

Title

Should Swear Words be Taught in English Language Classrooms?

Abstract

This study contributes to the debate over the potential value of pragmatic L2 swearing knowledge in TESL by introducing an updated measure of swearing pragmatic competence. The relationship between L2 pragmatic swearing competence and learners' interest in developing knowledge of English swearing is explored.

Summary

Second language learners often lack knowledge of L2 swear words, their appropriateness, and pragmatic function. Competence in L2 swearing is important in order for learners to be able to express themselves expertly and understand others' emotions precisely (Dewaele, 2010). However, taboo language is rarely included explicitly in L2 curricula due to its controversial nature (Liyanage, 2015). This presentation addresses a gap in the literature concerning what second language users actually know about swearing in their L2. Some studies, such as Jay and Janschewitz (2008) and Kapoor (2014), have attempted to determine learners' receptive swearing competence; however, the present study (in progress) employs an updated measure of L2 pragmatic swearing competence, utilizing not only the so-called tabooeness of certain swear words, but also the variable of *social distance* (difference in age, gender, and social status between interlocutors [Beers Fägersten, 2012]) in order to investigate the relationship between learners' receptive swearing competence and the perceived value in improving this competence. Baseline data from native English speaking participants will be used to verify ratings by non-native speakers of the likelihood of swear words to be used in certain contexts in which social distance between interlocutors, location of the incident, and tone of the swearing utterance have been specified (all variables found to significantly affect the use or non-use of swear words [Beers Fägersten, 2012]). The non-native speakers will also complete a survey indicating their interest in learning about swear words and their perceived value in developing this competence. It is hypothesized that there will be a significant gap between learners' swearing competence and their desire to learn how to swear, offering support that swearing should be taught in English language classrooms. Implications toward the potential value of teaching L2 swearing competence will be of interest to ESL/EFL teachers and curriculum designers.