian corpus); the absence of the strongest-rated taboo item (i.e. the item naming the female sex organ), the tendency towards the use of “weaker” expletives and a wider spectrum of pejoratives in the Russian corpus should be attributed to culture particulars.

(2) a wide spectrum of negative emotions experienced by the personages in the quarrels is rendered through the extensive use of taboo language, whose function is non-interactive, i.e. intended to mirror the speaker’s emotional involvement.

(3) it can be claimed that face as the most valuable personal possession is devalorized in both cultures under analysis; politeness as a constraint ensuring communicative concord and comity is not observed. When it comes to revealing one’s feelings, the taboo items function as a part of “emotion leakage”, which is referred to as a face-threatening act damaging one’s positive face. The expression of one’s negative feelings towards the hearer embraces such speech acts as the speech act of insult, criticism, accusation, disapproval and create the atmosphere dangerous to his/her positive face. Speech acts of threat and order are said to attack the hearer’s negative face.

The reason for the symmetry discussed above may lie in the fact that the cultures and languages under analysis are not typologically and geographically distant. On the other hand, such a symmetry may be pre-conditioned by the atmosphere of the epoch with its social anomy and aggressiveness; it can also be accounted for just by the manifestation of the biological human essence.

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