



School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Final Year Project

**Not so “chee bai” anymore:  
a look at Hokkien swear words in Singapore  
and how they have changed over time**

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To my grandparents, this is for you.

## Abstract

Swear words can be found in the lexicon of many natural languages. They can convey meaning and like any other language component which can convey meaning, are subject to change. Semantic change will thus be the focus of this study which seeks to identify and explore the diachronic change of Hokkien swear words in Singapore through comparing the way they are perceived and used by first, second and third generation ethnic Chinese Singaporeans. This study has found that the swear word inventory of the third generation respondents has decreased significantly compared to the inventory of the first generation respondents. Many swear words have either weakened/ ameliorated to become normal words and/or have left the Hokkien lexicon entirely within a single generation. These swear words are generally those that violate one taboo. Those that are loaded (i.e violate more than one taboo) seem to be more resistant to forces of change. Yet the study shows that they are undergoing some sort of semantic weakening as well; in that they are no longer able to express the same intensity of anger as before. Swear words which start out as innovations in the second generation have also failed to be transmitted successfully to the third generation. These changes, as I go on to argue in the paper, can be largely attributed to the occurrence of language shift in Singapore.

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# 1. Introduction

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*“Ay, ay, the best terms will grow obsolete: damns have had their day”*

*- Richard Brinsley Sheridan, The Rivals, 1775*

A natural part of language, swearwords, can be found in most, if not all, the languages of the world (Ljung, 1984 cited in Karjalainen, 2002). Essentially taboo words that are used specifically by a speaker to swear i.e. to express his own emotional state and to convey this information to others (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008), swear words, like all other components of language are susceptible to change. Swearwords have this propensity for change because they can convey meaning; allowing them to be adapted by speakers to suit changing communicative needs (Wang, Language Change, 1976).

This study seeks to identify and explore the diachronic change of Hokkien swear words in Singapore through comparing the way they are perceived and used by first, second and third generation ethnic Chinese Singaporeans.

This study has found that Hokkien swear words have undergone semantic change: more specifically semantic weakening. Many of these swearwords also tend to leave the swear word lexicon all together. This change, which I argue is a consequence of language shift, is rapid and can occur within a single generation, affecting the swearing practices of the younger generation.

Because swear words are often conflated with taboo language and not really differentiated from the other classes of words that can also be found in the taboo language lexicon (Andersson & Trudgill, 1991; De Klerk, 1991; Hughes, 1992); it is imperative to first define what swear words are before delving any further into the study. This will be covered in section 2. Section 3 will discuss swearing and how swear words are used.

## 2. Defining swear words

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This paper adopts the definition of swearwords put forth by Andersson & Trudgill (2007), who define swear words as words that:

- i) refer to something taboo/stigmatised (refer to section 2.1)
- ii) are not be interpreted literally (refer to section 2.2) and
- iii) express strong emotions/attitudes (refer to section 2.3)

The reminder of this section will elaborate on each of these defining characteristics further.

### 2.1. Taboos reflected in Swear words

Since swear words are in essence taboo words, they naturally contain an overt taboo reference. This section will examine how taboo language and therefore swear words are formed. Since the way swear words are formed have a direct effect on their semantic content, understanding how they are formed is crucial in understanding how swear words are used (refer to section 3.2) .

A taboo is a restrictive behavioural norm that prohibits people from doing certain things which are believed to cause one discomfort, harm, or injury (Allan & Burrige, 2006). Swearwords mostly stem from a deep rooted ideological belief that is passed down from one generation to the next (Han, 2008) .

Taboo words are formed precisely because they are used to talk about taboo matters. Initially starting out as “normal” words, many words eventually become tainted by association and over time, become taboos themselves (Allan & Burrige, 2006). This results in the creation of taboo language which refers to words or expressions that are completely or partially prohibited in society (Murphy, 2009).The taboo lexicon, broadly defined, includes profanities, vulgarities, sexual terms, racial epithets, and other insults (Janschewitz, 2008).

Just as much as a language can influence culture, so can culture influence language. Taboo words being linguistic manifestations of social taboos (Karjalainen, 2002; Adeyanju, 2008)

can thus reveal and reflect a society's norms. This is in many ways similar to Croft (2001)'s idea of semantic relativity: that the semantic structure of a language reflects in some way the structure of experience and the perspective the speaker imposes on the world that the speaker imposes. Taboo language therefore reflects what a culture accepts and rejects; shedding light on its speakers' thoughts and attitude towards major forces which they perceive have the ability to sustain, alter and threaten life (Adeyanju, 2008; Hughes, 2006).

Taboo words are also highly culture specific. Every culture has its own set of "unmentionables". As long as one engages in discourse and communication, regardless in the public or private sphere, one is not immune to the effects of socialization and automatically participates in such regimes of value (Irvine, 2011).

The influence of societal factors on how words become taboo is captured in diagram 1 below.

Macrocontext refers to the social environment in which a word gains a socially engendered connotation either as sacred or filthy. This additional meaning is recognized by the speech community and adhered to accordingly. Macrocontext is determined by societal factors such as social structure, moral norms and religious beliefs and is essentially what determines the creation of a linguistic taboo.

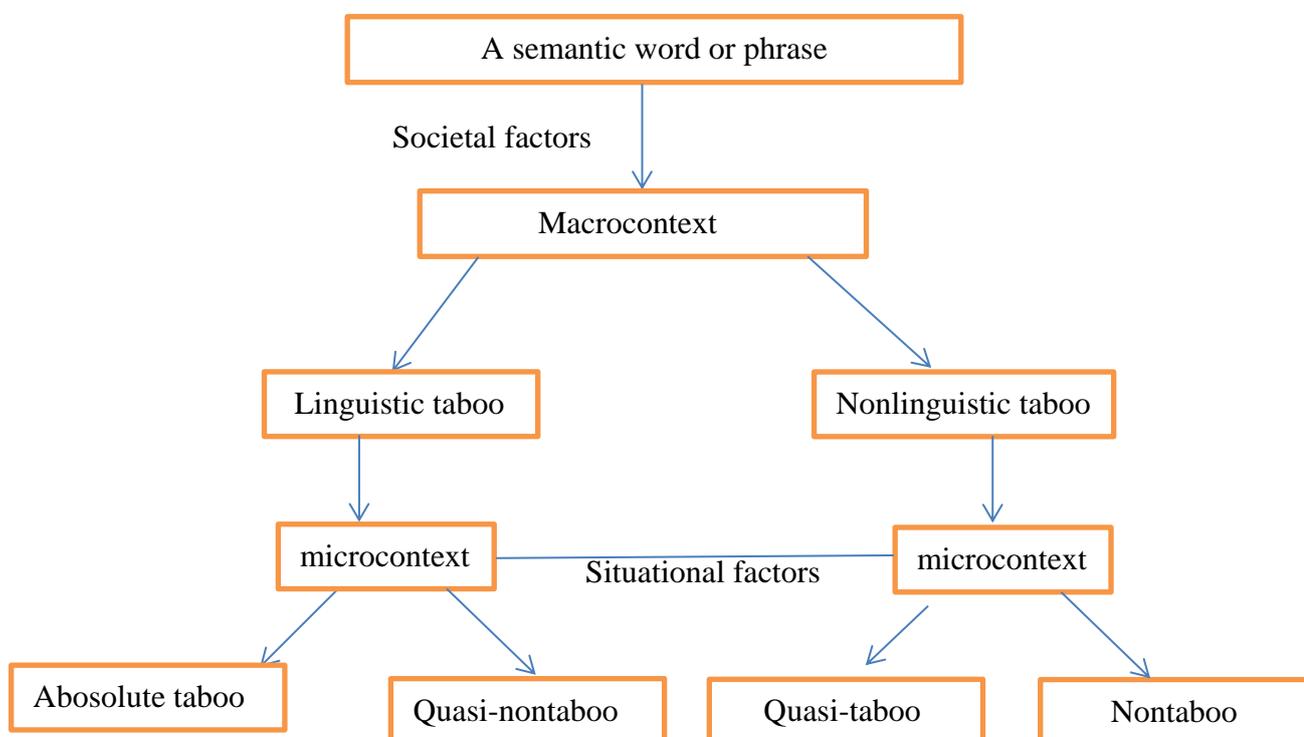


Diagram 1: Framework for linguistic taboo analysis (Huang & Tian, 1990)

Linguistic taboos can be further broken down into absolute taboos and quasi-nontaboos. Quasi-nontaboos are recognized taboo words that are used as if they are non-taboo words in certain microcontexts. Microcontexts are determined by situational factors such as setting and interlocutor relations and refer to the avoidance or use of words with their socially acquired additional connotations in such a way that is flexible and appropriate to the context (Huang & Tian, 1990). The importance of situational and other contextual factors in determining what function a swear word fulfils will be further elaborated in section 3.1.

Chu (2009) suggests that there are certain taboo categories such as excretion, sex and death that are probably universal and these have indeed been found to be the more common taboos found in swear words (Napoli & Hoeksema, 2009).

The following part will examine the specific taboos that can be found in swear words.

### **2.1.1 Types of taboos in swear words**

Ethical and ethno-philosophical concepts tend to be reflected in the lexicon either through words or conceptual metaphors to provide a way for people to think and speak about these experiences (Durst, 2003; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Swear words are no exception and it seems that there are a few main taboos that swear words can invoke and /or norms that they can violate.

While there are many different types of taboo words and phrases, the semantic range of taboo referents is limited in scope (Jay, 2009). Although there have been many proposed classifications for taboos found in swear words, Jay's (2009) framework for classifying these taboos was found to be the most concise and will be adopted in this paper.

These categories have been coded alphabetically and are listed in the second column of the table below. In light of the purposes behind this study, I have also found it useful to break down the sexual reference taboo category further to taboos that contain reference to sexual organs (A1) and sexual intercourse (A2).

Words that fall under categories A through G are socially established macrocontextual taboos while words under categories H and I may be deemed taboo only because of their microcontext.

In order to circumvent language and culture-specific configurations, these norms have been formulated using the semantic primitives proposed by Goddard and Wierzbicka (2002) under the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach and are listed in the third column of table 1.

Index	Taboo category (Jay,2009)	Example (Jay,2009)	Norm
A	Sexual references:		
	A <sup>1</sup> ) Sexual organs	cunt	THERE IS SOME PART OF THE BODY NOT ALL PEOPLE CAN SEE
	A <sup>2</sup> ) Sexual intercourse	blowjob	THERE IS SOMETHING TWO PEOPLE DO NO ONE CAN SEE
B	Religious blasphemy	jesus christ, goddamn	THERE IS SOMETHING GOOD NOT PART OF THIS WORLD
C	Scatological referents	shit,crap	BODY IS GOOD
D	Animal names	pig,bitch	WHEN WE SAY PEOPLE WE THINK OF PEOPLE
E	Ethnic-racial gender insults	nigger,fag	ALL PEOPLE THE SAME
F	Referents to perceived psychological, physical, or social deviations	retard,wimp	ALL PEOPLE THE SAME
G	Ancestral allusions	son of a bitch, bastard	THERE IS PEOPLE YOU FEEL PART OF BECAUSE THERE IS SOMETHING PEOPLE HAVE YOU IMAGINE IS THE SAME ONE YOU HAVE
H	Substandard vulgar terms	fart face, on the rag	Non applicable
I	Offensive slang	tit run, cluster fuck	Non applicable

Table 4: Taboos reflected in swear words

While there are some swear words that are taboo terms in all senses of use, , not all words that contain taboo references are necessarily swear words (Napoli & Hoeksema, 2009).

Take for example the words “shit” and “faeces”: both may refer to the taboo products of bodily excretion but only the word “shit” has the ability to express and elicit an emotional reaction when it is uttered (Karjalainen, 2002) . Clearly then, for a word to qualify as a swear word, it has to go beyond denoting and referring to something taboo (Jay , 2009; Jay, 1981), which brings me to the next characteristic of swear words: non literal usage.

## **2.2 Swear words and non-literal usage**

There are two types of meaning that a word can carry: denotative and connotative. For swear words, the emotional force of these words are more prominent, making connotative meaning more dominant than denotative meaning. Take for instance, when we call someone a bastard, we are not always exactly questioning the legitimacy of his birth but rather expressing a strong negative feeling towards him. Denotative meaning basically refers to the information typically given in a dictionary: the mental representation of a set of objects, characteristics, or events that a word refers to while connotative meaning refers to the affective or emotional representation that a word can evoke; and need not necessarily be due to an association with the word’s denotative meaning (Jay, 1981).

The saliency of a swear word’s connotative meaning enables it to have the ability to elicit and generate strong emotion (Jay & Danks, 1977) which incidentally is the third defining characteristic of swear words to be discussed in the following section. This characteristic is also crucial to the understanding of the functions of swear words and has to be discussed if the use of swear words are to be properly described.

## **2.3 Swear words and emotion**

Studies on swear words have found that swear words have a certain emotional force, an intense quality that accompanies them when they are used (Dewaele, 2004b) and it is this affectation or ability to effect feelings and arouse reactions that is perhaps the distinguishing characteristic of swear words (Janschewitz, 2008; Pavio & Begg, 1981;).

It has been argued that the reason why swear words or taboo words persist is because they add an emotional intensity to interactions that non taboo words cannot (Janschewitz & Jay, 2008 ; Jay,1999). Using taboo words thus allows speakers to express a strong emotional state in symbolic form without resorting to physical action. Swear words can thus occupy a pivotal space on a continuum of emotional communication that ranges from physical expressions of emotion such as screaming or hitting, to abstract, symbolic expressions like sarcastic irony ( Janschewitz & Jay, 2008).

Findings from psychological constructivism studies suggest that emotions are not fundamental or elemental units of the mind but instead are the emergent products of simpler, more versatile components namely : (i) the interaction of the evaluations of one's current state,predictions for the future, and (ii) the outcomes that one experiences after these predictions. Known as appraisals, these different components interact in order to form qualitatively different affective states: if an appraisal changes, the emotional experience changes accordingly (Kirkland & Cunningham, 2012; Ellsworth & Tong, 2006).

Emotions can also guide information-processing, helping to organize and direct one's behaviour and formulate an appropriate response to environmental stimuli (Sokol & Strout, 2006). The action tendency of an experience will thus change when an experiencer undergoes change in his/her emotional experience (Ellsworth & Tong, 2006).

One of the common emotions associated with swearwords is anger (Millwood-Hargrave, 1998) which will be briefly discussed here.

Anger as an emotional experience is basically centred around the occurrence of an unpleasant event. It is primarily understood by means of conceptual metaphor and is conceptualized across languages as some kind of internal pressure inside a container. This "universality" appears to be borne out of universal aspects of human physiological experience . These physiological effects stand metonymically for anger and is related through a cause and effect cognitive model (Kövecses, 2010).

The idea of causation is central to experiencing anger: the experiencer perceives that there is someone (the self or the other) who has caused the situation and deserves to be blamed for it. This is reflected in the other central characteristic of anger which is its associated action

tendency: the urge to attack, to get revenge, to harm the wrongdoer (Ellsworth & Tong, 2006).

The use of swearwords to release this anger will be further discussed in section 3.2.1. We now move on to look at swearing as a speech act.

### 3. Swearing as a speech act

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The ability to generate an emotional response is not only just due to the taboo semantic reference that a swear word contains but the act of swearing as well (Karjalainen, 2002). Since humans are assumed to be polite and inoffensive by default; censoring language and avoiding taboo topics in order to pursue and promote harmony and the well-being of ourselves and others is expected. The use of taboo language is highly marked and seen as a deliberate violation of these norms (Allan & Burrige, 2006 ; Hughes, 2006).

Across all cultures, there is a general consensus about swearing as offensive and complainable behaviour that when committed, is censored because it is deemed to be in violation of some form of social norm (Stapleton, 2010). This attitude is generally institutionalized, making it highly prevalent and consistent throughout many speech communities (Butler & Fitzgerald , 2011).

Three factors that affect swear word attitudes on an individual level are gender, age and socioeconomic status. While the results of the effects of gender and socioeconomic status are mixed, age has consistently been found to have an effect on usage and attitude (Dewaele, 2004a; Murphy, 2009; Schellenberg, 1996; Millwood-Hargrave, 1998; Washington, 2010).

Generally speaking, there are two situations under which swearing can occur: when the speaker is aware (propositional); and when the speaker is not (nonpropositional). Any effect generated by nonpropositional swearing slips is unintentional and any offence taken purely based on the listener's perception of the taboo word and/or the act itself. Propositional swearing on the other hand is done with the intent of creating some sort of impact or effect on the interlocuter ( Janschewitz & Jay, 2008).

Swearing can thus be an active choice on the part of the speaker and this decision whether to swear or not is influenced by considerations of context, which I will elaborate on in the next section.

### **3.1 Swearing and context**

Swearing is very context dependent. In a study done by Beers Fägersten (2007), it was found that expletives were judged by participants to be more offensive when presented in isolation than when they were given some sort of context. Murphy (n.d) and Mcenery & Xiao (2004) have also found that there are certain situations in which speakers exhibited different perceptions of the harshness and strength of the same swear word “fuck” for different situations. These studies show that there are situations where swearing is not only unoffensive but appropriate and acceptable.

The decision to use swear words is calculated and involves the consideration of context in which many pragmatic factors such as: conversational topic, speaker-listener relationship, social-physical setting of the communication and the level of formality of the occasion play a part (Irvine, 2011; Janschewitz & Jay, 2008; Jay T. B., 1981 Murphy, n.d).

Recipient design helps speakers gauge whether their utterance will be appropriately received or not, indicating whether their utterance will achieve what they intend for it to do (Butler & Fitzgerald , 2011). This is knowledge that not only has to be learnt but also requires some form of sociocultural awareness on the part of the interlocutor (Irvine, 2011). Afterall, “when transgression becomes the norm it is no longer transgression; the unmentionable is unmentionable no longer” (Irvine, 2011).

Swearing is a linguistic resource that can help fulfil certain functions (Dewaele, 2004a) listed in the following section.

### **3.2 Functions of swearing**

Swearing fulfils four main functions: firstly, as a means of emotional release, secondly, as a means of intensifying emotion, thirdly, as a means of establishing and maintaining social relations and thirdly, as a means of structuring discourse.

### **3.2.1 Swearing as a means of emotional release**

One of the most common reason why people swear is because it is seen as a means of emotional release (Rassin and Murriss ,2005 ; Johnson,1993). Traditionally associated as a means of catharsis (Stapleton, 2003) , swearing is commonly seen as a means of conveying negative emotion. Montagu(2001) terms the use of swear words as a relief mechanism for expressing tension/stress as “annoyance swearing”,with Jay(2000) even going so far as to suggest that the act of swearing replaces the act of real physical aggression.

However, it is not always the case that swearing only releases negative emotions. It can also convey positive emotions such as surprise, happiness and excitement especially when the swear words are used as intensifiers (Crawford,1995 in Stapleton, 2010).

### **3.2.2 Swearing as a means of intensifying emotion**

Instead of participating in conveying the actual emotion itself, swear words can also act as intensifiers of emotions. This can be seen in the example “she’s a fucking ticket”. Ticket which is slang for a fun person already inherently contains a positive evaluation and the use of “fucking” as an adjective simply serves to amplify this positive evaluation (Murphy, 2009). Such instances of swearing are mostly conversational and need not necessarily be “highly emotional, confrontational, rude or aggressive” ( Janschewitz & Jay, 2008).

### **3.2.3 Swearing as a means of establishing and maintaining social relations**

The use of swearing to maintain and develop social relationships is referred to by Montagu (2001) as “social swearing”. Depending on the group’s community of practice model, swearing can be used to signify membership to a particular social group, or to signal and/or develop in-group solidarity (Baruch & Jenkins, 2007). Swearing can therefore be polite, impolite or even neither (Janschewitz & Jay, 2008). It is polite when it promotes social harmony, as in face building and rude when used to attack someone as in face threatening and neutral when it is seen to be a norm (Hughes, 1992).

### 3.2.4 Swearing as a means of structuring discourse

Swearing can also fulfill a discourse function by helping to organize interactions through the structuring of verbal exchange and turn taking between interlocutors (Drescher, 2000 in Dewaele, 2004). This special pragmatic function of swear words is recognized grammatically in the potential applicability of swear words to a wide range of contexts - without any apparent semantic, syntactic and morphological constraints (Napoli & Hoeksema, 2009).

After establishing the general definitions and use of swear words and swearing, let us now turn our attention to swearing in Singapore and how Hokkien is used to swear.

## 4. Hokkien in Singapore

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Hokkien, also known as Southern Min, is a language originally spoken by Holo (or Hoklo) people who lived in southern Fujian (Chen, 2012). Hokkien speakers form the majority of the Singaporean Chinese diaspora, making Hokkien the lingua franca for the Chinese community which also consisted of Cantonese, Hakka and Teochew speakers, before independence (Conceicao, 2012, Platt, 1985).

However, ever since independence, the Singapore government has put into place policies Mandarin as the new lingua franca for the Chinese community. Along with English, Mandarin is recognised as one of the four official languages of Singapore, making it a language that is not only commonly spoken but also taught in all government schools and used in mass media.

Such strong institutional support has created an unequal power relation between English, Mandarin and the other Chinese vernaculars found in Singapore, resulting in the “dialectizing” of the other Chinese vernaculars (Cavallaro, 2009). Many parents no longer see the need to transmit these heritage languages and have chosen to give them up (Tan, 2006) resulting in a shift towards either English or Mandarin as the home language of the ethnic Chinese community (Gupta & Yeok, 1995; Kwan-Terry, 2000; Wei, Saravanan, & Hoon, J., 1997).

The 2010 census shows that this trend is still very much occurring. For homes that still report using a Chinese vernacular as a home language, a closer look at the breakdown in terms of dialect group shows that Hokkien is still the vernacular with the biggest number of speakers (Cavallaro, 2009). Yet this number has greatly decreased with only a mere 1.6% of this group of speakers who are under 20 years old (Census of Population 2010 Statistical Release 1 Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion , 2010).

Even though Hokkien as a language is itself no longer widely spoken, Hokkien swear words have become part of the colloquial Singaporean English lexicon. Aside from being used in a Hokkien utterance/ conversation, Hokkien swear words can also be “inserted” (Matras, 2009) into English utterances/ conversations. They are used on a daily basis , by speakers of different ethnicities in a variety of situations (Ong, n.d). A study done by Chua *et al.* (2009) examining the differences across ethnic groups in usage and perception of Hokkien and English swear words in Singapore found despite the ease in which Hokkien swear words can be used interchangeably with English ones, swearing in Hokkien is the result of deliberate choice and is only used when its meaning is deemed to be appropriate.

Featuring very prominently in the conversational discourse of army men and a key component of their shared experience, swearing in Hokkien is therefore something that many Singaporeans are exposed to, regardless of their language background and their proficiency (or lack thereof) in Hokkien.

The unique linguistic situation in Singapore therefore creates an environment for language change to occur which will be explained briefly in the next section.

# 5. Language Change

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Before moving on to discuss the Hokkien swear words used in this study, a short note is in place to explain semantic change and language change in general.

Wang (1976) distinguishes three main areas in which a language can change:

- i) syntax-morphology (how morphemes combine into words and then into sentences)
- ii) semantics (how words change in meaning)
- iii) phonology (how words change in pronunciation)

This study will focus specifically on examining the semantic change of swear words.

## 5.1 Semantic change

Transformations in the meaning and usage of word forms occur when certain contexts or certain meanings become distinguished or more prominent than before (Barsch, 1984). This is known as semantic change or semantic reanalysis (Traugott and Dasher, 2002 in Washington, 2010).

Washington (2010) who in her study of semantic change in African American English distinguished how semantic change can affect the nature and scope of meaning in terms of quantity and quality:

- i) quantitative semantic change - when the number of meanings intended by a particular word is extended (semantic extension) or restricted (semantic restriction)
- ii) qualitative semantic change - when the meaning of the word is elevated such that it becomes more positive (amelioration) or worsened such that it becomes more negative (pejoration)

Not only can these changes act as catalysts for each other, they can also be non-mutually exclusive and can come to affect words in different degrees (Washington, 2010).

Semantic change can be caused by language internal or external factors (Washington, 2010). Language external factors are broadly sociocultural in nature and tend to be the main cause of change in taboo language (Hollmann, n.d ).

Since swear words are “mass cultural concepts” formed based on societal norms and taboos; they will naturally change when social changes take place (Schellenberg, 1996). It has been found that youths nowadays mostly use swearwords that are related to sex and drinking whilst adults mostly use swearwords with religious blasphemous references (Stenström, 1995). Jay (1992) attributes this amelioration of blasphemous swear words to the loss of the power of the church as a result of the increasing secularization of society.

Conducting research on the use of the word “fuck”, Mcenery and Xiao (2004) and Murphy (n.d) have found that not only is it a higher frequency item amongst younger speakers but that this usage has also expanded as well. “Fuck” is now used as a verb, a noun, an adjective, an adverb and an interjection in every day casual conversation.

One reason for this changing mindset can be attributed to the relaxing of profanity codes in music, film, television and other forms of mass media which have pushed the boundaries of expletive use. This has caused a word like “fuck” to be regarded as normal and increasingly acceptable even in mainstream language use, therefore losing its ability to shock (Baruch & Jenkins, 2007; Kaye & Sapolsky, 2005; McEnery & Xiao, 2004; Murphy, n.d.). Viewers also seem to be less offended when hearing it on television than before (Millwood-Hargrave, 2000).

With an increase in global communication and a freer interaction of cultures, the increase in exposure to other cultures also makes it even less of a certainty that a group of people within the same culture would share the same beliefs and ideas about taboos (Schellenberg, 1996). This change and expansion of an individual’s and a culture’s worldview would no doubt have bearings on concepts of taboo, hence affecting swearwords and swearword usage of speakers in that community.

From this we can see how the characteristics of a speech community and its members can affect the outcomes of language change, creating different results even if the process of change is the same across different communities.

## 6. Research hypotheses and goals

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In light of past research into swearwords and semantic change, the following predictions about swearword inventory, meaning, and usage can be made:

- (i) there will be a decrease in the number of words in the swear word inventory of the oldest respondent compared to the youngest respondent
- (ii) for swear words that remain in the swear word inventory of the youngest generation would have undergone some sort of amelioration
- (iii) younger generation respondents use swear words differently from the older generations: there would be an expansion in scope and manner of use

In relation to the above-formulated predictions, this study thus attempts to:

- (i) identify diachronic semantic change of Hokkien swearwords,
- (ii) examine the usage of Hokkien swearwords across three generations, and
- (iii) identify reasons for any intergenerational differences

# 7. Methodology

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This section will first start with a brief description of the procedure of the study (section 7.1) followed by an introduction of the instruments used (section 7.2). I then move on to describe the procedures involved in selecting the words that are tested in this study (section 7.3). A short description of the participants will follow thereafter (section 7.4).

## 7.1 Procedure

Participants were first asked to fill in a questionnaire which they were later interviewed on. The interview was recorded with permission and allowed to be used in this study. Participants were asked to participate in a follow up test two weeks after data collection.

## 7.2 Instruments

There are two main instruments used to gather data in this study: a questionnaire and an interview.

a) Questionnaire - Participants were given a list of 33 potential swearword/phrases and for each were asked the following:

- whether they consider it to be a swear word
- whether it can be used to express happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust or surprise
- whether this word can be used on a male/female subject

b) Interview – Participants were asked questions that were meant to elicit their attitudes towards swearing and Hokkien and their use of each Hokkien testword.

c) Follow-up Questionnaire- Participants were asked to participate in a follow up questionnaire after the collection of data. This questionnaire tested the use of 4 swear words and how participants mapped anger with their usage of each. Basically, three components of

anger were tested: nature of stimulus, appraisal and action tendency. (Refer to appendix for greater detail)

- nature of stimulus – ( $\pm$  time,  $\pm$  intent,  $\pm$ familiarity)

The respondents are given a range of scenarios each testing the presence/ absence of a particular quality and asked to select the one that would best exemplify the situation which would trigger the utterance of the tested swear word.

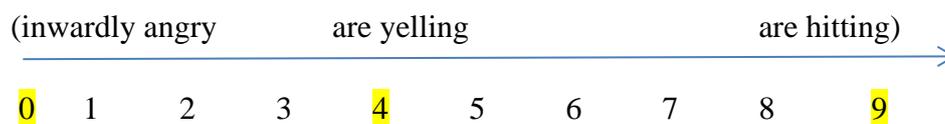
- moral judgement - ( own fault: + , other fault: - , no one's fault: 0)

This question tests the respondent's perception of whether his use of the swear word is justifiable

- action tendencies

This question examines the speaker's intensity of appraisal.

0 refers to anger as a state of mind, 1-3 involves the experiencer considering some form of action, 4 marks the point where the experiencer commits the action of yelling ,5-8 involves the experiencer considering action beyond yelling (hitting) and 9 involves physical hitting.



### 7.3 Test words

Using the popular satirical website [talkingcock.com](http://talkingcock.com) as a guide, a prior study done by Choo (2011) and my own intuitions, I have generated a list of 33 test words to be tested in this study.

The 33 words/ phrases used in this study were separated and classified according to the taboo referents (s) that they semantically reflect (Refer to appendix).

However, not all of the taboo words are perceived to be swear words and only those that are relevant to the study will be presented here.

Each word has been coded to reflect the taboo they carry as well as the grammatical class that they belong to.

The alphabet at the start of each word refers to the taboo norm that they violate. This is consistent with the list of taboo categories found earlier in table 1 in section 2.1.2

The numeral in between the alphabet and the last number refers to the arbitrary position of the word on a list.

The alphabet at the end of each index refers to the grammatical class of the word/phrase:

N for Noun; NP for Noun phrase

V for Verb; VP for Verb phrase

A for Adjective; AP for Adjectival phrase

A<sup>1</sup> (Sexual organs)

Index	Word	IPA	Gloss
A <sup>1</sup> 1N	Chee bai	tei <sup>55</sup> bai <sup>55</sup>	“vagina”
A <sup>1</sup> 3N	Lan cheow	lan <sup>33</sup> teiau <sup>51</sup>	“penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 4N	Lum par	lam <sup>31</sup> pa <sup>55</sup>	“testicles”
A <sup>1</sup> 5NP	Si mi lan cheow	si <sup>55</sup> mi <sup>51</sup> lan <sup>33</sup> teiau <sup>51</sup>	“what, penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 6NP	Wah lan	wa <sup>51</sup> lan <sup>24</sup>	“oh, penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 7AP	Chee teh bin	tei <sup>55</sup> te <sup>51</sup> bin <sup>11</sup>	“pussy face”
A <sup>1</sup> 8AP	Lan lan	lan <sup>51</sup> lan <sup>11</sup>	“penis, penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 9AP	Lan tui	lan <sup>51</sup> tui <sup>33</sup>	“penis split”
A <sup>1</sup> 10AP	Lao lan	lau <sup>51</sup> lan <sup>11</sup>	“leaky penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 11VP	Boh ji	bo <sup>33</sup> tei <sup>51</sup>	“no balls”
A <sup>1</sup> 12VP	Boh Lum Par ji	bo <sup>33</sup> lam <sup>33</sup> pa <sup>55</sup> tei <sup>51</sup>	“no testicles and balls”
A <sup>1</sup> 13VP	Cho bo lan	tso <sup>51</sup> bo <sup>33</sup> lan <sup>33</sup>	“do nothing, penis”

A <sup>1</sup> 14VP	Kana lan neh	kəna lan <sup>24</sup> ne <sup>31</sup>	<i>“just like a penis”</i>
A <sup>1</sup> 15VP	Lam par pah lan	lam <sup>31</sup> pa <sup>55</sup> pa <sup>51</sup> lan <sup>31</sup>	<i>“testicles hitting the penis”</i>

Table 5: Sexual Organ taboos

A<sup>2</sup> (Sexual intercourse)

Index	Word	IPA	Gloss
A <sup>2</sup> 1V	Kan	kan <sup>51</sup>	<i>“fuck”</i>
A <sup>2</sup> 2VP	Buay kan	buei <sup>33</sup> kan <sup>33</sup>	<i>“unable to fuck”</i>
A <sup>2</sup> 3VP	Chui kong lum par song	tsui <sup>33</sup> kəŋ <sup>51</sup> lam <sup>11</sup> pa <sup>55</sup> soŋ <sup>51</sup>	<i>“wanker”</i>
A <sup>2</sup> 4VP	Hong kan	həŋ <sup>51</sup> kan <sup>33</sup>	<i>“wanting to be fucked”</i>
A <sup>2</sup> 5VP	Kan ni na	kan <sup>55</sup> ni <sup>55</sup> na <sup>55</sup>	<i>“fuck you”</i>
A <sup>2</sup> 6VP	Kum lan	kam <sup>33</sup> lan <sup>11</sup>	<i>“suck penis/blow job”</i>

Table 6: Sexual intercourse taboos

## G (Ancestral allusions)

Index	Word	IPA	Gloss
G1N	Chap cheng	tsap <sup>31</sup> tseŋ <sup>55</sup>	<i>“mixed blood”</i>
G3NP	Na beh/ Na bu	na <sup>55</sup> be <sup>51</sup> / na <sup>55</sup> bu <sup>51</sup>	<i>“your father/ your mother”</i>

Table 7: Ancestral allusions taboos

It is perhaps appropriate here to introduce the idea of “taboo loading”. First proposed by Taylor (cited in Schellenberg, 1996) in his study on Australian swear words, “taboo loading” is a term that recognises that within the limited category of swear words, not all are deemed

to carry the same amount of emotional force/ weight as each other (Janschewitz & Jay, 2008; Schellenberg, 1996).

Swear words can thus be said to exist in some sort of relative heirachy or continuum, with speakers ranking each word according to how offensive they perceive the word to be. Taylor (cited in Schellenberg, 1996) proposes that this ranking, which varies across individuals, aids a speaker in selecting which swear word to use. Words that are ranked at a higher level of offensiveness are reserved for use only in extreme situations. (Schellenberg, 1996).

Taylor (1995) also suggests that one way to increase the” taboo loading” of a word would be to combine it with another taboo word giving rise to swear words such as “fucking bitch”, which are more intensely loaded.

A similar thing occurs in Hokkien as well where swear words invoke more than one taboo. These are listed below:

#### A<sup>2</sup>G (Sexual intercourse + Ancestral allusions)

Index	Word	IPA	Gloss
A <sup>2</sup> G1VP	Kan ni na bu	kan <sup>55</sup> ni <sup>55</sup> na <sup>55</sup> bu <sup>51</sup>	“ <i>fuck your mother</i> ”
/	/	/	/
A <sup>2</sup> G1VP	Kan ni na beh	kan <sup>55</sup> ni <sup>55</sup> na <sup>55</sup> be <sup>51</sup>	“ <i>fuck your father</i> ”

Table 8: Sexual intercourse + Ancestral allusions taboos

#### A<sup>1</sup>A<sup>2</sup>G ( Sexual organs + Sexual intercourse + Ancestral allusions)

Index	Word	IPA	Gloss
A <sup>1</sup> A <sup>2</sup> G 1VP	Kan ni na bu chao chee bai	kan <sup>55</sup> ni <sup>55</sup> na <sup>55</sup> bu <sup>51</sup> tsau <sup>51</sup> tei <sup>55</sup> bai <sup>55</sup>	“ <i>fuck your mother’s smelly vagina</i> ”

Table 9: Sexual organs + Sexual intercourse + Ancestral allusions

A<sup>2</sup>D (Sexual intercourse + Animal names)

Index	Word	IPA	Gloss
A <sup>2</sup> D 1VP	Heng kao kan	heŋ <sup>55</sup> kau <sup>51</sup> kan <sup>11</sup>	<i>“to be given to a dog for fucking”</i>

Table 10: Sexual intercourse + Animal names

## 7.4 Participants

Six ethnic Chinese Singaporean participants (two each from the first, second or third generation) were involved in this study.

First generation (G1) participants will be those who are either early migrants themselves or children of earlier migrants. Second generation (G2) participants refer to the offspring of these first generation participants. These speakers typically belong to the generation between the oldest and youngest members of a family unit and speakers belonging to this generation are the parents of the third generation group (G3) of subjects.

Since the focus of this study is to find out how swear words are used it is not mandatory for subjects to be particularly proficient in Hokkien let alone members of the Hokkien dialect group.

The respondents have been coded according the generation they belong to (G1/G2/G3) as well as their gender (M-male, F-female)

## 8. Results

The results section will be divided into two parts. The first part (section 8.1 and 8.2) is concerned with identifying diachronic change. 8.1 will look at the overall effects of diachronic change on the inventory of the given words while 8.2 will assess the type of change that each individual taboo word undergoes.

The second part (section 8.3 and 8.4) examines the intergenerational differences in the usage of swear words. 8.3 will look at the semantic mapping of anger while 8.4 will examine the effect of a word's semantic referent on usage.

### 8.1 Overall change

This section starts with showing the overall collated response of each individual's perception of each individual word: whether or not they perceive each word to be a swear word. The answers were either elicited directly or inferred indirectly from the interview and/or the filling in of a questionnaire.

Out of the 33 test words given, G1 respondents identified 16, G2 identified 8 and G3 identified 4. It seems that overall the swear word inventory of this particular set of 33 taboo words has decreased over time, indicating that some change has indeed occurred.

Table 8 shows the words that both respondents of each generation identify to be swear words. The highlighted swear words are those found in the inventory of all three generations.

G1	G2	G3
A <sup>1</sup> 1N Chee bai	A <sup>1</sup> 1N Chee bai	A <sup>1</sup> 1N Chee bai
A <sup>1</sup> 6NP Wah lan	A <sup>1</sup> 3N Lan cheow	A <sup>2</sup> 5VP Kan ni na
A <sup>1</sup> 9AP Lan tui	A <sup>2</sup> 4VP Hong kan	A <sup>2</sup> G1VP Kan ni na bu/
A <sup>1</sup> 10AP Lao lan	A <sup>2</sup> 5VP Kan ni na	Kan ni na beh
A <sup>1</sup> 12VP Boh Lum Par ji	A <sup>2</sup> G1VP Kan ni na bu/	A <sup>1</sup> A <sup>2</sup> G1VP Kan ni na bu
A <sup>2</sup> 1V Kan	Kan ni na beh	chao chee bai

A <sup>2</sup> VP Buay kan	A <sup>1</sup> A <sup>2</sup> G1VP Kan ni na bu
A <sup>2</sup> 3VP Chui kong lum par song	chao chee bai
A <sup>2</sup> 4VP Hong kan	A <sup>2</sup> D1VP Heng kao kan
A <sup>2</sup> 5VP Kan ni na	
A <sup>2</sup> 6VP Kum lan	
G1N Chap cheng	
G3NP Na beh/ Na bu	
A <sup>2</sup> G1VP Kan ni na bu/ Kan ni na beh	
A <sup>1</sup> A <sup>2</sup> G1VP Kan ni na bu chao chee bai	
A <sup>2</sup> D1VP Heng kao kan	

Table 11: Identified swearwords

Using the NSM formulated norms found in table 1 has led to the identification of two consistent taboo norms that are reflected in the swear word inventory of all three generations. The highlighted swear words in the table above reflect the two taboos of sexual references and ancestral allusions.

In order to better understand why these words are able to cause offence, it is necessary to look at Chinese language and culture which will be the focus of the next section.

### 8.1.1 Taboos in Hokkien swearwords

In a study examining Chinese similes and Metaphors for family, Rosenblatt and Li (2010) found a very consistent trend that describes the family unit positively and celebrates the values of family harmony and compatibility. The family is represented as the core unit or centre of one's world, a haven and harbor and an ideal that one should work towards achieving.

In other words, the family is seen as central resulting in the propagation of ideas of filial piety, familial obligation and mutuality. In Chinese culture the family is of great significance and maybe even more important than the self. To insult one's family then would naturally result in great offence.

Likewise for sex. Because of the traditional emphasis on sexual morality, sex is viewed in the Chinese culture as a very private, secret and even shameful matter that should not be discussed in public. While there are words in the Mandarin lexicon that refer directly to sex as well as sexual organs, they are rarely used.

Instead, euphemisms and metaphors have been created to allow discourse but not in a "direct" manner. Sexual intercourse for instance can be referred to in a variety of ways from the elegant literary phrase: yun(2)yu(3) (raising cloud and rain) to zuo(4)ai(1) which is the direct translation of the English equivalent "make love". Although these taboos are observed less strictly than before, in some situations, the direct use of taboo words can still elicit strong reactions from listeners and shame the speakers (Huang & Tian, 1990).

Looking at the swear words that have retained their taboo status throughout the generations, it is clear then that what is considered taboo has not changed: sex and ancestral allusions are still words that are able to cause offence and elicit emotional reactions.

This is further manifested in the construction of more intense forms of swear words which combines the two taboos as can be seen in the constructions A<sup>2</sup>G1VP "*fuck your mother/father*" and A<sup>1</sup>A<sup>2</sup>G1VP "*fuck your mother's smelly vagina*". The heightened severity of taboo loading is perhaps the reason why these words remain consistently taboo across time (refer to section 9.2).

This study has also found that Hokkien swear words have developed as acronyms that are commonly used by the G3 respondents and this is discussed in the following section.

### 8.1.2 The development of acronyms

The proliferation of these acronyms can be attributed to the advent of texting as a preferred channel of communication especially amongst youths. With the character limit, texters are more concerned with getting their message across rather than making sure it is grammatical or spelled correctly. Texts are therefore constructed with the aim of conveying this message with minimal effort, time and cost therefore giving rise to the use of abbreviations and acronyms (Shafie, Azida, & Osman, 2010).

While research indicates that taboo language fulfils similar interpersonal functions in online or computer-mediated environments( Stapleton, 2010) it seems that the development of these swear words into acronyms have an impact on how they are used out of the cyber world.

G3-F reports that although she recognises the inherent taboo and finds the words to be offensive because of that, the use of acronyms aid in masking the offensiveness of the words.

In using the phrase “Kan Ni Na Bu Chao Chee Bai”, G3-F says: *“usually I won’t use this.. but if I use it right.. usually over text.. It’s easier.. because there is an acronym..like knnbccb..and it’s not so bad.. but I wouldn’t say it out loud..”*

In fact G3-M reports that he only uses “Kan Ni Na Bu” and “Kan Ni Na Beh” in acronym form “KNNB” and it is only when it is spelt out fully that he realises its offensive content.

It can then be seen that despite a recognition of the offence that the word can cause, the development of the swear words to acronyms is perhaps something that could contribute to the change in the function and manner swear words are used in this generation.

Another thing that table 8 shows is that despite reflecting these taboos, there are taboo words that have lost their swearword status and have left the inventory. In order to account for this, we have to look at each word individually and chart the judgements of the informants in order to determine what and how these words change over time. This will be covered in the next section.

## 8.2 Establishing individual change over time

Based on the findings from the interviews, these are the patterns of change that can be identified:

Using the G1 responses as the starting point, it can be seen that words can either undergo:

- 1) Semantic weakening whereby G3 respondents do not perceive the words that G1 respondents perceive to be swear words as swear words (refer to section 8.2.1)
- 2) Semantic strengthening whereby G3 respondents perceive words that G1 respondents do not perceive to be swear words to be swear words (refer to section 8.2.2)

It can also be observed that these semantic changes can take place gradually over the generations or abruptly within a single generation. This will be discussed further in the later sections of the paper.

Not only that, words can also enter/ leave the swear word lexicon leading to:

- 1) Addition- which occurs when G1 respondents do not exhibit knowledge/use of words that G3 respondents have (refer to section 8.2.3)
- 2) Loss- which occurs when G3 respondents do not exhibit knowledge/use of words that G1 respondents have (refer to section 8.2.3)

These lexical and semantic changes are not necessarily mutually exclusive and can occur together.

Table 9 shows the words that have exhibited these changes

Words that display semantic change are shaded: with those that demonstrate strengthening in a darker shade. Those that are unshaded are words that prominently display occurrences of lexical change.

Index	Word	Gloss
A <sup>1</sup> 3N	Lan cheow	“penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 4N	Lum par	“testicles”
A <sup>1</sup> 5NP	Si mi lan cheow	“what,penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 6NP	Wah lan	“oh, penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 7AP	Chee teh bin	“pussy face”
A <sup>1</sup> 8AP	Lan lan	“penis, penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 9AP	Lan tui	“penis split”
A <sup>1</sup> 10AP	Lao lan	“leaky penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 12VP	Boh Lum Par ji	“no testicles and balls”
A <sup>1</sup> 13VP	Cho bo lan	“do nothing,penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 14VP	Kana lan neh	“just like a penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 15VP	Lam par pah lan	“ testicles hitting the penis ”
A <sup>2</sup> 1V	Kan	“fuck”
A <sup>2</sup> 2VP	Buay kan	“unable to fuck”
A <sup>2</sup> 3VP	Chui kong lum par song	“wanker”
A <sup>2</sup> 4VP	Hong kan	“wanting to be fucked”
A <sup>2</sup> 6VP	Kum lan	“suck penis/blow job”
G1N	Chap cheng	“mixed blood”
G3NP	Na beh/ Na bu	“your father/ your mother”
A <sup>2</sup> D 1VP	Heng kao kan	“to be given to a dog for fucking”

Table 12: Breakdown of responses for individual taboo words

Diagram 2 provides a summary of the findings with regard to the number of words that have changed and the type of change that has occurred.

The data suggests that the most common type of change that can occur for taboo words is semantic change: in particular, semantic weakening which is shown to account for half of the words that have undergone change.

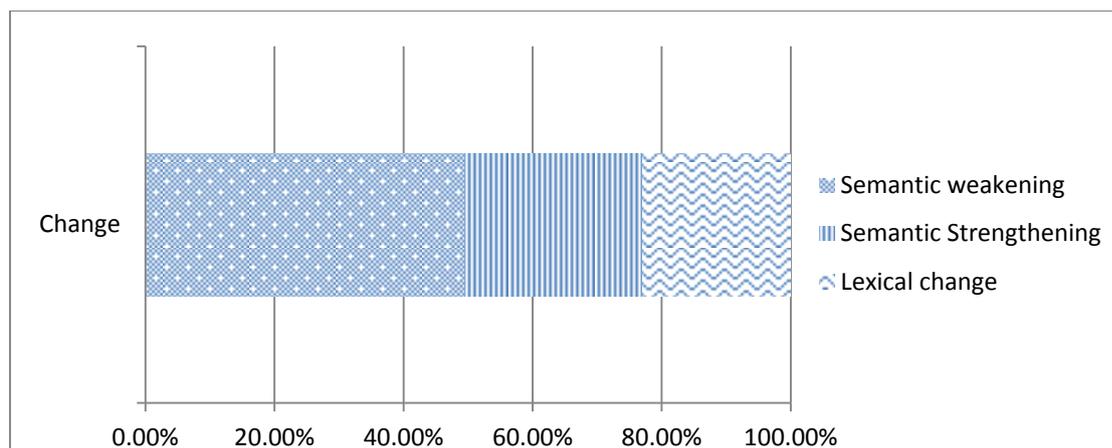


Diagram 2: Summary of findings for language change of taboo words

This change seems to be particularly salient to all the respondents who recognize and bring it up in the interview. G1-F for instance says that: *“but only the older people know the meaning of these words.. .and only the older people will know more of these words.. the younger people also say it more easily.. and more naturally... maybe the words are not so heavy and offensive now compared to last time”*.

In fact, G3-M reports that *“we don’t really look at their meanings in that sense when we use them.. we use them because we know they are swear words.. we don’t necessarily know what’s the meaning behind it.. but we know that it’s a swearword..*

The following sections will look at each type of change in greater detail

### 8.2.1 Words that start off as swear words but have lost this status over time (weakening)

Table 10 shows that for many of the swear words that demonstrate weakening seem leave the Hokkien lexicon entirely.

Index	Word	G1	G2	G3
A <sup>1</sup> 6NP	Wah lan	++	+-	--
A <sup>1</sup> 9AP	Lan tui	++	+-	00
A <sup>1</sup> 10AP	Lao lan	++	+-	-0
A <sup>1</sup> 12VP	Boh lum par ji	++	+-	00

A <sup>2</sup> 1V	Kan	++	+-	+-
A <sup>2</sup> 2VP	Buay kan	++	+-	- 0
A <sup>2</sup> 3VP	Chui kong lum par song	++	+-	0 0
A <sup>2</sup> 4VP	Hong kan	++	++	--
A <sup>2</sup> 6VP	Kum lan	++	+-	+-
G1N	Chap cheng	++	--	0 0
G3NP	Na beh/Na bu	++	+-	--
A <sup>2</sup> D 1VP	Heng kao kan	++	++	0 0

Table 13: Swearwords that demonstrate weakening over time

This change also seems to take place within the span of one generation, namely G2, since G3 respondents demonstrate a very clear difference in judgement from G1 respondents. Not only that, the judgements of the G2 informants are more varied than G1 and G3 and this semantic instability could be a sign of change in progress.

It is also interesting to note that many of these words actually invoke the sex taboo. While it could be an indication of changing societal norms and a subsequent relaxing of the taboo (Schellenberg, 1996), I would like to propose that these words are in fact those that are deemed to be “weak” relative to the other words in the swear word lexicon. In other words, these words leave the swear word lexicon precisely because they are only perceived to violate the taboo very mildly.

G3-F for instance says that when she is not angry, the words she uses are A15NP “*oh, penis*” and F4NP “*your father*”. This is primarily because G3-F thinks they are not strong enough to cause offence. Their taboo reference may cause them to be thought of as crude/ vulgar but not offensive. And it is precisely for this reason that they lose their status as swear words.

### 8.2.2 Words that do not start off as swear words but have gained swear word status over time (strengthening)

Table 11 lists words which have exhibited strengthening and have attained swear word status within the span of one generation. This is indicated by the fact that G1 respondents do not report these words as offensive whereas G2 respondents do so hence supporting the idea that these words have simply gained notoriety over time. It is also significant that all of these

words belong to the taboo category A<sup>1</sup>, perhaps suggesting that sex is still very much a taboo topic in Singapore.

Looking specifically at words that show evidence of being transmitted to the G3 (A<sup>1</sup>3N and A<sup>1</sup>4N), it can be seen that these two words make reference to the male sexual organ. Both G2 respondents demonstrate a consensus in the word's status as a swear word, suggesting that the strengthening process is more stable for these 2 words than the others. The subsequent stability of the taboo word's status as a swear word could have some sort of strengthening effect on its transmission since the occurrence of a mixed G3 response suggests that for one respondent at least, this change has been successfully transmitted.

These mixed responses are perhaps indicative of the instability of these two words for G3 respondents. The "taboo" status of these two words seems to be to some extent dependent on the respondent's gender.

G3-F says that "*lan jiao*" is "*slightly more vulgar than chee bai..maybe because im a girl..so I swear with my own body part..but I cannot swear with other people's body parts*". G3-M on the other hand indicates that "*lan jiao*" "*doesn't even express anger*". He on the other hand, expresses "*lum pah*" is a swear word but a "*slightly outdated*" one that is "*not very common and popular*" and is "*falling out of use*" while G3-F expresses only minimal knowledge.

Not all of the words that undergo strengthening are successfully transmitted to the G3. This can be seen in the words A<sup>1</sup>7Ap "*pussyface*", A<sup>1</sup>13VP "*do nothing, penis*" and A<sup>1</sup>5NP "*what, penis*". The mixed responses of the G2 respondents already seem to indicate that the change, in and of itself, is unstable and as shown by G3 judgements, which more or less either indicate a return to the word's initial status before the change occurred or an exit out of the lexicon, are proven to be shortlived.

The judgements of the G1 respondents could also be a possible result of a previous cycle of change while the negative response of the other G3 informant could perhaps be indicative of yet another cycle of change taking place.

Index	Word	G1	G2	G3
A <sup>1</sup> 3N	Lan cheow	--	++	+-
A <sup>1</sup> 4N	Lum par	--	++	+-
A <sup>1</sup> 5NP	Si mi lan cheow	--	+-	--
A <sup>1</sup> 7AP	Chee teh bin	--	+-	00
A <sup>1</sup> 13VP	Cho bo lan	--	+-	--

Table 11: Words that demonstrate strengthening over time

This section has largely been concerned with looking at existing words in the G1 lexicon and how they have changed. The next part of this section will look at words that are new to the G1 respondents.

### 8.2.3 Addition and Loss

Table 12 shows three words that seem to have entered into use as some sort of swear word which G1 respondents indicate they have no knowledge of., pointing to the possibility that these words are additions to the lexicon .A7VP “*just like a penis*” is particularly interesting as it is formed from an innovative mixing of the Malay word “kana” and the Hokkien word “lan neh”, indicating a possibility of contact induced change. It is also interesting to note that all these make reference to the male sexual organ. Yet like those seen before in section 4.2.2, these words are not successfully transmitted to the next generation.

Index	Word	G1	G2	G3
A <sup>1</sup> 8 AP	Lan lan	00	+-	--
A <sup>1</sup> 14VP	Kana lan neh	00	+-	00
A <sup>1</sup> 15VP	Lum par pah lan	00	+-	-0

Table 12: Words that exhibit addition

These words also show an ability on the part of the G2 respondents to be comfortable enough with the language to play with it, resulting in new innovative creations such as those seen in table 12. However, it seems that this ability to cause offence is not successfully transmitted to the G3 respondents who either demonstrate a lack of knowledge of the word or perceive the word to be a normal one. The responses of the G3 can perhaps be viewed as “interruptions” to the propagation process of these changes, stopping them entirely hence causing them to be lost to future generations.

The results in this section show that swear words can undergo both qualitative and quantitative semantic change. One thing all these words have in common is that they are simple swear words, violating only one social norm. This could perhaps make them more susceptible to change.

The only exception would be A<sup>2</sup>D 1VP which violates two. I propose that since this particular swear word shows a sudden move out of the lexicon without any prior indication of semantic weakening, it has not changed in function; just in its form. This is supported by G3-F who provides alternative variations that she is familiar with such as “*hor ter kan*” and “*hor kao kan*”, which means *get fucked by a pig and get fucked by a dog*”, both of which involves the violations of the same norm.

This section has focused on looking at swear words and how they can change in their ability to cause offence. In the next section, we will look at these words and how they are used by speakers of different generations.

### 8.3 Swearing and anger

It was found that across all generations; swear words were used primarily to express anger. In fact, with the exception of G3 respondents, both G1 and G2 respondents reported that “swear words were used *“to express negative emotion”* (G1-F) and that it was *“rare to use swear words for any other purpose than to scold”* (G1-M).

A follow up test was conducted to investigate how each respondent’s perceive each swear word to represent anger. Only the words that all respondents across the 3 generations agreed were swear words was tested. These words are: A<sup>1</sup>1N “*vagina*”, A<sup>2</sup>5VP “*fuck you*”, A<sup>2</sup>G1VP “*fuck your mother/father*” and A<sup>1</sup>A<sup>2</sup>G1VP “*fuck your mother’s smelly vagina*”.

For the sake of clarity, I have constructed two scales which will be used to present the results for nature of stimulus and action tendency. The moral judgement results were found to be irrelevant and will thus not be presented in this paper.

In the questionnaire, the nature of stimulus tested for the saliency of 3 aspects: time, intent, and familiarity which can be reclassified into 3 main scenarios that typically arouse anger:

- i) anger perceived to be caused by self/ self-anger ( $\pm$  time)
- ii) anger perceived to be caused by others/ other-anger ( $\pm$  intentionality)
- iii) verbal argument ( $\pm$  familiar addressee)

I have also restructured the action tendency scale based on the raw results gathered from the respondents and the different levels of appraisal will be represented in this section as follows:

- 1 – Respondent is only inwardly angry at the situation/person/object
- 2- Respondent wishes he/she could yell at the situation/person/object
- 3-Respondent is yelling at the situation/person/object
- 4- Respondent wishes he/she could hit the situation/person/object
- 5-Respondent is hitting the situation/person/object

For G1 and G2 respondents, it was found that the most offensive swear word is “Kan ni na bu chao chee bai” and is rated to be able to represent the highest levels of anger. G3 respondents show otherwise. Their responses demonstrate a decrease in the word’s ability to represent the intense emotion that it previously could.

This idea is further supported by the expansion of scope of use reported by the G3 informants. Since none of the G3 responses report the use of these words in situations of verbal arguments, it suggests the possibility that there are either other words they might use that are stronger and have a greater ability to cause offence than these tested words or they employ different manners of using swear words in order to express more intense anger.

G3-M, for instance says to express higher levels of anger he would make use of tone and simply use more swear words in a single utterance. He does not make any distinction in the kind of swear words that he uses as he thinks that “*these coined terms that have already been*

*going around for some time* “are normal. To him, the ability of the word to cause offence lies in the knowledge that the word is a swear word (and therefore should be found offensive), not in the semantics of the word.

This test ultimately shows that even swear words themselves are also undergoing some sort of weakening over time, possibly making them less offensive and severe than before.

-Test word: Chee bai

	Nature of stimulus	Action tendencies
G1-M	Other-anger(-I)	3
G1-F	Other-anger(-I)	3
G2-M	Verbal argument(-F)	3
G2-F	Verbal argument(-F)	3
G3-M	Verbal argument(+F)	2
G3-F	Other-anger(-I)	2

Table 13: Semantic mapping for “Chee bai”

-Test word: Kan ni na

	Nature of stimulus	Action tendencies
G1-M	Other- anger(-I)	2
G1-F	Verbal argument(-F)	1
G2-M	Other- anger(+I)	3
G2-F	Other-anger(-I)	1
G3-M	Other- anger(+I)	2
G3-F	Other- anger(+I)	2

Table 14: Semantic mapping for “Kan ni na”

-Test word: Kan ni na bu/ Kan ni na beh

	Nature of stimulus	Action tendencies
G1-M	Verbal argument(-F)	3
G1-F	Verbal argument(-F)	3
G2-M	Verbal argument(-F)	3
G2-F	Other- anger(+I)	3
G3-M	Self- anger (+T)	1
G3-F	Other- anger(+I)	2

Table 15: Semantic mapping for “Kan ni na bu/ Kan ni na beh

-Test word: Kan ni na bu chao chee bai

	Nature of Stimulus	Action tendencies
G1-M	Verbal argument(-F)	4
G1-F	Verbal argument(-F)	4
G2-M	Verbal argument(-F)	4
G2-F	Verbal argument(-F)	5
G3-M	Other- anger(+I)	2
G3-F	Other- anger(+I)	2

Table 16: Semantic mapping for “Kan ni na bu chao chee bai”

What is very clear from the follow up test is how similar the response patterns of the G1 and G2 informants are; compared to the responses of the G3 informants.

Across the board, it can be seen that both G1 and G2 respondents tend to utilise these swear words mainly in verbal arguments with people whom they do not know on a personal level.

This could perhaps indicate that for them, the use of these words fulfill two main functions: to verbally express their inner state and as a means of response with the intent to hurt, offend or cause some sort of damage to the other party. This is further supported by their action tendency responses which indicate that G1 and G2 respondent views the utterance of the swear word is in and of itself an appropriate means of response to the situation.

In contrast, when using these words, G3 respondents report the use of these words as a means of indicating a desire to respond appropriately i.e. to yell at the other party. The act of swearing or using these words for that matter is no longer seen as a response of sorts. Now it seems to be used more to express one's state of mind.

Stapleton (2010) suggests that despite these functional changes across time, the linguistic practice of swearing still retains a unique capacity to shock, alienate, insult, abuse and generally cause offence. Perhaps then the reason why there is a distinct difference in the way informants from different generations report the action tendencies that using the same swearword would represent could be simply an overall loss of a word's ability to offend.

This can be seen most clearly by the shaded responses, whereby despite the respondents choosing the same scenario that triggers the use of the word the same word is no longer able to express the same amount of desire for retributive action as before.

To sum up, this test reflects two dimensions of semantic change for existing swear words:

Firstly, the stimulus which triggers the usage of these swear words have shifted towards a more public nature: G3 respondents are clearly less restrained in their usage and more inclined towards using them even in situations where there is no intent to offend the addressee. Secondly, these swear words have also decreased in terms of their intensity in that they are no longer able to represent the same level of retributive action as before.

These changes can also be bidirectional: as swear words become less intense and offensive, they are used in more areas and fulfil more functions than before.

## 8.4 Swearing and semantic reference

Another aspect that this study was interested in is whether there is any discriminatory use of swear words across generations i.e. whether there are certain words that can only be used on one gender. This section will examine the extent of gender discrimination that accompanies usage of two words that have overt reference to the male and female sexual organs. These words are: A<sup>1</sup>1N “vagina” and A<sup>1</sup>3N “penis”.

The findings are presented in the tables below; whereby “X” marks the speaker’s judgement of whether a particular word can be used on a male or female addressee. Overall .it was found that these two terms are used indiscriminately by the G3 respondents

A<sup>1</sup>3N “vagina”

	G1M	G1F	G2M	G2F	G3M	G3F
M			X		X	X
F	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 17: Effect of gender on usage of “Chee Bai”

A<sup>1</sup>8N “penis”

	G1M	G1F	G2M	G2F	G3M	G3F
M	X	X	X	X	X	X
F					X	

Table 18: Effect of gender on usage of “Lan jiao ”

Clearly, for the G1 respondents, the usage of these terms are strictly constrained by the gender of the person they are using the term on. This can be seen in how A3N can only be used for females and A8N for males. Both G1 respondents report that “chee bai” cannot be used on a man: *“it can be used by a man to scold a woman, but never when a man is being*

*scolded*” (G1-M). In short, “*you can only use chee bai when you are scolding a woman and Lan jiao for man*” (G1-F). “*if a man and woman are fighting.. the man will use chee bai on the woman and the woman will use Lan cheow on a man.. but if a woman and woman are fighting.. both will use chee bai on each other.. men don’t use chee bai on another man*” (G1-M).

This discriminatory use seems to have passed on somewhat to the second generation, but is completely lost by the time it reaches the third generation. G3 respondents no longer display any regard for the gender of the other party in their use of these words as tables 8 and 9 show.

*“I use it on both guys and girls..Chee bai is for all”* (G3-F)

G3-M explains that for him, “*it’s not so much about the gender but what the situation presents*”. How he decides on which word to use is really dependent on “*which word comes to mind first*”, he “*doesn’t really consider the gender of the other party or the offence*”.

The difference could be due to older generation’s use of these words as a form of verbal attack. G2-F explains that she makes the difference because “*you are scolding people..sure you want to scold own people things what*” . In other words, the use of these words is very literal, hinging on the speaker’s awareness of the word’s semantics. However, once it comes to the third generation, it is possible that these are all now “cover terms” used merely as expressive exclamations and nothing else.

The lack of discriminatory use reflected by the respondents indicates the possibility of a semantic extension of meaning for these terms. The fact that usage is no longer restricted to the addressee’s gender could suggest a semantic broadening of these terms.

## 9. Discussion

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This section will discuss reasons for the trends of change revealed in this study.

9.1 will discuss the effects of language shift and 9.2 the effect of taboo loading.

### 9.1 The effect of language shift

There are multiple causes of change. But the data seems to suggest a strong correlation between language shift and language change. This shift from Hokkien (and other dialects) to English and Mandarin can help to account for both the quantitative decrease in the swear word inventory and the qualitative difference in the usage and perception of those that remain.

As stated earlier on, there was a very conscious effort towards formally establishing and encouraging the use of English and Mandarin as the two main lingua francas for the Chinese community. Hokkien, which was the previous lingua franca was displaced as a result and a restriction in its domains of use subsequently followed as well. The shift has two implications that most probably set the ground for and perpetuated change.

Firstly, because Hokkien was a lingua franca, there is a predisposition to use Hokkien to swear because it was the language that had the highest probability of ensuring the other party understood oneself. Even if Hokkien is not the “dialect” that one speaks the most or is the most comfortable in. Thus, even if one does not belong to the Hokkien dialect group, one would still use it “*because the majority of Chinese people are Hokkien, (so) a lot of people will be able to understand you..you want to swear because you want to make another person understand right?*” (G2-M ). However, because of the shift away from Hokkien, swearing is now done in the new lingua franca, English.. G1-F says that “*the younger generation don’t know Hokkien or not many speak Hokkien so most of them will swear in English*”. Similar views were expressed by the rest of the respondents.

G3 respondents also report mixing Hokkien swear words with English. G3-M .gives an example of that he uses: “*fuck your mother chee bai*”. For him, “*first one that always comes out first is fuck.. then if fuck is not sufficient, then you start bringing out the rest..*” It seems

that what the younger generations do is to simply add Hokkien swearwords to their swear word inventory and use them at will.

Furthermore, These words are used only because “*English swear words are very limited..so you bring in the hokkien..because hokkien swear words are very colourful..* “. They “*show the different intensity of emotion better*” as “*there are so many*”.

However that being said, as the previous section showed (refer to section 8.3), these words no longer carry the same amount of emotional force as before. They have different emotional trajectories and have weakened over time. G2-M alludes to this in the interview where she says that: “*I think they lost control of the mastery of the language.. so some of the swear words that they use.. it’s not as varied as the older generation..they only use a common few..*”

Findings from the interview also suggest that, overall, from G1 to G3, there seems to be no incoming “replacement” for the outgoing swearwords. While there are words that do show some signs of strengthening over time (ref. section 8.2.2) yet there *seems to be no* evidence of any new lexical innovation that develops into a full-fledged swear word and stays in use over a significant period of time. G2 respondents may demonstrate instances of lexical innovation yet these are not transmitted to the G3. This should come as no surprise since with decreasing opportunities to utilise and learn the language; the language is not used as much as before and not by as many and therefore not only has little opportunity for “regeneration” but also for innovations to be sustained.

## 9.2 The effect of taboo loading

The results of this study also show that simple taboo words are the ones that have the most tendency to leave the swear word lexicon even though they may invoke a serious taboo (Refer to table 8). Complex taboos on the other hand are those that are more resilient and remain consistently acknowledged throughout as swear words (A<sup>2</sup>G1VP “*fuck your mother/father*” and A<sup>1</sup>A<sup>2</sup>G1VP “*fuck your mother’s smelly vagina*”). Even if they do leave; they take a longer time to leave. A<sup>2</sup>D1VP “*to be given to a dog for fucking*” for instance, was recognized for two generations before being lost in the third.

These “complex” taboo words identified in this study all also belong to the grammatical category of verbs. Their use as verb phrases could also perhaps have an effect on their “staying” power in the sense that they are grammatically correct and able to exist on their own, giving rise to their “iconicity”. These verb phrases then are perhaps not as easy to erode as compared to if it were to exist as a simple noun or verb. “Kan” for example has eroded as a recognised swear word on its own whereas it still exists in complex taboo words such as “kan ni na” and “kan ni n abu chao chee bai” Only this time, it is used as the head of the verb phrase.

Taboo loaded swear words are also those that are recognized to have greater intensity and offensiveness as compared to those that only invoke the breaking of one taboo norm. Across all generations they are viewed to be the most intense compared to the other swear words in the inventory. However, that being said, if these loaded swear words were to be taken on their own and compared across generations, it can be seen that they have weakened such that they are no longer able to express the same level of emotion as they did for the generations before. Taboo loading is thus a relative concept: not only to the other swear words of that time but to the time period itself.

## 10. Conclusion

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The persistence of linguistic taboos is a result of a regard for social etiquette and a heightened sense of awareness of the individual as a member of society. Therefore as long as this remains a psychological reality, linguistic taboos will not only continue to exist but will change in forms in accordance to the manners of society and the modes of communication.

As my study has found, it seems that Hokkien swear words have undergone a semantic change due to the occurrence of a fundamental change in the mode of communication from Hokkien to English. As the diagram below shows, the swear word inventory has decreased with movement of certain swear words out of the lexicon all together.

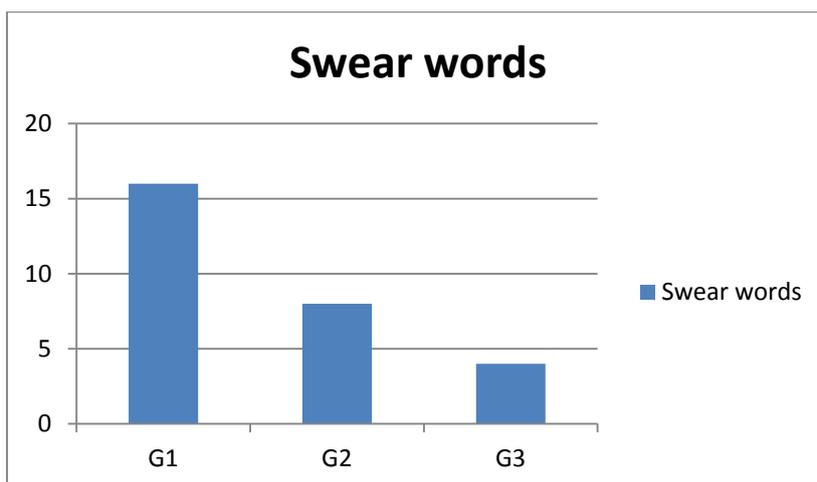


Diagram 3: Number of swearwords perceived by both respondents of each generation

The study has also found that swear words that do remain in the inventory have weakened in i) their ability to cause offence and ii) their emotional force(in relation to conveying anger) while at the same time demonstrating a clear expansion in their scope of meaning as well as the social situations which they are used. It was also found that swear words that comprise of more than one taboo are more resistant to change suggesting that the fact that they invoke more than one taboo slows down the forces of change.

In light of this, it would be interesting for future studies to look at what has replaced the use of these Hokkien swear words and how the younger generations manipulate the linguistic resources available to them to fulfil the same functions that Hokkien has fulfilled for the older generation.

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# Appendix

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## A. List of test words

The study tested a total of 33 words which have been categorised according to the taboo reference they contain.

### A<sup>1</sup> (Sexual organs)

Index	Word	IPA	Gloss
A <sup>1</sup> 1N	Chee bai	tei <sup>55</sup> bai <sup>55</sup>	“vagina”
A <sup>1</sup> 2N	How seow	hau <sup>24</sup> siau <sup>24</sup>	“sperm”
A <sup>1</sup> 3N	Lan cheow	lan <sup>33</sup> teiau <sup>51</sup>	“penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 4N	Lum par	lam <sup>31</sup> pa <sup>55</sup>	“testicles”
A <sup>1</sup> 5NP	Si mi lan cheow	si <sup>55</sup> mi <sup>51</sup> lan <sup>33</sup> teiau <sup>51</sup>	“what, penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 6NP	Wah lan	wa <sup>51</sup> lan <sup>24</sup>	“oh, penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 7AP	Chee teh bin	tei <sup>55</sup> te <sup>51</sup> bin <sup>11</sup>	“pussy face”
A <sup>1</sup> 8AP	Lan lan	lan <sup>51</sup> lan <sup>11</sup>	“penis, penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 9AP	Lan tui	lan <sup>51</sup> tui <sup>33</sup>	“penis split”
A <sup>1</sup> 10AP	Lao lan	lau <sup>51</sup> lan <sup>11</sup>	“leaky penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 11VP	Boh ji	bo <sup>33</sup> tei <sup>51</sup>	“no balls”
A <sup>1</sup> 12VP	Boh Lum Par ji	bo <sup>33</sup> lam <sup>33</sup> pa <sup>55</sup> tei <sup>51</sup>	“no testicles and balls”
A <sup>1</sup> 13VP	Cho bo lan	tso <sup>51</sup> bo <sup>33</sup> lan <sup>33</sup>	“do nothing, penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 14VP	Kana lan neh	kəna lan <sup>24</sup> ne <sup>31</sup>	“just like a penis”
A <sup>1</sup> 15VP	Lam par pah lan	lam <sup>31</sup> pa <sup>55</sup> pa <sup>51</sup> lan <sup>31</sup>	“testicles hitting the penis”

A<sup>2</sup> (Sexual intercourse)

Index	Word	IPA	Gloss
A <sup>2</sup> 1V	Kan	kan <sup>51</sup>	<i>“fuck”</i>
A <sup>2</sup> 2VP	Buay kan	buei <sup>33</sup> kan <sup>33</sup>	<i>“unable to fuck”</i>
A <sup>2</sup> 3VP	Chui kong lum par song	tsui <sup>33</sup> kɔŋ <sup>51</sup> lam <sup>11</sup> pa <sup>55</sup> soŋ <sup>51</sup>	<i>“wanker”</i>
A <sup>2</sup> 4VP	Hong kan	hɔŋ <sup>51</sup> kan <sup>33</sup>	<i>“wanting to be fucked”</i>
A <sup>2</sup> 5VP	Kan ni na	kan <sup>55</sup> ni <sup>55</sup> na <sup>55</sup>	<i>“fuck you”</i>
A <sup>2</sup> 6VP	Kum lan	kam <sup>33</sup> lan <sup>11</sup>	<i>“suck penis/blow job”</i>

## C (Scatological referents)

Index	Word	IPA	Gloss
C1VP	Kum pooi	k <sup>h</sup> am <sup>24</sup> p <sup>h</sup> ui <sup>51</sup>	<i>“suck fart”</i>

## G (Ancestral allusions)

Index	Word	IPA	Gloss
G1N	Chap cheng	tsap <sup>31</sup> tseŋ <sup>55</sup>	<i>“mixed blood”</i>
G2NP	Lim beh kah li kong	lim <sup>24</sup> pe <sup>33</sup> ka <sup>33</sup> lə <sup>51</sup> kɔŋ <sup>51</sup>	<i>“Let I, your father, tell you”</i>
G3NP	Na beh/ Na bu	na <sup>55</sup> be <sup>51</sup> / na <sup>55</sup> bu <sup>51</sup>	<i>“your father/ your mother”</i>
G4VP	Kau beh kau bu	kau <sup>51</sup> pe <sup>33</sup> kau <sup>51</sup> bu <sup>51</sup>	<i>“cry father, cry mother”</i>

## I (offensive slang)

Index	Word	IPA	Gloss
I1AP	Char tau	t <sup>s</sup> a <sup>11</sup> t <sup>h</sup> au <sup>27</sup>	<i>“woden head/ idiot”</i>
I2AP	Kum gong	k <sup>h</sup> am <sup>24</sup> gɔŋ <sup>11</sup>	<i>“stupid”</i>
I3V	Si	si <sup>51</sup>	<i>“die”</i>

I4VP Chek ak tsek<sup>31</sup> ak<sup>31</sup> “to build bad karma”

A<sup>2</sup>G (Sexual intercourse + Ancestral allusions)

Index	Word	IPA	Gloss
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A <sup>2</sup> G1VP	Kan ni na bu	kan <sup>55</sup> ni <sup>55</sup> na <sup>55</sup> bu <sup>51</sup>	“fuck your mother”
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A <sup>2</sup> G1VP	Kan ni na beh	kan <sup>55</sup> ni <sup>55</sup> na <sup>55</sup> be <sup>51</sup>	“fuck your father”
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A<sup>1</sup>A<sup>2</sup>G (Sexual organs + Sexual intercourse + Ancestral allusions)

Index	Word	IPA	Gloss
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A <sup>1</sup> A <sup>2</sup> G 1VP	Kan ni na bu chao chee bai	kan <sup>55</sup> ni <sup>55</sup> na <sup>55</sup> bu <sup>51</sup> tsau <sup>51</sup> tei <sup>55</sup> bai <sup>55</sup>	“fuck your mother’s smelly vagina”
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A<sup>2</sup>D (Sexual intercourse + Animal names)

Index	Word	IPA	Gloss
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A <sup>2</sup> D 1VP	Heng kao kan	heŋ <sup>55</sup> kau <sup>51</sup> kan <sup>11</sup>	“to be given to a dog for fucking”
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## B. Interview question guide

### General questions

- 1) Aside from Swearing, do you speak hokkien?
- 2) Do you only swear in Hokkien? Why/Why not?
- 3) Do you think that swearing in hokkien is stronger than using another language?
- 4) Do you use hokkien swear words with another language? Why/ why not?
- 5) Do you think its okay for you to swear? How about at home? In the office? Outside in a market, hawker centre?
- 6) Are there people you will not swear in front of?
- 7) Why do you swear?
- 8) What do you think of other people who swear in hokkien/ how will u feel if you hear them use the same words you use?
- 9) Do you think people who swear are vulgar?
- 10) Do you think the older generation swear differently from you? in what ways? How about the younger generation?
- 11) Have you heard anyone from these generations swear in Hokkien?
- 12) I have a list of common Hokkien swearwords, Which ones do you consider swear words? can you arrange them in terms of offensiveness?
- 13) Are there words that you use that are not included here?

### Specific questions

- 1) Do you have a swear word that you always use?
- 2) How about for when you are really angry and upset?
- 3) Do you use any words for when you are really happy and excited?
- 4) How about when you are in pain?
- 5) Do you use it in a non offensive manner eg to joke with your friends?
- 6) Do you swear at a person when you are angry because they have done something wrong? If so, what word will you use?
- 7) How about if you are only annoyed at a person? Do you use a different word
- 8) How about if the person is a family member/ colleague/ friend?

- 9) Do you think that for it is more offensive if you add in ni na bu/na beh? Eg kan
- 10) Si mi vs. si mi lan jiao. Is there any situations you would use one and not the other?
- 11) Are there any words you will not say if the listener is a female? Will you feel comfortable using words containing references to the male penis eg lan jiao
- 12) How about males? Will you feel comfortable using words like chee bai?

### C. Follow-up questionnaire

The questionnaire tested for:

- nature of stimulus – ( $\pm$  time,  $\pm$  intent,  $\pm$ familiarity)

The respondents are given a range of scenarios each testing the presence/ absence of a particular quality and asked to select the one that would best exemplify the situation which would trigger the utterance of the tested swear word.

The 2 scenarios (a) and (b) test for time whereby the anger felt in (a) is more temporal and of a shorter span of time than the one felt in (b)

The next 2 scenarios (c) and (d) test for intent whereby the anger felt for the trigger in (c) is not personal because the action is seen as non-volitional whereas the anger felt for the trigger in (d) is more personal because the action is seen as deliberate

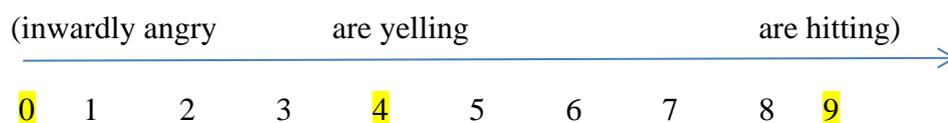
The next 2 scenarios (e) and (f) test for familiarity whereby the anger felt in (e) is triggered by a stranger compared to someone familiar as in (f)
- moral judgement - ( own fault: + , other fault: - , no one's fault: 0)

This question tests the respondent's perception of whether his use of the swear word is justifiable
- action tendencies

This question examines the speaker's perception of the action tendency that using the particular swear word can be used to replace/represent.

Since the action tendencies associated with anger are mostly retributive in nature, the parameters involved will centre on yelling and hitting.

0 refers to anger as a state of mind, 1-3 involves the experiencer considering some form of action, 4 marks the point where the experiencer commits the minimal action of yelling ,5-8 involves the experiencer considering action beyond yelling (hitting) and 9 involves physical hitting.



**A sample of this questionnaire is provided as follows:**

**Instructions: Please select the most appropriate answer for each question 😊**

**Test word: Chee bai**

**You are most likely to use it when:**

- a) You are walking home and you trip over a rock and fall
- b) You forgot your house keys and you are locked out of the house for a few hours
- d) You are walking in a crowded shopping mall and someone knocks into you
- e) You are running late and someone steals your taxi
- f) You are arguing with a stranger
- g) You are arguing with someone you know

**You use it because you think:**

- a) it is your fault
- b) it is no one's fault
- c) it is someone else's fault

**When you use it, you:**

- a) are only inwardly angry at the situation/person/object
- b) wish someone else but you would yell at the situation/person/object
- c) wish you could yell at the situation/person/object
- d) are about to yell at the situation/person/object
- e) are yelling at the situation/person/object
- f) wish someone else but you would hit at the situation/person/object
- g) wish you could hit at the situation/person/object
- h) are about to hit at the situation/person/object
- i) are hitting at the situation/person/object

**Test word: Kan ni na****You are most likely to use it when:**

- a) You are walking home and you trip over a rock and fall
- b) You forgot your house keys and you are locked out of the house for a few hours
- d) You are walking in a crowded shopping mall and someone knocks into you
- e) You are running late and someone steals your taxi
- f) You are arguing with a stranger
- g) You are arguing with someone you know

**You use it because you think:**

- a) it is your fault
- b) it is no one's fault
- c) it is someone else's fault

**When you use it, you:**

- a) are only inwardly angry at the situation/person/object
- b) wish someone else but you would yell at the situation/person/object
- c) wish you could yell at the situation/person/object
- d) are about to yell at the situation/person/object
- e) are yelling at the situation/person/object
- f) wish someone else but you would hit at the situation/person/object
- g) wish you could hit at the situation/person/object
- h) are about to hit at the situation/person/object
- i) are hitting at the situation/person/object

**Test word: kan ni na bu/kan ni na beh****You are most likely to use it when:**

- a) You are walking home and you trip over a rock and fall
- b) You forgot your house keys and you are locked out of the house for a few hours
- d) You are walking in a crowded shopping mall and someone knocks into you
- e) You are running late and someone steals your taxi
- f) You are arguing with a stranger
- g) You are arguing with someone you know

**You use it because you think:**

- a) it is your fault
- b) it is no one's fault
- c) it is someone else's fault

**When you use it, you:**

- a) are only inwardly angry at the situation/person/object
- b) wish someone else but you would yell at the situation/person/object
- c) wish you could yell at the situation/person/object
- d) are about to yell at the situation/person/object
- e) are yelling at the situation/person/object
- f) wish someone else but you would hit at the situation/person/object
- g) wish you could hit at the situation/person/object
- h) are about to hit at the situation/person/object
- i) are hitting at the situation/person/object

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**Test word: Kan ni na bu chao chee bai****You are most likely to use it when:**

- a) You are walking home and you trip over a rock and fall
- b) You forgot your house keys and you are locked out of the house for a few hours
- d) You are walking in a crowded shopping mall and someone knocks into you
- e) You are running late and someone steals your taxi
- f) You are arguing with a stranger
- g) You are arguing with someone you know

**You use it because you think:**

- a) it is your fault
- b) it is no one's fault
- c) it is someone else's fault

**When you use it, you:**

- a) are only inwardly angry at the situation/person/object
- b) wish someone else but you would yell at the situation/person/object
- c) wish you could yell at the situation/person/object
- d) are about to yell at the situation/person/object
- e) are yelling at the situation/person/object
- f) wish someone else but you would hit at the situation/person/object
- g) wish you could hit at the situation/person/object
- h) are about to hit at the situation/person/object
- i) are hitting at the situation/person/object

#### D. Interview transcription

The generation 1 respondents were interviewed together. This interview was conducted in Cantonese which was then translated and transcribed. The interviewer is coded as “I”, G1-F for the female respondent, G1-M for the male respondent.

I: ok the first word is Boh Chee

G1-F: I cant say it..it’s bad..its coarse language..

I: but you’ve heard it before?

G1-F: yes yes of course

G1-F: how was it used?

G1-F: it means you have no guts..you use it when you say someone is too scared to do something..

I: would you use it to describe yourself or use it on other people?

G1-F: other people

G1-M: yeahyeah.. on other people.

G1-F: on people that I don’t like

I: Would you be feeling angry with the person?

G1-M: no..you just use it to describe someone who is timid..when he has no guts and does not dare to do something especially something that I asked him to do

I: then would you use it to describe males or females? Or both?

G1-F: no you don’t use it on females..only males... on boys..on men..

G1-M:actually I use it sometimes... but not to scold someone..it is just a way to describe his situation..

I: next word, boh lum par chee

G1-F: oh it is a coarse word too..its very rude.. we use it when we are very angry

G1-M: yesyes very very angry..

G1-M: like for example when someone scolds you for nothing.. you can use it to scold him too..mostly women will use it..to scold men...

G1-M: men don’t really use this at all..only women.. and to scold man....

I: buay kan..do you use it?

G1-F/M: nono i don’t..its a swear word

I: how about if you are talking about a friend?

G1-M: no..of course not

I:Chap cheng

G1-F: it is a word that is very emotional and negative..it evokes a lot of emotion in me... if someone uses it on me, I will be very angy and I will ignore the person...

G1-M:if you use it to scold someon,..the person will be very offended and will definitely scold you back..

I: but when you use it, do you actually know the person's family background?

G1-F: nono, we won't know... you don't know...you don't have to know whether he really is a bastard or not..you can just use it to scold someone...

I: Char tau

G1-F: you use it to scold someone..for instance you can call someone a "char tau"

I: but it is not vulgar?

G1-F: no it is not.. you can use it to scold someone. But it is not a bad word

G1-M: yes it is not vulgar at all.

I: Chee bai

G1-F: oh this is of course a swearword.. to use it is very crude.. actually even in normal conversation... you can also say it as an exclamation not only just to scold someone... ..like at the end of a sentence....like something something, cheebai....

G1-M: yes or you can use it to describe a situation also... like something is very cheebai...

I: oh but if used in a fight this is only used to scold women?

G1-F: yes.. I have never heard it used on a man

I: so it can't be used on a man?

G1-F: nono of course not

G1-M: no it is not used to scold men..it can be used by a man to scold a woman but never when a man is being scolded..

I: have you ever heard this word being used in a context other than in a fight or when it is being used to scold someone?

G1-F: yesyes sometimes people say it in a normal conversation..

I: how do you know that it is not being used in an aggressive manner?

G1-F: you listen to the way the speaker says it..the tone he is using.. and the conversation setting... sometimes he can just add it at the end for fun or for emphasis depending.. but most of the time if you

do that you will do it at the end of your sentence.. or when you have finished what you want to say.. so you can say somethingsomething and end it with a chee bai

I: chee teh bin

G1-F: oh it means to say that someone has a very black face..

G1-M: yes like to describe his attitude which you can see from his face...

I: is it used to scold someone?

G1-F: not really..maybe a little.. well you can use it to scold someone when you are angry with him.. but it is quite a normal phrase.. not vulgar and not really a swear word

G1-M: yeah it is not a bad word..you can use it to scold I guess but it is also not very strong if you do..

I: so can you use it to describe a friend?

G1-F/G1-M: yes

G1-F: you can use it very easily..like just in conversation when you are talking about a friend.. actually you won't use it as a vulgarity when you are angry.. it is not one of the words that you will naturally use to express your anger or when you are scolding someone..

G1-M: yes because it is not very strong..so you can use it when describing a friend.. and it is not really that offensive..

G1-F: or even when your friend is there and you use it directly to describe him..it is also acceptable..

G1-M: it is very normal..part of normal vocabulary..

G1-F: you can even change it to "chee tai meng" based on a person's expression

I: chek ak

G1-M: it is used to describe someone who is evil..who has done many bad things.. and will get retribution.. like you can tell someone "be careful of "chik ak"..later your children will have no backside" (\* saying that speaker will get his just desserts)

I: do you use it to scold someone?

G1-M: maybe a little..but not really in the sense of scolding the person..it is not used when the speaker is angry..it is more of "saying" the person.. like you can say " don't bully the old lady..if you do so it is very "chik ak"..the old lady is already so old"

I: so it is not a vulgarity?

G1-F: no it is not

G1-M: ya it is a normal word..you can say it to someone like this "the lady is so old..you are very "chik ak"..bullying an old lady like that"

G1-F: it is not a word you will use to scold someone if you are angry with him

I: cho bo lan is it a swear word?

G1-M/G1-F: no

I: do you think it is very rude/coarse?

G1-M/G1-F: no

I: how about if you want to scold somebody? Do you use it?

G1-F: no..it is actually a very normal word..you don't use it to scold anyone.. it is part of normal conversation.. you can say it very comfortably and easily in normal conversations..

I: have you heard it being used in any other way? Such as to describe a sad situation?

G1-F: no no never..

I: heng gao kan.. is it coarse language?

G1-M: yes

I: where will you use it? When have you heard it being used?

G1-F/G1-M: it is used to scold somebody

I: is it only used on male or females?

G1-F: it can be used on males and females..

G1-M: yes.. on both males and females...actually.. most of the time it is the men who use it to scold females..

I: do females use it on other females?

G1-F: no not really...

G1-M: females don't really use it.. and they don't really use it to scold men.. you can't really use it to scold men..

I: you can't use it to scold men?

G1-M: no no you cannot. It is not used to scold men..

G1-F: well you can use it in an argument I guess but it is not common to use it on a man anyway..i don't really hear it being used very much in an argument with a man actually

G1-M: yeah actually it is just not very common to hear it being used by a female.. females just generally won't use it

G1-F: yeah it is very rare to hear a female saying it actually.. I don't think females use it very much..

I: okay next word.. hong kan

G1-F: this is very rude too..

G1-M: yes it is coarse language.. only men will use this.. it can be used on females too

I: do males and females use this?

G1-F: nono females cannot use this..

G1-M: only males will use this..and on females..

I: how about females using this on females?

G1-F/G1-M: no cannot

I: how about females using this on males?

G1-F/G1-M: nono they don't.. you cannot.. females just cannot use this at all..

I: how about how seow

G1-F: it means that you want to be number 1..

G1-M: “ the things you say are very how seow”..like you are saying that the person is trying to cheat you or pull a fast one on you or something..

I: do you think this is a coarse word?

G1-F/G1-M: no

I: is it used to scold someone?

G1-F: no it is not..it is a normal word..

G1-M: yeah it is very normal..

G1-F: like you can say a person is “how seow” but you don't necessarily scold a person when you say it.. like someone can say it to me after I say I have done something and he doesn't believe me.. it is normal.. I don't feel offended...

I: okay how about kan

G1-F: this is coarse language..

G1-F: yes

I: where have you heard it being used?

G1-F: in normal conversation..

I: how do people use it? Will they use it as a word on its own?

G1-F: well.. people say it out in conversation..like in a group conversation..if someone says something you don't agree with you can say “chuang gan”..

G1-M: or “hong gan ah”

G1-F: you cannot use “gan” as a word on its own..

G1-M: yeah..you have to use it with something..

G1-F: and you cannot say it for no reason.. you must have grounds for disagreeing with the person..or when you think he is wrong.. or is not making any sense..

I: do people use it when they are angry?

G1-F: it is more commonly used in a normal conversational setting.. amongst friends... you can say it to your friend and your friend can say it back.. you don't use it to express anger in this case..

I: but you can use it to scold someone?

G1-F: yes of course.. you can use "chuang gan" to scold someone too like "chuang gan ah ler"..

I: how would it be used in a scolding manner?

G1-F: I have heard it used in a normal conversation before..when you want to tell someone off and end his turn at the conversation.. you can use it and it is almost like using it to tell someone to go away..

G1-M: ya like you can say "you are preventing me from speaking..kan ah" (8:17)

I: okay how about if you use it like kan ni na bu and kan ni na beh?

G1-F: na bu means your mother

G1-M: na beh means your father

I: are these words used to scold people?

G1-F/G1-M: yes

G1-M: and these two are very very bad words

I: if someone uses these words on you, how would you feel?

G1-F: I would be very very very angry.

G1-M: yes I would be very angry too.. I mean like my mother has not offended you in any way.. why are you bringing her in.. I would also think that the person saying it is being very very crude..

I: why do you react so strongly to these words? Is it because it insults your parents?

G1-F/G1-M: yes of course..

G1-F: it also insults our birth and our family and our background..it will make me very very angry..

I: do you think the most offensive way to scold someone is to insult their parents?

G1-M: yes.. that is the worst..to scold somebody's parents..

G1-F: people will get very very angry...it is very very offensive to insult a person's parents

G1-M: it will lead to fights.. physical fights definitely will happen..

I: okay how about kan ni na bu chao chee bye?

G1-F: ohhh that is even worst..

G1-M: this will definitely lead to fights.. it is that offensive.. it can make people explode with anger..

I: when is it used?

G1-M: when you want to pick a fight with someone else..

G1-F: it can be used in normal conversation too.. like it can be used very naturally... for example.. if you want to question what someone is saying...you can say “kan ni na bu chee bai what are you saying?” but you have to look at the situation and context.. before you say it. Because some people might take it the wrong way and be offended...

I: so you can use it in front of friends?

G1-F: yes yes.. it is okay to do so...

G1-M: you can use it in front of friends or people you know well.. if there are strangers you won't really dare to use it..

G1-F: yes only in front of people you know.. because you don't want to risk offending anyone..so you definitely won't say it in front of people you don't know.. if a stranger uses it on me I will be offended because I don't know him.. why is he scolding me?

G1-M: yeah it is a very offensive word.. you will only use it in front of people you know.. for example if it is used as some sort of “decoration” to the conversation.. it is okay..

G1-F: yeah..sometimes it's just added in because of how it sounds.. and that is okay and not offensive..

I: can you use it under any other circumstance?

G1-F: yes I think you can.. sometimes it can be used to express amusement... even in normal conversation.. it is easily said..sometimes because it rhymes.. with what was said before..so people just add it in..because of how it sounds.. even when there is no offensive conversational topic.. or when there is no intention to scold someone...so it will not cause offence when it is used like that..when someone has finished saying his piece he can use it.. but it is very crude..

I: kana lan neh

G1-F: this one I have not heard before..

G1-M: yeah I have not heard it before also

I: ok next one.. kao bei kao bu

G1-F: yes I've heard it..

G1-M: me too

I: is it bad language?

G1-F/G1-M: no

G1-M: you can use it like “ both of us are talking, you don’t kao bei kao bu”

G1-F: it means to tell someone not to cut in..

G1-M: this is a very normal word..and it will not cause offence or lead to any fights..

I: Kum gong

G1-F: I don’t think I have heard it. have you?

G1-M: no I have not

I: kum lan

G1-F/G1-M: oh this is coarse language.. you can use it to scold people

G1-M: this is used more often by me.. I don’t think women would use this or would want to use this..

I: can it be used on women?

G1-F/G1-M: yes.. by a man on a woman mostly..

I: Kum pooi

G1-F/G1-M: I have never heard it

I: lan cheow

G1-F: this is coarse language.. like for example I can use it at the end of a sentence.. something something lan jio la.. just for the sound of it..

I: are you using it to scold someone?

G1-F: no I am not.. I think it is a normal word

G1-M: the offence level is not very high..you dont really use it to scold.. it is actually a normal word..

G1-F: yeah for example if you think someone is saying something that is not believable or out of this word

G1-M: you can turn to him and say “lan jiao la”

I: so although it is very crude, people still use it?

G1-F:yes.. and very naturally.. it’s more of the sound of it than the meaning..

I: so it can be used in front of friends? Or on your friend?

G1-F: yes.. just like how I can swear in front of friends and they will not be offended.. it’s the same..

I: can it be used to scold someone?

G1-M: it is not a word that will cause offence at all.. it is not fierce..

G1-F: yeah it is used more because of how it sounds..

G1-M: you can use it to scold someone.. like if someone says it to me for no reason, I may be angry but if he uses it for a reason or to express himself and he does not use it personally then I won't be offended..

G1-F: yeah when you don't agree with what another person is saying you can say it to express this feeling.. that's how it can be used normally..and it's okay..

I: so can you say this to a female?

G1-F/G1-M: no you cannot

G1-F: if someone says it to me, I will be really surprised and ask him who he is scolding..because it doesn't make sense to use it on me..

I: you can only say this to male?

G1-F/G1-M: yes

I: so for words like lan jiao and chee bai, you have to look at who you are talking to in order to use them?

G1-F: yes.. you can only use chee bai when you are scolding a woman and lan jiao for man..

G1-M: yes.. if a man and woman are fighting.. the man will use chee bai on the woman and the woman will use lan jiao on a man.. but if a woman and woman are fighting.. both will use chee bai on each other.. men don't use chee bai on another man..

G1-F: actually sometimes chee bai can be used by a woman on a man.. maybe in a verbal exchange where it is very heated..and very fast moving.. but most of the time women will use lan cheow to scold a man..

I: lan lan

G1-F: this is new I have not heard this before

G1-M: me too

I: okay then lao lan

G1-F: okay this is coarse language too...but I don't really hear it being used very much..

I: have you heard it being used to scold someone?

G1-F: yes I think ive heard women using it to scold a men..it is like lan tui which is very bad language as well..

I: will it cause offence?

G1-F: yes if the person you are talking about hears it.. you use it to talk bad about somebody..

I: lim peh ka li kong

G1-F: oh that is very normal..

G1-M: it is not vulgar or offensive

G1-F: yeah you use it in a situation where you try to tell someone something they don't know..

I: can women use it?

G1-F: no

G1-M: no ive never really heard a woman use it..i think only men would use this..

G1-F: because lim peh means your father...

I: lum pah

G1-F: well it is slightly crude

I: is it used to scold somebody?

G1-F: not really..again it is about how it sounds..it can be used to signal the end of a conversation..it doesn't really mean anything..it's just the sound..it's like something you want to put at the end of the conversation..

I: lum pah pah lan

G1-F/G1-M: ive not heard it..

I: si

G1-F: it is not crude..but you can use it to scold someone..

I: will the person be angry?

G1-F: sometimes..but you can also use it when someone says something wrong.. you can ask him to go die..thats kind of scolding him for whatever he said but it is not so offensive...

I: si mi lan jiao

G1-F: oh it is very normal..i don't think it is crude..

G1-M: it is not offensive.. if people hear it they won't get angry..

G1-F/G1-M: it can be used by both genders

I: wah lan/ wah lan eh

G1-F: oh this is crude language.. you can use it at the end of your sentence..because of the sound..so it is more of to exclaim..

G1-M: you can use it to scold..when men want to scold other men especially..

G1-F: you don't really use it on women if you want to scold them..

I: so far all these words are used to express only anger?

G1-F/G1-M: yes...

I: how about pain..let's say you bumped into a table accidentally..what can you say?

G1-F: you can say that youre cheh meh (blind)

G1-M: or mak jiu cheh meh.. you can use it to express your discontent.. or to scold yourself for being careless...

I: what do you think of people who use vulgarities?

G1-F: I would think that they are not "proper"

I: is it because they use hokkien?

G1-F: no no it's the same to me whether you swear in hokkien, teochew or Cantonese..they are all still vulgar. And you are still using vulgarities..so ther is no difference..

I: do you think there is any difference in how the youths today swear and how people in your time swear?

G1-F: they swear in English..and we don't speak English.. so I am not sure of the content.. now those who know how to swear in hokkien are the people from my generation and the middle aged people.. the younger generation don't know hokkien or not many speak hokkien so most of them will swear in English..even for those who use hokkien..maybe it's the secondary school teenage gangsters.. but only the older people know the meaning of these words.. and only the older people will know more of these words.. the younger people also say it more easily.. and more naturally... maybe the words are not so heavy and offensive now compared to last time

G1-M: but actually now most of the time youngsters use English to swear.. they don't really use hokkien anymore

I: so for your generation, swear words were only used to scold people?

G1-F/G1-M: yes.. only to scold people..

G1-F: we don't use it for anything other than to express negative emotions..it is not so easy to say it out..

G1-M: it is very rare to use swear words for any other purpose other than to scold..

G1-F: ya to scold someone's father or mother... that's the worst and the most offensive..

I: ok great thank you

This is the transcription of the interview with the G2 female respondent, coded as G2-F.

I: Aside from Swearing, do you speak hokkien?

G2-F: Yes, but not much

I: Not much? Okay but you swear in Hokkien?

G2-F: Yes

I: okay, why do you use Hokkien to swear if you don't speak it so much?

G2-F: because when you scold people you don't care, any dialects what, even if it's *gek ling* (slang for indian) I will still go out and swear and scold people ah

I: do you think that swearing in Hokkien is stronger than using another language to swear?

G2-F: Yes

I: Okay, can you give me an example?

G2-F: Hokkien is more vulgar.. yeah.. like for example if I say in other language like Cantonese "*diu gao lei*" its fucking you, in Hokkien it is "kan ni neh" ..it's much more stronger and vulgar

I: So do you use Hokkien swear words with another language? Like for example, say you are speaking in English and then suddenly you need to swear, do you use Hokkien?

G2-F: yes I suddenly say "aiyah why the bus run away, kan ni na beh ah" also will what

I: ohh ok. Then do you use it as a replacement? Do you use Hokkien swear words to replace English swear words?

G2-F: Yes

I: But do you swear in English also?

G2-F: yes but swear in English not that kick ah because first we are Asian and second thing ah, when you swear in English ah, not that fantastic lah, sometimes you just f,f,f, or fuck fuck fuck or you f ah its nothing what. Fuck fuck fuck wait people don't know how they think it's very far far far ah especially all those hokkien people all those aunty *ah ma ah tsim* (slang for aunty) ah don't understand you and those pai kia (slang for gangsters) don't understand what you are saying ah they will think what: *Ah jie kio le ki huat, tio bo?* ("Elder sister ask you to go and prosper, correct or not")

*wah ji eh gou si* ("this is worse"), *ji gou hou leh* ("this is better(in the worst sense)") you fuck me keep on fa ah fa ah, right the more you fuck him, the more he will say you better better better fuck me more because he thinks its fa

I: so you use hokkien because you think everyone will understand?

G2-F: ya anybody should be understand la and with some sign language will be fantastic lah

I: so do you use it with the sign language often?

G2-F: yeah... better with it, especially if you don't know sign language never mind even have what body language ah also can

I: ah so you think it's okay for you to swear?

G2-F: yes

I: do you do it at home?

G2-F: no I don't do it at home, I do it outside and I don't swear at my own family you don't tell your father kan ni na beh right.. you fuck other peoples' father what right? Or fuck other peoples' mother what right better their own great great grandfather also fuck lah

I: then you do it in the office?

G2-F: yeah sometimes ..people you hate ah, but fuck in a softer way la and at the back lah, if in the empty room we don't mind la fuck up and down don't care lah even the name ah if you want, shout out ah right, fuck until ah she better wah until you no breath ah

I: So at home you don't use it all?

G2-F: no

I: then how about English swearwords? Do you use it at home?

G2-F: no

I: oh so no swearwords at all?

G2-F: no, no kick at all English swear words, too polite

I: so do you do it outside, like at a market or hawker centre?

G2-F: yes especially at the hawker centre, when people are rushing, and people just push then they knock you ah and then hor you can say" sibe kuai lan ah" "kl ah" , ah shortform ah even a nice short form ah you say "kl" ah you see in English you can say more softer, more vulgar but in hokkien you say it loud you very kuai lan ah knock against me wait I *huntum* ( malay for hit) your what lah, see can use with malay right, *zhe(4) xie(1) quan(3) ke(3) yi(3) xue(3)* la ( all these can be learnt la)

I: so are there some people you will not swear in front of?

G2-F: *pai kia* la should be or those with tattoo one you don't want to fight with people which is stronger than you la. like when you see a guy you won't say chao chee bai you better say chao lan jiao, chao chee bai youre scolding yourself what right?

I: so you you won't swear in front of your family members?

G2-F: No

I: then your friends?

G2-F: my friends? No.. only my enemies.

I: okay then can you tell me why you swear?

G2-F: swear because want to scold them what, want to vent anger on them what, swear at them, we will curse them..not say curse ah, better than curse itself, just want to scold them but in our own language or even I think some of the *pai kia* they are even more vulgar they will even scold your mother with it “kan ni na beh chao chee bye” or even Cantonese which will be “*diu lei lou mou fa hai*” “*fa hai*” means ah the chee bye already scratch scratch scrath until damage ah

I: so what do you think when you hear other people swearing in hokkien? Like are you offended?

G2-F: no lah

I: do you think negatively of them?

G2-F: no if they talk ah like if it's one of the *pai kia* I heard one of the conversation before. Like somebody go to somewhere they say “kan ni neh, where are you? why you haven't here yet, kan ni na beh , de dan jin gu liao “I wait for you very long already” lao bei chao lan jiao “your father's smelly penis” le kou mai ka gin ga wah lai “you still don't want to hurry up come” wa lan eh

You see one word, just to from there to here, just ask the friend why why are you not here from the kan gao lao bei lao bu long zong dou kan ge liao “fuck your father fuck your mother fuck everyone” but to them they are very buddy buddy already, when you see your best friend you don't ask them how are you, you will say you haven't die yet ah?

I: so to you it's not very offensive?

G2-F: no

I: depends on the person who says it?

G2-F: depends on the theme la like for example you gamble ah when you gamble you don't say lei ah ye ah you will say lei ah ye ah! You have the kick there right you have the sound there right like when you study a story in a story book you will have high and low pitch but when you are very angry with somebody or your enemy..the tone and the tune is totally different, your face and your expression also different like for example suay ji (unlucky testicles) all these are vulgar words but in a nice way if youre with friends, it's okay

I: so do you think people who swear in hokkien are vulgar?

G2-F: not really sometimes people can say in hokkien and it will sound like a song like this.. you ah you ah toh payoh, lei mother chee bai you ah its very *you(3) ya(1) yun(4)*( rhyme) ah like this nowadays the rap also what you know the *ang moh* (slang for Caucasian) rap, the black rap, they have all this ah is also vulgar words but don't sound very vulgar.. just nice with the tune I think.. you don't overuse it la.. just like just now I mention..the guy who asked the guy why he is not here.. you see people talk talk talk but never in fight but if you talk ah like those want to fight one ah...wah... kan ni na beh le lai ah, le kan ni beh, chee bai, kan ni beh tok la ke, kua chee bai, le kua lei lao bu chee bai le kan la.. its different, when you are fighting and the way you talk to your friends... is too different..

I: so you think swear words can be used for both?

G2-F: yes and some of the place you go like for example you have a lot of gangsters. Im sure you won't talk nice nice one what.. people will sure bully you what..you talk in a way ah that people will respect you

I: so do you think that the older generation that means your parents' generation they use swear words very often also?

G2-F: not really..the older generation they don't use swear words.. they will use it outside..they don't use it in the family..when you hear someone use swear words in the family will get slapped they will say "you swear at your own father.. you are crazy"

I: so where did you learn all the swear words from?

G2-F: outside ..when we are in fights, or when we are angry or when we were youngsters we go to parties ah or when you mix with all the *ah lian ah huay ah beng ah seng* (uncouth youth stereotypes) ah all these we learn what..

I: so what was the most popular swear word for your time?

G2-F: I think our most popular swear word was *chee bai lan jiao* ... little bit of trouble and people swear... *tam poh dai ji ah wah lan eh* ("little bit of trouble, my genitals")

I: so most popular is *lan jiao* and *chee bai*?

G2-F: ya the most

I: so do you think that it is the same for the older generation?

G2-F: no I don't think so..i think last time more *chor lor* (slang for uncouth) we say one time *chee bai* one *lan jiao* last time they will say *chao chee bai* or your *lan lan jiao*..they will add some more words in..

I: oh..then how about the younger generation?

G2-F: only two words *chee bai* and *lan jiao lor*...

I: so you think that there's a change from your parents to you, but there's no change from you to someone younger than you?

G2-F: no.. nowadays even people don't use ah, til you don't know also like they will say *neh neh* they will say *papaya la*, change all the words *la*, *banana la* they still scolding you what

Life is too good now, the younger generation don't need to swear very much.. now people swear to hurt..last time people use it for other things..to protect themselves, their status, to save face..also it will be accompanied with actions..like in a fight, we can actually throw things or do things to hurt people but now.. you can't do that..people don't use physical action so much.. you can actually mean what you say last time when you scold people but now you can only scold them verbally..thats why last time when you use swear words it had more impact.. you will want to say things you can do right..

but now it's different.. now people use for fun..now when you use it it will not lead to fight..verbal fight only..but people also may not think it is vulgar so will not affect what they think of the person.. but last time when you walk down the street...you need to know all this... life was also shorter last time...more real...now life is more artificial...also last time hokkien swear word is something almost everyone knows.. even people of another race... cos now the young generation they don't really speak dialects.. ya they speak in Chinese.. mandarin or English

I: so.. do you have a swear word that you always use?

G2-F: nowadays I don't use la..seldom use any..but most of the time is kum gao lan ah.. like *kum gao lan mafan* (so penis troublesome), *kum gao lan cheong* (so penis longwinded) kum gao lan that means very very.... Very very lan

I: so you mix hokkien and Cantonese?

G2-F: yes. gao lan in our Cantonese is lan pah and lan jiao..

I: so when you are really angry and upset, what word will you use?

G2-F: all the bad words I use finish.. yes everything from hokkien

I: so how about if you are happy or excited? Will you use swear words to express that?

G2-F: no..

I: so its whn you are very angry and upset?

G2-F: only when very angry or upset.. or when the thing is very troublesome la.. or very long winded la or all these we will use swear words

I: ok how about when you are in pain? Like for example when you walk against a table and you hit your leg?

G2-F: no .. only if people knock into you, or purposely knock into you.. you will rant at them..

I: so do you use it in a non- offensive manner also? Whn you joke with your friends and stuff like that?

G2-F: seldom..my staff worst ah..they don't even talk vulgar language..

I: so do you feel relief? Like for example you are really angry and then after you swear then do you feel abit relieved? Like qing song after that?

G2-F: yeah and even better la if you can slap them or box them or kick them or block them..

I: then do you use different words for different groups of people?

G2-F:yeah...if you go to hokkien shop you talk to them in hokkien but if you go to Chinatown you will say all in Cantonese..

I: do you think it is more offensive if you use kan ni nabu instead of kan? which means you don't insult the person's family/parents

G2-F: yaya.. kan on its own has no *ya(1) yun(3)* (rhyme)..dont sound like..you don't say kan le (fuck you)..kan le..kan le what? Kan le sounds like "*gan ni*" ah which is chase you away only.. don't sounds like f-ing you what right..it's just like *ni(3) gan(3) zhe(4) wo(3) jing(4) lai(3) ni(3) gan(3) zhe(4) wo(3) chu(1) qu(4)* (you chase me in, you chase me out)people will think that you sound like you are chasing me in and chasing me out not fucking me in fucking me out... so you put more vulgar terms in like: *wo(3) kan zhe(4) ni(3) chee bai chu(1) qu(4) kan zhe(4) ni(3) chee bai chu(1) lai(3)* (*mix of Hokkien and Mandarin for I fuck your cheebai in and out*)..confirm is fucking you right..

I: so you do it because you want to make it clear that you are cursing at some one?

G2-F: yes ah scolding someone.

I:but will you feel offended if someone scolds you and scolds your parents also?

G2-F: no la... I don't care la... sure scold her back...if you don't scold her back you will be offended what.. you say aiyah somebody scold my parents..but it's the same..you can scold them back what.. it's the same what...

I: so are there words like for example the word chee bai will you say it in front of a girl?

G2-F:yeah..if you are quarrelling with a girl if it's a girl sure you will say chee bai to her what..you are scolding people..sure you want to scold own people things what.. but this one is a girl what.. but if youre scolding a man it's different...

I:oh so if youre scolding a man what will you say?

G2-F: lan jiao lah..anything connected with man one la

I: so you think of the meaning of the word when you use the word?

G2-F: yes la..no no its not just an angry word.. for example now when youre talking to a man you will say kua simi lan jiao (what are you staring at?) you won't say kua simi chee bai because he can say ya im looking at your chee bai.. worst right?

you also must have iq to say this and you *ya(3) yun(4)* (rhyme) you must have the loud voice so people will think that you are very strong and wah they scared ah cos sometimes people want to fight with people because they are afraid..they don't want to be inferior...so if you are stronger than them.. But if you are very timid timid one ah.. you say kan ni na chao chee bai lan jiao.. it doesn't work

I: so it's about the tone also?

A:yes the tone is very important..look at bruce lee when he fights he shouts also

I: ok how about the difference between simi, simi lan and simi lan jiao?

A: they are all the same..actually simi lan and simi lan jiao is the addition of vulgar words only but actually they mean the same thing..

I: do you use them differently?

A: ya when its offensive then I will use simi lan jiao one..

I: so that means when you use a swear word there must be a reason for it?

A: ya la like for example only when its really troublesome until you cannot stand it or something then you will say *ma gao lan fan* (so penis troublesome) ah if not then you won't even think of saying it right if *ma gao fan* (troublesome) is enough..

I: ok this is the end of the interview, thank you

This is the transcription of the interview with the G2 malee respondent, coded as G2-M.

I: I have a list of swearwords that I have questions about..so you just tell me what you think of them and what emotions you think they can be used to express. And I will guide you along...first word...boh chee...

G2-M: it means no balls..no testicles..no guts.. what it means is all that

I: do you think that it is vulgar?

G2-M: it's not vulgar..

I: is it a swear word?

G2-M: nono..it's not really a swear word.. it's more of an expression..to say that someone does not have guts..

I: where have you heard it? Is it used very loosely?

G2-M: it could be used by both genders.. but it's definitely not a vulgar word. It's just an expression to say that one person has no guts to do something..

I: so if someone says it to you, you won't be offended??

G2-M: no they are just saying that you have no guts..it could be used in a conversation where you brag that you are so-and-so but when something happens, you don't have the guts to take action..so it's not offensive and it's not a swear word..

I:okay how about boh lum par chee?

G2-M: ahh this is a deeper meaning than boh chee. It's the same thing but this is used more for emphasis.. to emphasize that you really really got no guts at all..you know.. in whatever you do.. boh chee is just the short form.. it's like when you call someone by a short form instead of his longer name.. it is to address him in a more affectionate way or something like that ... but in this case it is the opposite.. when you use the longer one.. you emphasise the vulgarity of it.. le boh lum par chee eh.. it means that im telling you you really got no guts at all...that means even though you have testicles but they are missing..

I: so its stronger than boh chee? But it's not a vulgarity? So Is it a swear word?

G2-M: yes... it is a swear word in some sense but it's not really swearing either...it's just a word you use when you deeply resent a person for having no guts..

I: so you use it when you're angry?

A: yes

I: do you use it to describe a person? Or its only used to describe a person when you are very angry?

G2-M: it is just used to describe a person who has no guts more strongly.. like this characteristic is more strongly worded..

I: would you use this to describe women?

G2-M: nope..because women don't have what.. they don't have lum par chee.. lum par chee is the testicles what..

I: so you won't use it on women but you will use it on men?

G2-M: yeah because men have testicles what

I: is there any alternative you would use on females?

G2-M: no no no alternative..

I: so do you consider this a vulgarity?

G2-M: nono..lum par is the hokkien word for testicles..thats all..

I: so it's not a vulgarity? Or a swearword?

G2-M: no its just an expression and it's a stronger expression than boh chee.

I: ok then buay kan..

G2-M: buay kan means you cannot have sex right.. so that's the literal meaning.. so when you use it it means that whatever you say ah, like le buay kan ah le. This is a hokkien expression meaning that whatever you do, you cannot be trusted..

I: so is it a swear word?

G2-M: it is a swear word that you want to express your feelings about a person who cannot be trusted.. or the person has no truth or whose actions and words don't match. It could be a person who says " eh buay kan leh" it means that literally.. this person can't have sex, so meaning he doesn't have the ability to do certain thing that's why for example when you say a person buay kan, he cannot fuck that means he is impotent, he cannot perform, so impotent.. you can be impotent in many ways other than sex.. so you use this word to express a person's inability to perform..may not have to be sexually.. you can also use it to mean that he is all talk no action.. I use it as an expression..not as a swear word..

I: have you heard people using this as a swear word?

G2-M: nope. They use it as part of a sentence to describe a person who cannot achieve anything one.. not just sexually..they just use the sexual organ to describe this person..so the meaning is more general..transcends the sexual meaning..

I: so do you use this to express anything positive? Or it's a very negative word?

G2-M: no it's a very negative statement about a person..

I: so you use it for males naturally? Will you use it on females?

G2-M: yes both genders..because the word is general for hokkien so a woman can talk about another woman..

I: so do you think that it is vulgar?

G2-M: it is vulgar..but it is used as an expression.. it's not a swear word..

I: have you heard of it in a verbal argument?

G2-M: no usually no..it's just a way of describing someone.. even in front of the person, you can use it as well..

I: and he will not take offence?

G2-M: no..it just means he cannot perform...

I: ok chui kong lam par song

G2-M: it means someone who knows how to talk only..you talk a lot.. and you feel very satisfied..it's like how you feel very satisfied after a sexual act..and your lam par which is your testicles..feels very satisfied.. you enjoy it.. like you enjoy the sex but you only talk only lor..like you feel satisfied from all that talking..but you don't mean anything you said..

I: so is it used as a swear word??

G2-M: no. you use it to express..a person who just talk and talk and enjoys talking only..chui kong means your mouth speaks only, and lum par song..that means you talk and talk as if youre having sex and you feel satisfied from it.. but actually whatever you talk is nonsensical..but you feel nice and ecstatic from saying it..

I: so it is used negatively to describe someone?

G2-M: yes

I: is it ever used positively?

G2-M: no.

I: So do you use it to describe people of both genders?

G2-M: more men..because lum par is the male testicle what

I: so that means when you use this kind of expression you tend to consider the meaning of the word and what it actually means isit?

G2-M: correct correct.. I mean you can use it on the ladies but they can always retort and say "I don't have a lum par" like "*ni(3) bu(4) shi(4) jun(1) zi(3)*" (Mandarin for "you are not a gentleman") and "*wo(3) mei(3) you(3) shuo(1) wo(3) shi(4) nan(3) ren(3) ma*" (Mandarin for "I never said I was a man") yeah so it's like that too..you have to use it correctly..if you use it wrongly.. you will get retorted..

I: so will you say this to someone's face directly? Is it an aggressive term?

G2-M: it is an offensive word but it is not an aggressive word... it's like in a conversation, you want to tell your friend off that means you just talk only lah...you feel very good when you say it but you won't do anything one..its offensive to the listener but it's definitely only used to describe a situation..

I: so he will not take the meaning personally?

G2-M: no no..it's a general expression.. he will know what your referring to..

I: ok then how about chap cheng

G2-M: it means that youre born of a mixed parentage..youre not pure..it was used mainly to describe Eurasians..theyre neither caucasian or other races..or it could be mixed parentage of any other blood..now the Chinese use it more on the Eurasians or the other races..why because the Chinese think that the chinese usually marry Chinese what so they remain pure what you see...whereas for intermarriages in the 70s were quite frowned upon..because they want to remain pure lah..

I: okay so its offensive but it's not a vulgarity?

G2-M: its offensive..because its racist but it's not vulgar..

I: you cannot use it as a swearword?

G2-M: you can use it as a swearword to describe a person to indicate that he is really mixed blood..

I: but he has to be really mixed blood?

G2-M: chap cheng ah means ten kinds of different blood.. it is used to describe a person and say that he is really not pure and that he doesn't belong to any race at all..

I: so it is very literal? You cannot use it on people who are not of mixed parentage?

G2-M: you can literally mean it or you can also figuratively mean it. Like for example if it is used on a Chinese.. who's really a Chinese.. it means that he is acting like he is mixed.. he has no sense of propriety of being a Chinese or something like that.. like as if he is born of a mixed parentage.. I mean in the early days it was like that

I: so the person doesn't really have to be mixed?

G2-M: no.. he doesn't.. as long as he exhibits behaviour that makes it seem like he is.. so it is kind of a racist remark

I: so it is a negative term?

G2-M: yes it is

I: and you can use it on both genders?

G2-M: correct

I: okay then how about char tau?

G2-M: blockhead la..a person who is stupid, cannot react to anything

I: is that a swear word?

G2-M: no it is used as an expression..to describe a person who is a blockhead.

I: in an affectionate manner or in an insulting manner?

G2-M: it is used in a negative way.

I: so will you say “you are such a char tau” in an affectionate manner? Can you use it like that?

G2-M: no no..it depends on the content of the subject matter. For example, “wah just now I was a the range firing then ah I like char tau know I, I froze then I never fire” or “you stupid blockhead ah.. you at the firing range you freeze..char tau ah you” used to describe a person who’s brain is not connected to his acitons..

I: so it is not vulgarity..but can it be offensive?

G2-M: uh not offensive I mean these kinda words are not offensive..they are just descriptions for situations or people or things.. it can swing both ways depending on the content..

I: ok then how “about chee bai”

G2-M: it is the female anatomy..you can use it on both genders.. if you use it on a male.. you are saying he is really not a male, youre a female.. uh if you use it on a lady well usually theres a prefix “chao” before the chee bai..like chao chee bai.. you know? It means that the person has a stinking vagina..

I: ok so it is a swear word??

G2-M: yes it is

I: so you use it to express anger?

G2-M: yes mostly

I: have you heard of it being used in a positive manner?

G2-M: no

I: how aobut when you are surprised or something? Is it used as a swear word on its own? That means like for example, like if you knocked over something..can it be used?

G2-M: nono cannot..it has to be used on another person..

I: so it’s a normal swear word? You cannot use it to express anything more?

G2-M: nono

I: ok how about chee teh bin

G2-M: it means to tell someone he has the face of a vagina..it’s an offensive word.. a swear word..when you use it on someone, you will be angry with the person..

I: you can use it on male/female?

G2-M: uh if you use it on a male, youre saying that he is not a male.. he is behaving like a girl.. and his face is like the shape of a vagina..

I: so it will be more offensive if you use it on a male?

G2-M: uh actually I think both will be equally offended...I mean nobody will like being called that right..

I: so it is used to express anger?

G2-M: yes.. it can also be used as a swear word to scold someone..it can be used right in front of the person, to his face..

I: ohhh ok..how about chek ak

G2-M: chek ak means you are wicked..it's not a swear word..it's an expression.. to describe a person who is wicked..

I: for both genders?

G2-M: yes

I: so it is a negative word but it's not a swear word?

G2-M: yes correct

I: ok so chuo bo lan

G2-M: ok lan is the male anatomy.. or the short form of it.. chuo bo lan means you didn't do anything at all..you wasted a lot of time.. it is an expression, it is not a swear word.. it's to describe a situation you know for example in the army they always like to use chuo bo lan.. which means that you didn't do anything..from the time that you are supposed to go into the army and from the time you came out, if you say the time inbetween is chuo bo lan. You are saying that you didn't do anything and it was not a productive time that you had..

I: ok so it's not really positive or negative?

G2-M: it's more of a negative way to describe a negative situation..especially relating to time..

I: then you don't think it's vulgar even though it makes reference to the penis?

G2-M: no its not vulgar.. it's an expression that the hokkiens like to use..zhuo bo means to do nothing and they like to add on the last word to it the endword to get zhuo bo lan

I: so it's now a phrase? People don't break it down to get the individual meaning?

G2-M: nono

I: so zhuo bo and zhuo bo lan..the addition of the lan, does it make it stronger?

G2-M: yes.. anything that has to do with anatomy, in any language, always tends to be quite offensive..to certain hearers. For example, for a person who comes from a good background, to him he may consider this a vulgarity.. but to a person who grew up in that environment...it is very normal one.. it's very casual.. it can also be used to describe a situation whereby all that he does comes to zero..

I: ok how about heng kao kan

G2-M: it means that in the natural course of things a person will have sex with another person right.. when you say this to another person, youre saying that he is not even fit to be a human being..he has to be satisfied by a dog.. so this is a vulgarity.. youre saying that a person is not even fit enough to have sex with a human being..

I: so you dehumanize the person?

G2-M: yes..so you curse him that he is not a person

I: so it's a very offensive word?

G2-M: yes.. you use it to express anger..very much used to express deep anger..

I: hatred?

G2-M: not so much hatred.. because through the years it has become an expression..

I: so it might not be offensive to some people anymore?

G2-M: in the olden days it is.. anything to do with parents and brother or sister, family.. family unit in the Chinese culture is very important you see...so if you scold anyone in my family.. I will take offence to it.. but as the years gone by, you find that all these vulgarities and all that right..it diminishes.. and they become very generic expressions..

I: so you think that if you use this to scold someone, it won't be as strong as if you were to use it last time?

G2-M: yes

I: so will you use this for male and female?

G2-M: both..to a male..ok you see the dog it takes the lead.. so the male becomes the passive one.. so when you use it on a male.. youre telling him that he is so negative until the dog is the one who is stronger.. and is the one controlling him...whereas to a woman, youre only fit to have sex with a dog instead of a man..

I: so this word is vulgar and a swear word?

G2-M: yes and you use it to express anger..

I: okay then how about hong kan?

G2-M: it compares the person to a prostitute..and like a prostitute he is waiting to be sold for a price..

I: so do you use it on male or female?

G2-M: both

I: so is it vulgar?

G2-M: yes.. and it's used to express anger..

I: are there people that you will not use this word on?

G2-M: you will not use this word among siblings or close relatives..

I: so its only used on people you don't know or people who have deeply offended you?

G2-M: correct.. but it evolves.. like I said in the older days, you are more strict with how you use the vulgarity.. but in the newer days, perhaps people do not really know the meaning of the word they know it's a swear word so they just use it lor..but what exactly it means they don't know.. so perhaps it evolves in that way because they use it not knowing the actual meaning

I: so you think the older generation or people from your generation are stricter with how they use the vulgarirty?

G2-M: yeah I mean in the sense that we will know exactly the meaning of the word.. its more descriptive..whereas now it's more generic..

I: so now people just use words that they may not know the meaning of?

G2-M: correct.. they don't know the meaning because they don't have the environment that is the source you know it's just like sometimes in the olden days if you use the wrong word.. you get retorted you see...

I: ohhh so you will be more careful when you use it?

G2-M: yes

I: is it also because you know the extent of the offence that it can cause?

G2-M: yeah because I know the meaning so I won't use it when it is not right

I: ok then how about how seow?

G2-M: that means you are full of shit..you are bullshitting..

I: is it offensive?

G2-M: it is not offensive it's a normal word..the word seow has a double meaning. Seow as in you are mad..the other one refers to sperm..same sound but it could have a double meaning..

I: but in both cases..it's not offensive?

G2-M: no..it's just a way of expressing that someone is full of lies.. and whatever he says is untrue.. and he is bullshitting

I: can you use it in a positive way? Or like can you use it in the sense that won't cause offence

G2-M: this word doesn't cause offence at all.. when you say le hao seow.. you are saying that you are bluffing...

I: how about kan?

G2-M: just screw, fuck.. it's an expression now.. in the olden days it was a swear word..but now it's just an expression

I: so you can just use it like that?

G2-M: no usually you say hor lan kan which means let people fuck you.. it doesn't sound right if you just use it as a word on its own..

I: so that means you have to use it on somebody?

G2-M: yeah it expresses anger, frustration.. it's more of a word to express frustration rather than it being used to curse or to scold someone..

I: so when you hear people use it..they are using it to express frustration with others as well as themselves?

G2-M: yes

I: you can use it in front of males and females?

G2-M: yes

I: does it cause offence?

G2-M: no it doesn't..it has become a generic word

I: then how about the older generation?

G2-M: it's the same to them I think.. this word has not evolved.. it remains the same.. so to them it's not really an offence causing word...but it really depends on the environment and where you come from.. for example if you live in a neighbourhood whereby a lot of gangsters or a lot of people of lower income... to them this is an everyday word.. it doesn't cause offence..

I: how about kan ni na

G2-M: okay remember there was this malay blogger who was talking about this word and how it is very popular in the army.. they are always using it.. and it actually literally means.. I want to have sex with your mother.. but why would you want to do that with someone's mother? So it's kind of a very stupid thing to say actually. I mean if you want to have sex, you'll want to have sex with a younger woman right. So in this case.. the person who scolds kan ni na.. it's stupid right but people still use it..

I: so it's a swear word?

G2-M: it is a swear word.. in the olden days it points to some taboo..because you don't scold a person an offensive word that involves his sister his mother his brother his father.. those are his close family unit.. but now.. people use it.. without thinking what the actual meaning is

I: so normally people will use it to express anger and frustration?

G2-M: frustration more than anger..

I: so you can use it in front of male and female?

G2-M: well for words like kan ni na bu and kan ni na beh... I think like when men scold women.. they will use kan ni na bu rather than kan ni na beh because if they use kan ni nab eh which is fuck your father.. it's weird because they are men and they want to fuck my father? So the girl will say kan ni n beh if she is the one who is scolding.. so you must actually know the meaning..

I: so it's a swear word?

G2-M: yes and you can use it to scold other people it's not a word that you will use on yourself.. like for example between siblings.. you won't say kan ni na bu... because that is disrespectful to your own mother

I: so will it cause a lot of offence?

G2-M: yesyes in the olden days.. nowadays maybe people or even the hokkiens themselves.. because they don't speak hokkien very well anymore.. they don't know the meaning so just because they know that it's a vulgarity and a swear word, they just use it without caring about the actual meaning.. but if you know the meaning you won't use it under certain circumstances.. like a quarrel between siblings.. then you will stay away from words that will have this kind of meaning..

I: okay how about kan ni na bu chao chee bai

G2-M: that means you are scolding the person's mother who has a very smelly vagina.. in that literal sense.. that means you want to have sex with the other person's mother whose vagina is dirty..

I: so it is offensive?

G2-M: yes very..but it's a very stupid swear word.. you won't want to do the actual act correct? I mean to fuck someone's mother..and then she has a stinking vagina somemore..

I: so it's just a blank expression?

G2-M: yes..but people use it..in the olden days ah, we scold people we also use brains one..it's a very stupid expression I think..whoever who came up with it.. must not have been thinking..but whoever who use this is quite stupid too.. why would you want to say something you don't mean

I: but was it very commonly used?

G2-M:yes it was..a very commonly used phrase..but When I was younger..when I first heard it..i asked myself why I would want to use this..it's an oxymoron what..

I: but it's very offensive?

G2-M: yes it is very offensive...for Asians the family unit is very important..for example the middle eastern they also have this also.. why zidane lost his temper and headbutted the other guy? It was because he insulted his mother and sister..he found it very offensive in his culture.. so in the same way..the Asian or rather the Singapore context..anything to do with your blood relations are very important to you..you will not allow that offence to go away that easily..

I: okay so you can use this to express anger?

G2-M: anger..frustration..and more so is to incite reaction..

I: ok so it's very provocative?

G2-M: yes correct

I: okay so would you then consider this to be the deepest form of insult?

G2-M: yes..not only for the hokkien..but for the other races as well..even the malays..they know how to use this one what..

I: and you can use this on both genders?

G2-M: no..kan ni na bu chao chee bai that means your mother right.. so the one who use it has to be a guy.. you can use it on a lady or a man..but the user has to be a guy.. how can a girl use this?

I: okay then how about kana lan neh

G2-M: okay kana lan neh.. hokkien has evolved you know.. kana is actually a malay word and lan is the male testicle.. when you combine the phrase..it's a very funny phrase.. the meaning is to say someone is speechless..or something stunned you.. you cannot react..so for example. You have a situation where you are asked to buy a ticket.. and the queue is really long..so you queue and queue all the way until it reaches your turn and they just sold out.. so you would say that you kana lan..an expression to say that you got played out

I: so it doesn't cause offence?

G2-M: no it doesn't.. it's just an expression..but it has colloquial meaning.. because kana is a malay word..it's not really pure hokkien.. half of it is hokkien and half of it is malay.. so you find certain swear words..they have other races input into it..

I: so this one can be used to express a situation that happened to you..can you use it on another person..

G2-M: you can tell a person you kana lan neh.. so you are saying that he is like a male testicle..like he is quite a blockhead..so it has two meanings..one, you got played out...the other one is you expressed the other party to be like a male testicle..

I: and it's not really offensive if you use it like that?

G2-M: uh not really offensive..it's just an expression..

I: uh then kao peh kao bu

G2-M: literally it means crying out for your father and crying out for your mother

I: is it offensive?

G2-M: no it is not.. it just means youre making a lot of noise as if your mother and father have died.. so youre crying over spilt milk. So this is used to describe a situation..where another person accuse you of making so much noise as if oyure crying for your dead parents..

I: okay then kum goong..

G2-M: stupid la.. just stupid..goong means stupid lor..so kum is a stronger word.. so it means you are very stupid..

I: but that's all? It will not cause any offence?

G2-M: no..

I:so it's not a swear word?

G2-M:no

I:kum lan

G2-M: the word kum.. means to use your mouth.. as if youre doing oral sex.. but for kum goong just now.. the word goong means stupid right.. but the interesting is how come it evolves in this way? because you have kum lan.. which means that youre having a blow job or having oral sex..

I: ok so is it offensive?

G2-M: no it has no meaning to it.. it's just an expression that you are having a blow job.. you can use it in a situation like if you are asked what someone has asked you to do you can say "kum lan ah"...its used as an expression to signify that you are effectively doing nothing and you use it to describe a situation where you felt that it was a very stupid thing you have to do.. so literally right.. it's like if you can have sex, why should you want to have oral sex.. isn't that more satisfying having real sex rather than just oral sex..so you can say kum lan ah.. meaning that this whole situation is very stupid..

I: so people won't take offence?

G2-M: no they will understand.. like I said..why would you settle for second best when you can have the best.. that's the meaning

I: kum pooi

G2-M: pooi means fart..which denotes an unpleasant smell...so now when you are telling a person to kum pooi that means like you are telling him to put his mouth to another person's backside and instead of having oral sex, you are having an oral with the fart..which is gas right...so it means like nothing will come out of the whole situation... you are questioning the person like why would you want to do this? Because nothing good will come out what.. you know...so it describes a situational thing..

I: okay so it's not a vulgarity? Or a swear word?

G2-M: no..it's just a description..

I: ok..next word lan jiao

G2-M: lan jiao is the male penis la..it's like scolding chee bai to a girl.. but you use it on a guy..you call him a penis

I: so it's a swearword?

G2-M: it can be a swearword..but now.. like I said.. the language has changed..you use it to express frustration..

I: and you will only use it on a guy?

G2-M: no I think both sex also can.. but it will be funny on a lady..so mostly it will be on a man..so a man on a man..or a lady on a man..

I: so it's only a word you use when youre angry.. will it be used in any other way?

G2-M: no..all swearwords not used to express any positive thing one what..

I: okay so lan lan

G2-M: lan lan is a vulgar word.. it means the situation cause you to feel at the end of the day, like you didn't get any positive thing out of a situation..like just now I said ..the one about queueing to get tickets and in the end it runs out.. lanlan lor you stayed there..

I: so it's an expression? And not a swearword?

G2-M: yeah it's an expression and it's not a swearword..you won't use it to scold someone.. you are just using it to describe a situation which makes you feel stupid or the situation makes you look stupid..

I: so it's not a word that can cause offence even if you use it on another person?

G2-M: nono..i won't use it to scold another person..

I: ok good then lan tui

G2-M: it's again used to describe a situation in which you feel like youre a penis..but I don't think it is used very often..

I: okay then lao lan

G2-M: that means you cannot control your penis..thats why you have a leaky penis..it means that you cannot control a situation..or a whole situation, you are not in control..thats all..

I: so it's not an offensive word?

G2-M: no it's a descriptive word..of a situation or an experience..

I: you cannot use it to scold a person?

G2-M: you can use it to scold someone.. but only for not having control of a situation..it's not a word that you will use when you are angry in general.. when you call a person lao lan, you are using this because you are saying that the person has lost control of a situation.. so it's just a crude way of describing his situation.. I won't be offended if someone uses this on me..because it's just a way to describe a situation as it is or to compare my situation to a premature ejaculation

I: so have you heard women using this?

G2-M: no..mostly men.. women do use this.. when they describe a man..who is not in control of a situation

I: so man can use this to describe themselves? How about women?

G2-M: yah.. women won't use it to describe themselves.. like you cannot use lao lan to describe a woman what..you cannot use it on a woman what..vulgar words have a meaning one.. but over time, these words have lost their meaning.. so some people they just tend to follow others without understanding the word's meaning..

I: okay.. then lim peh ka li kong..does it cause offence?

G2-M: okay the meaning is like let me tell you like your father..lim peh is your father.. so I am like your father telling you something..so you better listen.. it doesn't cause offence.. it's just an expression..like im telling you like your father would tell you..

I: so can women use it?

G2-M: can. It goes beyond the gender.. that means the person is now like as if he is your father.. so it's a metaphorical kind of use..

I: so you won't be offended?

G2-M: no..it's just someone who is telling you something using the authority and position of your father..the thing is that.. the person can always say wah ka li kong.. that means im telling you but if he chooses to use lim peh ka li kong..it makes the things that he is saying all the more serious..and he should be taken seriously..

I: ok then lum pah

G2-M: lump ah is the male testicle only lor that's all..

I: is it used as a swearword?

G2-M: yes it's a swear word.. you can say lum pah la..but a very generic one..

I: so women also use it?

G2-M: yes.. they can

I: is it used in a positive way or a negative way?

G2-M: of course its negative.. all swear words are only used to express negative emotions..

I: ok lump ah pah lan

G2-M: the testicles hitting the penis.. this phrase is used to describe a situation about going back to square one.. it's a vulgar expression.. but it's not a swear word.. I use it to tell a person that this will only go back to the same thing.. it's a crude way to describe a situation which will go back to the status quo.. you won't really be angry when you use it..

I: how about na beh na bu

G2-M: theres a dotdotdot implication at the end..im not scolding any vulgar word.. it just means your father your mother.. and then after that its very imaginative.. it's a short form..like actually I could be scolding vulgar words.. but this is in a short form..actually I mean to scold your father and mother.. but im doing it in short form..and not actually saying it out.. so it's not offensive.. but I use it.. its more for people who are more refined..who don't like to say vulgar words.. like for example, the whole thing would be ni na bu eh chao chee bye..but they still want to express anger but they don't want to say it out..so they will just say ni na beh ah..the whole thing is im scolding your father/mother.. but scolding what im not saying it because I don't like to use vulgar words..

I: so you will use it when youre angry?

G2-M: yeah.. ok these words are mostly used by those who don't really like to use vulgar words..they will stop short of saying the following vulgarity..

I: but they use it to express anger and frustration also?

G2-M: ya..the vulgar word still continues.. just that the speaker stops there.. because maybe he feels it is demeaning of him to use vulgar words.. but he or she wants to scold still but don't want to be offensive to the full extent..

I: so it's a swear word?

G2-M: it's a swearword.. he has the thought.. but it's a short form with non- verbalized parts..

I: then how about si?

G2-M: si? Die la.. well it can be a swearword if its to describe a person... that whatever he do ah he is gonna die and pay for it...

I: can it cause offence?

G2-M: no not really.. you can use it to express a situation where things are not favourable to you..

I: si mi lan jiao

G2-M: the vulgarity of this expression is the use of lan which is penis.. actually you can say simi and it means the same thing.. you are asking someone what is going on or what he wants or something.. it's not really a swear word but it really depends on the tone of the user.. it can be neutral or it can be a swearword depending..

I: have you heard females using it?

G2-M: yeah.. but I think that they don't know the meaning of it.. they are just using it as an expression..

I: ok then how about wah lan/ lan eh or wah lan eh?

G2-M: ok it's an expression that comes from wah lau..which means to oh husband.. but the vulgarity of this is.. because of this addition of lan... Which is what testicle.. it's not really offensive.. it's just an expression.. it's the same as wah lau.. the people who want to use this is using it in a vulgar way..you can use it to describe positive things.. like my army friend used it to describe a situation to me that all my friends used my wedding as an excuse to not go for reserve or something.. he used wah lan instead of wah lau to express his exasperation.. so it's more of the speaker's choice to use this expression... as an exclamation.. it doesn't really have to convey any strong emotion.. in a verbal argument you won't use this.. this is the nicer swear word or expression to say already..

I: do you think that swearing in hokkien is stronger than using another language?

G2-M: perhaps because hokkien is spoken more so..majority of singaporeans are hokkien so maybe that's why we hear more hokkien words being swore out.. Cantonese..some of the swear words have the same meaning as the ones we used in hokkien.. but in terms of vocabulary I think hokkien has more swear words..

I: are there people you will not swear in front of?

G2-M: probably the teachers..or people who are more learned.. or in front of the older generation.. because you don't want to offend them..so probably you will only use swear words amongst your peers only lor..

I: so is there any kind of swear word that is popular for your generation?

G2-M: kan ah I think

I: do you think the older generation swears differently?

G2-M: yes..they know the meaning of the swear words and they will use it appropriately.. in appropriate situations..

I: how about the younger generation

G2-M: I think they lost control of the mastery of the language.. so some of the swear words that they use.. It's not as varied as the older generation..they only use a common few..

I: have you heard of words that people use when they are in pain..not to scold someone.. just to express some emotion, not necessarily to scold..

A G2-M maybe kan ah like the english "fuck" or "diu" in Cantonese

I: so is there a difference in the way that you use a word depending on your emotions?

G2-M: the swear word you use will be longer probably.. and it won't be so generic anymore.. it will be more personal..like instead of just kan ni na which is fuck you.. you will use kan ni na bu.. which is fuck your mother...that's when you are angrier.. it's no more an expression youre really cursing the person's father/mother..

I: so is that the most offensive? To insult a person's parents?

G2-M: yes and it will definitely trigger a person.. or incite more anger on the other person.. the response may be physical or verbal..then the person will swear back.. and both of them can keep swearing at each other..

but the environment has to play with a person's use of vulgar words.. like me I stayed in a kampong.. you think that a kampong is a place with attap houses and where many races stay right.. but I grew up in a modern kampong.. I grew up in a flat and it comprises of two or three rooms.. this is the kind of situation a lot of us grew up in..and our neighbours make up our kampong.. and in that kind of situation where the middle class is very little and the lower middle class is a lot and the lower class is even more.. then swear words are even more commonly used..

but even though as a middle class living in this situation, I do not want to use.. because if I use.. im no class.. so I will not use even though I have the knowledge of how to use them..so I decided not to use them myself.. because then I will be acting like an uneducated person..just like a lot of people in my kampong.. so people felt they have to behave with decorum and all that in order to disassociate themselves from all that in that sense.. because in the early days people were also concerned with where a person stayed.. I

ike I won't like to tell anyone where I stayed..because the brothels were near where I stayed.. so when you tell people where you stay..they will use it to judge you.. oh youre from this kind of neighbourhood..so it's like them stereotyping you already..so even though you don't use it.. they would have stereotyped you to swear a lot.. based on where you stay.. so swear words.. hokkien or what it actually depends on where you grew up in and the environment..

G2-M: but why there are more hokkien swear words.. it's because there are genetically more hokkiens.. then teochew than the Cantonese..so of course hokkien has more colourful swear words whereas if you go to china now..of course there are other dialect equivalents..but the Cantonese themselves also use hokkien even though they have the same thing.. for example.. lan lan ah, it was used to describe a situation where you feel very stupid.. so certain swear words are commonly used by all and so only certain swear words will evolve lor..

I: so are there any swear words that the older generation used that is no longer a swear word in your generation?

G2-M: like some of it has become generic.. but I think the greatest change has come during the third generation..which is my children's generation.. my father's time and my time.. is probably the same.. perhaps it's got to do with education..more so the younger people are swearing in English than in hokkien.. so it evolves.. like I said.. even though hokkien swear words that they use, are not as strong and as heavily worded as before..

I: and you think that it's because they don't know what they are swearing?

G2-M: correct and also because society has become affluent and people have become more educated..so swear words are used less...and the only thing left is the English swear words that are commonly used.. like for example the word die..the word in English is literal.. but in hokkien it is used to describe a situation that is unfavourable.. so I think what has changed is not really the meaning of the words per se but how it is used.. and maybe it's not so severe anymore.. people don't really know the true meaning anymore.. so they just stick to using the common ones.. so even though they may say certain swearwords, they may not even know the meaning

I: so you think that because of this, certain swear words are not used anymore?

G2-M: that is due to the mastery of language.. the erosion of the use of hokkien among the hokkiens..cantonese among the Cantonese..so I feel that the more they lose the language, the lesser swear words that they will use and know...it's the demise of a language.. the demise of the swear words.. maybe by the next generation, they won't be heard or known anymore.. because what you hear.. is what you learn.. so the lesser is said, the less you can learn...

I: so for instance do you think that if you hear a word now, you will be more offended than someone younger?

G2-M: yes because they won't know the literal meaning of it.. so as society becomes more educated and more affluent, and theres a change in the language spoken in society.. this is reflected in the use of swear words also.. interesting in the sense because I live through the period of change.. the other thing is also because even the malays they don't have use their own swear words.. they use the hokkien ones.. because you know if you swear in malay, only the malays will understand you.. but if you swear in hokkien and because the majority of chinese people are hokkien, a lot of people will be able to understand you..you want to swear because you want to make another person understand right?

I: oh so during your time, you would want to swear in hokkien because it's the language most people will understand?

G2-M: yes you see its nothing to do with the hokkien language itself..it's because more people will understand you.. and also more to do with the larger numbers.. so theres more people speaking..in

terms of sheer number.. naturally more voices being heard.. not that it is vulgar per se.. so because of that I always feel that that is why hokkien is seen to be more vulgar.. which they always deny..

I: so you won't think that someone who swears in hokkien is more vulgar than someone swearing in Cantonese?

G2-M: we always tend to associate vulgarities with hokkien even though both may mean the same.. but I think that hokkien does sound more vulgar because of that..

I: so why do you think people would want to swear?

G2-M: frustration..they just want to vent a certain anger.. and they want to be expressive about it.. it helps to alleviate some physical need to act out on that anger..

I: so which generation do you think swears more?

G2-M: the older generation.. the younger ones will only use the common ones.. the older generation are less educated so they don't have words to express very much in an argument.. so maybe they swear more often than the younger generation..

I: ok that's the last of my questions. Thank you

This is the transcription of the interview with the G3 female respondent, coded as G3-F.

I: ok so the first word is bo ji.. is it a swear word?

G3-F: is this bo ji.. like no balls?

I: yes

G3-F: ohh..uh not really..i think it's just to..you use it when someone is like being very coward..

I: uhuh..so you don't think it's a swearword then do you find it offensive?

A G3-F to a certain extent..but I think nowadays not so..but I wouldn't use it in front of my parents ah.. in front of friends..yeah

I: so can use it on guys and girls?

G3-F: I think mostly guys..

I: but can you use it on girls?

G3-F: not really..i think with girls it will be like hum ji

I: okay..does this express any emotions like happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust or surprise?

G3-F: it's more like im looking down on a person.. like you have no guts..

I: so maybe disgust?

G3-F: yeahh

I: how about anger? will you be angry if you use it? Or can the usage be neutral?

G3-F: it can used as like teasing.. or joking also and yeah it can be used to express anger..like " why you so bo chee..dont dare to do isit"

I: ok then boh lum par ji..

G3-F: it's about the same as boh ji lor

I: do you use it?

G3-F: no

I: have you heard other people using it?

G3-F:no

I: ok so do you think that it is like a swear word?

G3-F: yeah yeah.. because lum par ji is very vulgar..

I: you don't use it but you know it?

G3-F: yeah.. roughly..like I know the meaning la..

I: ok buay kan

G3-F: I don't know this.. I have never heard of it

I: ok chui kong lum par song

G3-F: I don't know this either.. these are very uncommon.. I don't know..i think maybe girls don't really use.. but guys among guys..they might know and use

I: ok then chap cheng.. have you heard of it?

G3-F: no.. sorry

I: char tau

G3-F: I don't know what it means, I have never heard of it

I: ok next word, chee bai

G3-F: oh..my favourite

I: your favourite?

G3-F: yeah... ok this is offensive..and it's a vulgarity

I: so will you be angry when you use this?

G3-F: yes

I: and will you call someone this?

G3-F: yes

I: will it matter whether it's a guy or a girl?

G3-F: no

I: so a guy can be a chee bai?

G3-F: yesyes

I: but do you use it anywhere else? Like in a non-offensive manner maybe?

G3-F: well.. like to refer to that part.. but I think mostly jokingly.. like yeah..if I am not angry.. I probably wouldn't use it

I: so not even in normal conversation? Will you use it to express like surprise?

G3-F: it's more like if im bitching about someone..i will say " he's damn chee bai" or "he is such a cheebai..how can he do this?"

I: oh okay so you use it to describe a person? How about a situation?

G3-F: like "this class is damn cheebai?" nono I don't use it like that

I: but have you heard other people using it this way?

G3-F: I think sometimes yeah..

I: so you are comfortable saying it in front of guys and girls?

G3-F: yes..As long as it is not in front of my parents..

I: okay chee teh bin

G3-F: ive never heard of it..

I: ok chek ak

G3-F: yeah ive heard of it

I: do you think it's a swearword?

G3-F: I don't think so.. because i have heard my mum using it.. I think it's more of like a why you so like that kind of expression..

I: so it's not offensive?

G3-F: nono

I: okay so next word... cho bo lan

G3-F: cho bo lan.. its like.. not really a vulgarity..but it's still the kind you won't use in front of your parents.. because it has "lan".. it's just to make.. like erm..to say a person is cho bo-ing and then you intensify it by adding a "lan"

I: so are you angry? Is there any emotion when you use it?

G3-F: it can be used like when youre angry la..like " my groupmate cho bo lan, never do the work"..but then you can also use it like on yourself..like "today I never do anything lor, cho bo lan"

I: ah ok so it depends on the context?

G3-F: yeah it depends..

I: but it's not really a swear word?

G3-F: can be.. but you are not really swearing also

I: you can use it to describe guys and girls?

G3-F: yes..can

I: ok next..heng kao kan

G3-F: uh..ive actually never heard of this.. I have only heard of the other one.. which is "hor ter kan" and "hor kao kan", which means get fucked by a pig and get fucked by a dog.. which means like get scrwed la basically

I: so those are swearwords?

G3-F: yes..i think they are quite vulgar..because they involve animals..and like fucking.. yeah but its used to describe situations..not to scold a person.. it's like " today I got into trouble at work and my boss scolded me..he scold me until like hor ter kan, hor kao kan" like yeah get scolded very seriously..yeah

I: so will you use it differently if it was a guy?

G3-F: not really..you can use it on both..just that maybe this kind of words you won't use it on girls..

I: because it is very graphic?

G3-F: yeah

I: so it's not really like a swear word? You won't use it when you are angry?

G3-F: not really..it's just to describe how serious a situation is..like maybe to exaggerate..

I: ok how about hong kan

G3-F: hong kan is also not really used to scold people.. even when im not angry I still can use it.. like "my fyp is due tomorrow and I still haven't finish..hong kan liao"

I: so it's not a swearword?

G3-F: no

I: how about how seow?

G3-F: never heard

I: how about kan

G3-F: kan is like fuck.. I think it's a swear word la.. I use it when im angry.. but not alone..it's like kan something..like kan ni na..

I: so it's only for negative things?

G3-F: yes

I: You don't use it in a way to express surprise? Like as an exclamation of something positive? Anything that is not anger

G3-F: exclamation... yes.. ive heard people use it like "kan".. just like that.. like "kan" exclamation mark..

I: as an utterance?

G3-F: yeah..but they are not scolding anyone

I: ok then kan ni na

G3-F: kan ni na..yes..its a swear word.. I will use it when im angry.. and I think it's like quite vulgar because kan ni na is like fuck you..yeah.. so I will be quite angry if I use it la..

I: and you can use it on a male and female?

G3-F: yes.. I will use it on both..

I: ok then how about kan ni na bu

G3-F: ok this is even more vulgar than kan ni na.. I mean yeah it expresses anger..but I think it is even more vulgar because it involves your parents.. it's like fuck your mother, fuck your father.. and usually I won't use it.. like normally when im angry.. it has to be like something really big.. and I have to be like really really really angry

I: so do you think that this kind of insults, because it involves your parents, its more vulgar?

G3-F: yes definitely.. and more offensive also..

I: so you will be very angry if someone says that to you?

G3-F: yes I will be angry la.. and like because it involves parents right.. I usually don't use it on people.. I won't say it to a person directly la like kan ni na bu..because it really is very vulgar..

I: so you don't use it as an expression? Or an exclamation?

G3-F: actually I do..but it has to be like when im angry then I will use it as an exclamation..

I: but there has to be anger for you to be able to say this?

G3-F: yes...

I: you can't say it as a normal expression?

G3-F: nonono

I: ok..kan ni nab u chao chee bai

G3-F: ohmygod..this is even worst.. ok it's like.. uh.. same as the kan ni na.. it's also very vulgar.. because it involves parents and like its even worst.. you go and add the chao chee bai at the back..which is like your mother's smelly chee bai.. yeah..usually I won't use this.. but if I use it right.. usually over text.. it's easier.. because there is an acronym..like knnbccb..and it's not so bad.. but I wouldn't say it out loud..

I: so you won't use it on somebody?

G3-F: no I won't

I: then how do you use it? to describe a situation?

G3-F: as in like I will use it like as an exclamation..or an utterance lor.. just to punctuate my sentence with it..but it's easier to type it out than to say it out..

I: ok then kana lan neh

G3-F: never heard of

I: ok then kau bei kau bu

G3-F: ok this one also involves parents..but I think this one is not so intense.. cos like kan is very vulgar.. but this one is just to describe someone who is very noisy or naggy

I: so this one is not a swear word?

G3-F: uh I guess it can be if you say directly it to someone like “you are damn kau bei, can you don’t so kau bei kau bu” but like..

I: so it’s not a word that you will swear with?

G3-F: yeah.. uh usually I won’t say it directly to a person..i think it can be offensive..

I: because of the parents reference?

G3-F: yeah..i think like this is to describe when your parents pass away and then you cry for them right?

I: yeah

G3-F: in other words saying that your parents died..yeah..but then..sometimes I will use it when I talk about other people...like “in my class there’s this guy, who’s always making a lot of noise, damn kau bei kau bu” not directly at a person..

I: so as a way to describe him?

G3-F: yeah

I: so doesn’t matter whether the person is a guy or a girl?

G3-F: no doesn’t matter..

I: ok so kum gong

G3-F: never heard of this

I: ok then kum lan

G3-F: this one ive heard of before..but I never really use it myself..

I: how have other people use it?

G3-F: I can’t really remember.. but I think just as an exclamation.. like at the end of the sentence: “something,something, kum lan” but im not very sure also la

I: Ok then kum pooi

G3-F: never heard of

I: then lan jiao

G3-F: lan jiao is.. I think it’s quite vulgar..it’s a swear word.. it can be used to scold people also.. and I think also to describe them.. like : “this guy is a lan jiao bin” you have to add in the “bin” at the back.. which mean he looks like an asshole.. or if you are very angry at someone, you can say: “ I don’t want to see your lan jiao bin, can you get out of my sight” that kind.. but usually I don’t really use lan jiao..

I think I use chee bai more often.. to me it's like slightly more vulgar than chee bai..maybe because im a girl..so I swear with my own body part..but I cannot swear with other people's body parts?

I: so normally when you use it ; will you be angry?

G3-F: yeah there has to be some sort of anger

I: other than anger, is there any situation that you will use this word?

G3-F: I think it's mostly anger and frustration.. I don't use it for any other situations

I: ok then if you use it on someone, does it have to be a guy?

G3-F: more often yes..its guys..i don't really use it on girls..

I: then if you're scolding a girl?

G3-F: I use chee bai..actually because I use chee bai more often.. I use it on both guys and girls.. lan jiao is probably more towards guys.. chee bai is for all

I: lan lan

G3-F: lan lan..is not.. I think it's only vulgar maybe because of the word lan.. but the meaning is not..

I: is it a swear word?

G3-F: no.. lan lan.. the way people use it..or the way I use it now.. is to describe when you have no choice, bo bian, like: " I have to write my lit review tonight, because I am seeing my supervisor tomorrow, lanlan"

I: is there any emotions involved?

G3-F: not really anger..maybe it's just *sianness* (slang for 'not in the mood' )

I: but you won't use it to scold someone?

G3-F: no la

I: and youre okay with using it on guys and girls?

G3-F: yeah

I: ok lan tui

G3-F: I've never heard of it

I: lao lan

G3-F: lao lan is like same as lan lan.. I mean its only vulgar because of the word lan.. but usually you don't use it to scold people,like when youre angry.. it's just to say someone or something is very lousy..

I: ok so it's not necessary to have anger involved?

G3-F: yeah it's not necessary..it's possible to have anger..but it can also be used when you are not angry

I: can you call someone this?

G3-F: no.. you can only say "this person is lao lan" but I wouldn't "eh lao lan" to the person's face.. you know.. like "eh lao lan" like that

I: you can call a girl this, as well?

G3-F: maybe not so..cos I mean..this is more like a guy thing..

I: ok then lim peh kah li kong

G3-F: this is not a swearword..it's not really used to scold people..it's just like im telling you something..

I: so it's a normal word?

G3-F: maybe if you use lim peh right.. you will have the I know something you don't, so listen to me..thats why im lim peh, im your father..

I: but as a girl, do you use it?

G3-F: no

I: have you heard women using it?

G3-F: I think women use lao niang.. but girls don't really use limp eh

I: but you won't be offended if someone uses it?

G3-F: no

I: ok then lum pah

G3-F: lum pah..i don't really use this very often.. actually I don't use it at all..but I have heard other people using it..

I: ok how do these people use it? is it a swear word?

A G3-F I think they use it as an intensifier.. or adjective.. I don't know..

I: ok nevermind, next one, lum pah pah lan

G3-F: never heard of this..

I: next, na beh/ na bu

G3-F: na beh.. I think it involves parents.. so its vulgar to a certain degree...but I use it more like an utterance

I: so it's not really as a swearword? It's not used to scold someone directly?

G3-F: no..it's just like : “na beh, today got class” or “ I woke up late today, na beh”.. it's just the situation.. it's something like “shit”, like “shit, I woke up late”..its' not really.. I don't think its

I: personal?

G3-F: yeahyeah..it's not really a personal attack..it's just like saying.. something

I: but you might not be angry?

G3-F: yeah, no.. not really directly at the person..but then this kind of thing.. I think.. cannot anyhow say to some people.. because it involves parents..then sometimes, some people are quite sensitive about it..

I: and then si

G3-F: si..like die? I don't think it's very vulgar

I: is it a swear word? Have you heard it being used before like one?

G3-F: no.. no I don't think it's a swear word.. but even though it's not really a swear word, I don't know I wouldn't really use it.. because it's like telling people to go and die.. and I find that quite offensive

I: so you only find it offensive when it is used to tell people to go and die?

G3-F: yeah

I: how about when someone just says “si ah”

G3-F: like “ si liao” ?

I: yeah

G3-F: oh..then in that case it is not offensive

I: so is it being used to swear here?

G3-F: used to swear.. I think not really.. it's more of just an utterance.. an expression.. similiar to how you use na beh.. it is like ...“shit”

I: ok then how about si mi lan jiao?

G3-F: that's not really a swear word.. because like you don't really use it at people.. but then you can use it when youre angry.. both anger and when you are not angry..you can use it..

I: do you find it offensive when someone uses it?

G3-F: not really la..i will just take it that the person is like very.. like..shocked.. that something can happen.. like “ huh? si mi lan jiao?!!” but then it can also be like “ you know, she did this today.. si mi lan jiao!!”

I: so it can be angry and neutral?

G3-F: yeah and sometimes shock

I: you can use it in front of guys and girls?

G3-F: yeah

I: ok then wah lan

G3-F: wah lan ah..it's not a swear word.. don't really use it on people.. but it's like an expression.. utterance.. like:"wah lan eh, today got class" but it is not directed at anyone in particular..like maybe to express my own feelings..yeah

I: do you use it as a swear word?

G3-F: no.. it's just an expression.. an exclamation

I: so you don't find it offensive? like when people say it to you?

G3-F: no..i won't consider them to be swearing

I: any other feelings it can express?

G3-F: maybe there will be like a bit of anger.. like it can be used when I am not angry..but also maybe like "you know tomorrow my class change from 130 pm to 530 pm? Wah lan eh, how can like that"

I: so it doesnt really mean anything?

G3-F: no.. I mean like im feeling some kind of anger..but not too much.. but it's like the "how can like that" is not enough to express it..you must have the "wah lan eh" also.. to show that im like quite upset by it or something..

I: then do you think that your generation and the older generation swear differently?

G3-F: yeah I think so..i think the older generation don't really use these words so loosely as we do now.. like chee bai.. I think to them it is very offensive.. like let's say even my parents or my grandparents.. they don't use it.. like even wah lau..to me now right..wah lau is not even a swearword..it's just an exclamation..but I think to my parents or my grandparents.. they don't really use it that much.. it is very rare for them to use it.. like my grandma right.. she uses it sometimes..but I mean it has to be like a quite an extreme situation for her to use it?

I: so she has to be angry? To her, it could be like a swear word?

G3-F: not really.. like she will talk about..like maybe she go to the market and then the things are very expensive.. maybe she will like "wah lau eh" yeah.. maybe not so angry..but just like "oh my god" kind of meaning...like she don't use it to punctuate her sentence so much..

I: any other differences you can think of?

G3-F: I think that to the older generation..all those swear words that involve parents and body parts are generally all very vulgar..so they don't use it.. actually I don't even think they use it at all..for my family.. yeah..like.. cos especially the parents..those that involve the parents.. are even worse than the body parts one..

I:do you think this applies to our generation?

G3-F: I think to a certain extent.. like even though we use these vulgarities loosely right..to me, there is like a scale.. like those parent ones I don't use very often right..but maybe the body part ones are not so vulgar..so those I use more often..and then those..like..i don't know leh.. I mean I use wah lau quite often lah..wah lau seems to have lost its meaning to me.. I don't find it offensive at all..i use it as a normal word..expression..

I: so do you have some scale for swearing..so like let's say on a scale of 1-10, 10 being the most angry, will the way you swear differ if you are at level 10 in terms of anger than level 5?

G3-F: of course..if im not really very angry.. I will use the ones that don't seem really offensive to me.. like wah lau.. yeah but I think wah lau or wah lan is like the least.. next would be like the chee bai.. cos that one to me has to have a certain amount of anger.. the body part ones are all like in the middle.. then the highest amount of anger ones are the parent ones and the kan ones like the kan ni na, kan ni na bu.. except for like na beh.. na beh is like lower.. yeah

I: are there any words that even though you are not angry, you can still say it loosely.. like just to exclaim?

G3-F: usually.. out loud.. when im not angry..is wah lau, wah lan, na beh..

I: words that don't seem to be offensive to you?

G3-F: yeah

I: so you don't think these words are swear words?

G3-F: no i don't think these are swear words.. they are just normal expressions to me.. but then like you know I don't really know whether people will be offended by it.. like na beh.. maybe people will be offended.. so if I were to use it when I am not angry and I don't mean to offend people right..so maybe I will not use na beh

I: oh so you think people now are still offended by words that involve parents?

G3-F: yeah.. I think depends.. like maybe those ah beng ah lian.. maybe they will be sensitive about their parents..so I won't use it around them..

I: but in generally?

G3-F: with friends.. just loosely..

I: then do you find that you can use all these words in a joking manner comfortably?

G3-F: of course.. but wait.. verbally, I don't think so..i mean like im not really comfortable with saying it out loud.. like chee bai.. maybe chee bai is okay lah.. it's like one of the acceptable ones.. but maybe like kan ni na or kan ni na bu.. I won't really say it out loud.. I type it.. the acronym but usually I don't say it out loud..

I: do you swear in other languages?

G3-F: English

I: do you mix it with other languages?

G3-F: yes normally I speak English what.. but English swear words are very limited..so you bring in the hokkien..because hokkien swear words are very colourful..

I: is it more to replace English swear words or because you feel that only by using these words is your anger or whatever that you want to express, is enough to express that emotion?

G3-F: it's not replacement.. yeah..maybe because it can express my anger more.. because there are so many right..so different hokkien swear words.. show the different intensity of emotion better.. so I think it's easier..to use hokkien rather than English sometimes.. because English is like fuck and that's all.. ok got motherfucker..but then after that got no much left.. but I think its comparable to like fuck or motherfucker.. mother fucker is like kan ni na bu right.. which is quite high up.. so ya maybe some words have the same meaning and can be replaced but some are able to express the different levels of anger..

I: so do you think that people who swear in hokkien are more vulgar?

G3-F: it sounds more vulgar la.. because it involves so many different things..like the parents and the body parts..and the tone also..it sounds more vulgar than let's say like "shit" or whatever in English...

I: ok great this is the end of the interview. Thank you

This is the transcription of the interview with the G3 male respondent, coded as G3-M.

I: I have a list of words, and then I will ask you whether you consider it to be a swearword, what kind of emotion you can use it to express, and whether you can use it in front of a male or female

G3-M: ok

I: so the first word is boh ji.. how do you use it? Do you think that its vulgar? Is it a swear word?

G3-M: it's a swear word but not particularly vulgar

I: can you use it to express anger?

G3-M: no you use it to poke fun or insult someone

I: so you won't be very emotional when you use it?

G3-M: no

I: then do you use it specifically on males or females?

G3-M: males and females.. there's no gender difference..but generally more on males than females

I: okay then the next one, boh lum par ji..do you think that is vulgar?

G3-M: yeah..as in I've not really heard of it being used.. I would think that it is vulgar..but I think the one we nowadays use more is boh ji.. which is a shortening of boh lum par ji.. so it feels kind of archaic and it's like a mouthful..

I: so you don't use it very much?

G3-M:no..not at all actually

I: but there will be generally no gender difference in how you might use it?

G3-M: no..it can be used on both guys and girls

I: okay..next word, buay kan..is it a swear word?

G3-M: no its not a swearword

I: do you think its vulgar?

G3-M: no

I: Do you use it?

G3-M: yes but not very often..i say it more to just insult..but as in usually you use it with close friends..it's not something you would use to scold someone..

I: so if you don't use it to scold, is it a word that will evoke any emotions in you?

G3-M: it's really just a word to ask someone why is he so incapable..

I: okay so will you use it on males and females?

G3-M: males.. not so much on females..

I: is it because its crude?

G3-M: not because its crude but it just somehow I think that in a way the word is abit harsh to use on girls.. but I won't say that its crude.. I will just say that its harsher in a sense..

I: have you heard it being used in a scolding manner? Like in an offensive insulting manner?

G3-M: no maybe just to tell someone off... but not in a particularly offensive way

I: okay next, chui kong lam par song

G3-M: no never used it before..

I: but have you heard people using it?

G3-M: no, never

I: next one, chap cheng..have you heard it?

G3-M: no..

I:so you've never used it as a swear word?

G3-M: ive never used it.. if it's a swearword, it's too refined a swearword..

I: have you heard anyone use it?

G3-M: nope

I: okay how about char tau?

G3-M: yeah that one i have heard it.. but not super offensive also..

I: so it's a swearword?

G3-M: no

I: so do you use it to express any positive emotions?

G3-M: not really..it's just to describe.. use it as a description of someone who has that characteristic.. theres no emotions involved actually..

I: you can use it on both genders?

G3-M: yes it doesn't matter..

I: okay. Next one, chee bai

G3-M: ah okay.. confirm.. this is definitely vulgar

I: it's a swear word? What do you use it to express?

G3-M: yes..uh use it to express anger I suppose.. anger and frustration..basically to lash out at someone..to express frustration about certain issues..

I: okay so would you use it in front of a male and a female?

G3-M: yeah..both

I: would you call someone a chee bai?

G3-M: more a male than a female.. but no gender difference..

I: do you use it in any other ways?

G3-M: surprise, maybe.. as an exclamation but definitely not for anything positive.. surprise, anger, shock frustration..yeah those few..

I: okay chee teh bin

G3-M: no, never used

I: okay then chek ak

G3-M: not vulgar.. just a description..to describe a situation..or your state of being..

I: ok so it's not offensive?

G3-M:no.. it's a very general term to use..it's an adjective.. you can use it in front of both genders

I: ok zhuo bo lan..how do you use it

G3-M: I'ts not an offensive term to use.. at all.. it's a normal phrase.. can use it when people ask you what you are doing and youre doing nothing.. so zhuo bo lan..

I: and you can use it in front of a guy and a girl?

G3-M: hmm yes.. but I think it's been shortened even more.. now it's just zhuo bo...

I: heng kao kan

G3-M: never used... well not in this combination.. I use heng and kan separately.. ive never used it this way..so I don't find it offensive..

I: hong kan

G3-M: mildly offensive..no actually I would also think that it's not even particularly offensive.. it's just to express how youre feeling at that particular instance..

I: okay so it's not offensive..it's not a swear word?

G3-M: no..it's just a word.. a normal word..an expression to use.

I: and you don't think that is vulgar?

G3-M:nope

I: so if someone uses it on you..you'll be okay? You won't feel angry?

G3-M: yeah its okay.. i won't feel offended.. I would agree if the situation im in is a really hong gan situation..

I: how seow

G3-M:as in youre bluffing me, don't bluff me kind of use.. no, it's not offensive..

I: kan

G3-M: uh nope..it's just used as an intensifier.. not offensive..

I: you don't use it to express anything? any emotions?

G3-M: no I use it as an intensifier mostly.. or if I use it as a standalone.. then I use it as a replacement for fuck

I: so you use it when you want to swear in hokkien?

G3-M: no not necessarily in hokkien.. its quite interchangeable.. yeah as in I don't really use the meaning behind it... it's just an interchangeable word for fuck

I: and you use it to express..?

G3-M: anger..frustration..

I: you use it in front of males and females?

G3-M: yeah..especially when it's an intensifier la.. I think when it is used as an intensifier..thats when it becomes really very unoffensive..cos it's just an intensifier..

I: okay can you give me an example?

G3-M: uh.. today the teacher give homework gan a lot..so it's an intensifier..something like that

I: ah ok..so like fucking a lot?

G3-M: yea like that

I: okay then how about kan ni na

G3-M: mildly offensive..because to me the origins is that it is a legit swear word in that sense.. so of course the offensiveness is there.. it's to you know insult someone, to show anger.. I mean it depends also on the tone you use it in.. but mostly it is used to scold I would say..

I: so its vulgar and a swear word?

G3-M: yes.. you can use it on males and females

I: okay how about kan ni na bu and kan ni na beh?

G3-M:actually I would use these as acronyms but I mean if you put it like that..then I would say that yes it is offensive..

I: why?

G3-M: for this one, I don't know..but if you think of the real context of the phrase.. which is to fuck your mother.. so then I think it evokes a certain kind of emotion..

I: but if someone uses it on you..would you really take it personally?

G3-M: no.. I don't take it personally.. because to me its impact is just from that it is an offensive swear word.. but that's about it.. not really about the semantics about the phrase..

I: so you use this to express?

G3-M: anger and frustration

I: do you use it in a joking manner or like a positive manner or..?

G3-M: uh not really positive but joking yes.. in front of friends.. actually only just friends

I: so you would say it to a male and a female?

G3-M: yes

I: okay so do you think that for this kind of swear words that either insult your family or has some connotations of doing so.. they are stronger? Like more offensive?

G3-M: I think that this kind of swear words.. where it goes towards your family.. I think it has become very normalized.. I think its stronger I think only when the speaker makes a very direct reference to your family.. instead of using these coined terms that have already been going around for some time

I: okay so now you use it as a sort of cover term?

G3-M: yeah sort of.. no you don't really think about the meaning when you use it..

I: ok how about kan ni na bu chao chee bai

G3-M: um used to express extreme anger and frustration I would say but other than that nothing much.. it's just a cover..

I: so male and female also can use this?

G3-M: yes..

I: do you think that these terms are crude?

G3-M: uh this is considered slightly crude I would say

I: but you have no problems with using this?

G3-M: no

I: kana lan neh

G3-M: hmm I don't use that.. feels very contrived to me actually..

I: ok then kao bei kao bu

G3-M: normal..not offensive..

I: not a swearword?

G3-M: no

I: ok then kum gong

G3-M: it's a slightly offensive term.. it's like the stronger version of char tau..

I: so its more offensive than char tau? Is it a swear word?

G3-M: yeah..but it's not a swearword..it's just a stronger and slightly more offensive description than char tau..but I wouldn't call it a swearword

I: but you would be expressing anger?

G3-M: yeah..it's like between calling someone stupid and a retard.. you'll be more angry with the person than if you call him a char tau..

I: is there a gender difference for this one?

G3-M: no, no gender difference

I: ok then kum lan..is it a swearword?

G3-M: slightly offensive slightly crude it's a swear word.. I would use it mainly for anger.. like you do this..kum lan.. it's to express your indignance or a certain kind of anger..

I: only for guys or both genders?

G3-M: actually for this one..mainly for guys.. yeah only for guys

I: okay then kum pooi

G3-M: never used..

I: okay then lan cheow

G3-M: uh slightly offensive.. but it depends on the context of how it used.. its used in the same manner as fuck I suppose..whereby it can be seen as offensive or a normal cover term that you just insert..

I: would you say that this is a vulgarity that you can use to express your anger adequately?

G3-M: no.. it doesn't even express anger.. it's just an exclamation I would say

I: ok so using it infront of guys and girls.. you are okay with that?

G3-M: yeah

I: would you call someone that if it's a personal attack?

G3-M: unlikely

I: okay.. then lan lan

G3-M: no not offensive..

I: is it used? How would you use it?

G3-M: it's very normal.. just like the hokkien version of suck thumb.. there's no emotion.. just to describe something.. can use it on guys and girls.. nothing wrong..

I: okay then lan tui

G3-M: never heard..

I: lao lan

G3-M: never heard.,

I: okay lim peh kah li kong

G3-M: used to show superiority I suppose.. but nothing offensive.. I mean depends on the tone also la. If the person is saying it in a very aggressive way..then its aggressive.. and more offensive I suppose.. I guess you will find it offensive if you are taken aback by the aggressiveness of the tone.. but inherently, I think there's nothing offensive about it..

I: ok lum pah

G3-M: mmm offensive, slightly crude.. ok quite crude actually.. I would say it's a swear word

G3-M: what would you use it to express?

G3-M: I wouldnt use it on its own.. maybe people will say lum par ji.. but I still think its slightly outdated? Yeah it's not very common and popular.. its falling out of use I think

I: and you can use it in front on both genders?

G3-M: yeah

I: lum pah pah lan

G3-M: no..i think it's nothing.. it's just a thing to say..for example.. like the huh huh huh lum pah kinda thing.. theres no meaning ..

I: it's just the sound?

G3-M: yeah yeah just the sound of it..like youre playing with rhyme kind of thing..i don't think its offensive or used very often also.,.

I: okay then na beh and na bu

G3-M: no its not offensive.. na bu is only used as a swearword with kan ni na bu.. I don't hear it being used on its own..

I: how about si

G3-M: not offensive.. it's just a verb.. it's not really used to swear.. I would think even go and die has a stronger connotation then saying it in Hokkien.. they make it sound more offensive.. I think a lot lies in the tone

I: so for it to be offensive it has to be said in a more aggressive manner?

G3-M: yeah yeah.. not just si like that.. the single word on its own doesn't mean much

I: ok then how about si mi lan jiao

G3-M: no its not offensive.. it's just to express your own surprise shock or disgust.. and what not..

I: do you use it in an angry way?

G3-M: no its more of shock..maybe an angry shock but the basic feeling is shock

I: so not offensive? And not a swearword?

G3-M: no

I: wah lan

G3-M: normalized..i would think that it used to be crude.. but not anymore..not now.. it's pretty normal

I: is it the same as wah lau?

G3-M: I would use it very interchangeably..even though the two words mean very different things

I: so to you its just an exclamation?

G3-M: yes to express surprise..there's nothing wrong with saying this in front of two genders..

I: so aside from swearing, do you speak hokkien?

G3-M: I do..but not very often..the only hokkien would possibly be the swearwords

I: and do you only swear in hokkien?

G3-M: no.. I swear in English,mandarin and abit of malay

I: do you think that swearing in hokkien is stronger than using any of the other languages?

G3-M: actually yes.. because of the way hokkien sounds.. hokkien sounds rather inherently vulgar and crude and uncouth so I would think it stems from this.. and you know there also there are so many swear words in hokkien compared to other dialects.. so you link this 2 together and you get that idea you know.. so when you hear hokkien you would automatically have a higher level of crudeness and offensiveness when you hear a hokkien swearword.

I: so do you use these swear words with another language?

G3-M: yeah.. like fuck your mother chee bai... something like that. It will be used as a phrase.. but you wouldn't mix one lexicon and one lexicon together..

I: do you think that it's okay for you to swear?

G3-M: yeah im fine

I: how about is there places or any group of people that you will not swear in front of?

G3-M: school..formal settings.. its only in a private setting.. with friends and all.. not family.. just friends...

I: so why do you swear?

G3-M: expression.. of anger..shock..not happiness

I: how about pain

G3-M: yes.

I: do you think it lessens the feeling of pain

G3-M: no it doesn't.. you just have to do it anyway

I: do you use swearwords in a non-offensive manner? Is it common for you to do that?

G3-M: in a more joking manner yes

I: do you think that the older generation swears differently from you.. like let's say your parents' generation..

G3-M: yes.. they use a different set of swear words like for example they won't use fuck because they are more Chinese educated..so they will tend towards more dialect swear words.. its generally more dialects

I: and how about your grandparents

G3-M: same..

I: so the change is more of the language?

G3-M: yes..but they pick vulgarities rather carefully...like when they say it they will mean it..it's not like an empty kind of expression..

I: so you would say that nowadays people use swearwords more loosely now?

G3-M: yes.. we are more liberal with the words.. we don't really look at their meanings in that sense when we use them ..we use them because we know they are swear words.. we don't necessarily know what the meaning behind it is.. but we know that it's a swearword..

I: so do you swear at a person when you are angry.. in a direct manner.. like in a verbal argument

G3-M: yes.. I would use fuck mostly.. if its hokkien.. I will use chee bai..

I: and the other party's gender doesn't matter?

G3-M: no I think the situation applies.. I'ts not so much about the gender but what the situation presents..

I: can you elaborate?

G3-M: it's just like..it doesn't really matter what the situation is but how I use it is more of like which word comes to mind first.. don't really consider the gender of the other party or the offence..

I: so as long as you have a swear word in mind you just take it and use it?

G3-M: there's like this inherent ranking of swearwords.. where first one that always comes out first is fuck.. then if fuck is not sufficient, then you start bringing out the rest..

I: ok so how would you express more anger? Is there any difference in the swear words or how you swear?

G3-M: the tone.. quantity wise maybe more, I will use more vulgarities.. the tone will change.. but there won't be a variety la

I: ok so there won't be new words that you put in?

A: no its not because im angrier I use different kind of swear words.. yup

I: ok that's the end of this interview. Thank you