

Article

The Pleasure and Pain in Taboo Exploitation

Keith Allan

School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics (LLCL), Monash University, Clayton 3800, Australia; keith.allan@monash.edu

Abstract: The taboo exploitation examined in this essay is swearing. Swearing intersects in complex ways with the giving and taking of pleasure and concomitantly coping with pain or, conversely, craving to inflict pain. Swearing is normally restricted to colloquial styles because it is commonly perceived to breach the rules of courtesy by offending against standards of good taste and good manners. The breaking of this taboo is an emotional release. Swearing has a special place in our neural anatomy, perhaps accounting for: (a) its effectiveness displaying pleasure and managing pain or the hypoalgesia and other physiological effects in laboratory studies; (b) for the tendency of any disparaging denotation or connotation to dominate the interpretation of the immediate context. I recognize five frequently synchronous functions for swearing from the utterer's as well as the audience point of view: (i) The expletive function, often marking attitude to what is said. (ii) Abuse, insult, banter. (iii) Spicing up the message. (iv) Expression of social solidarity. (v) The discourse function. There is an additional from an audience point of view: (vi) Characterizing an individual's behavior. For every function, the degree of pleasure and/or pain and the kind of taboo exploitation is assessed.

Keywords: banter; catharsis; cursing/cussing; expletives; illocutionary intention; insult; pain; perlocutionary effect; pleasure; spicy language

1. Introductory Sketch of the Meaning and Functions of Swearing

This essay examines both the pleasure and pain of swearing as motivation, illocutionary intention, and perlocutionary effect. As an introductory example of both, take the 2006 Tourism Australia advertisement seeking to attract international visitors to Australia (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-ZLr9ePuj8>) which concluded with the invitation in (1).

(1) Where the bloody hell are you?

People judge the perlocutionary effect of (1) to be cheeky and inviting—largely because of the swear word used by an attractive nubile woman semi-clad in a bikini. Evaluations of swearing depend on the context of utterance: the utterer (speaker, writer, signer), his or her apparent intention, and the situation of utterance. So, there is a pleasurable aspect to (1). But there is also a painful aspect because of the perlocutionary effect that some people took offense. The ad was censored in Singapore and North America and, initially, banned from British TV.¹ Moreover, it is arguable that the television advert was created because Tourism Australia was pained by the dearth of international tourists; so, loosely speaking, pain was the motivation for the swearing in (1).

From the utterer's point of view, there are five, frequently synchronous, functions for swearing.

- (i) The expletive function, often marking the attitude to what is said: *It's my fucking birthday goddamn it.*
- (ii) Abuse, insult, banter: *Bastard motherfucker.*
- (iii) Spicing up the message: *they were flying into Perth n there was a lotta cloud over the bloody skies n everything.*



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- (iv) Expression of social solidarity: *Oh, you lucky bitch!*
- (v) The discourse function: *Well, shit... Fuck, I don't know, I guess... well, shit, if I can't swear I can't talk.*

From an audience point of view there are these five functions plus one that ascribes a character trait to an individual on the basis of that individual's frequent use of swearing in at least one, and up to all five of (i)–(v). This sixth function of ascribing characteristic behaviour is described in Section 8. This analysis revises the one presented in Allan and Burridge (2009).²

Dynel (2012) identified three functions for swearing: “abuse”, covered by my (ii); “venting negative emotions”, roughly equivalent to my (i); and “solidarity”, my (iv). Stapleton (2010) identified four functions “expressing emotion and/or aggression” which are covered by my (i) and (ii); “humour and verbal emphasis”, which is similar to my (iii); “social bonding and solidarity”, my (iv); and “constructing and displaying identity”, which corresponds to my (vi) function of ascribing characteristic behavior.

The original meaning of the verb *swear* was to take an oath; make a solemn declaration, statement, affirmation, promise or undertaking; often in the eyes of God or in relation to some sacred object so that the swearer is, by implication, put in grave danger if found to be lying. A nominal counterpart of the verb *swear* is *oath*. Initially, *profane swearing/oaths* were statements made with profane reference to the deity. Profanity extended from irreligious language to obscene language which has become the salient meaning of *swearing/oaths*. Obscenity is the use of an abominated and/or repugnant and/or depraved offensively indecent, lewd, or deprecatory expression. The dysphemistic senses of *swear* and *oath* came to dominate in unmarked contexts because situations favorable to the attestation such as *I swear by Almighty God* are infrequent compared to the number conducive to profane swearing and profane oaths. Profane swearing, the exemplary topic of this essay, is—like slang—normally restricted to colloquial styles. It still includes religion-based profanity and blasphemy, as well as a wealth of obscenities.

The dysphemistic connotations of swearing have led to its being associated with *cursing* “imprecating malevolent fate”. In The Bible, Matthew 26, 74 reports Saint Peter cursing and swearing when denying he knows Jesus: “Then began he to curse and to swear”.

The term *Curses!* has been used as a euphemistic dysphemism (a disguised expletive) for several centuries, e.g.,

SEAGOON: Wait. (Raspberry) Curses, the spirit has gone. It must have been only 70% proof. (Milligan 1972, ‘The Internal Mountain’ broadcast 29 March 1954)

The colloquial form of *curse*, *cuss*, is often used in *cussing and swearing* (*cuss*~*curse* is just one pair of many synonymous doublets in which the colloquial variant has a short lax vowel and the standard form a long tense vowel). The term *cuss word* is found from the nineteenth century as synonymous with *swear word*.

A recent public example of *fuck you* being used primarily to verbally sully perpetrators of an abhorrent act occurred at the 2022 Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts. American singer Olivia Roderigo cursed those members of the Supreme Court of the United States who voted against Federal abortion rights³ and, with Lily Allen, gave a spirited rendition of Allen's 2009 protest song ‘Fuck You’,⁴ enthusiastically supported by an audience of over 200,000 people.

- (2) Fuck you SCOTUS: Olivia Roderigo and Lily Allen at Glastonbury (<https://youtu.be/Fpc40dmPIVM>).⁵



Roderigo introduced Allen, then declared: “I’m heartbroken over what happened in America yesterday [24 June 2022] the Supreme Court decided to overturn *Roe v Wade* which is a law that ensures a woman’s right to a safe abortion and other basic human rights. And I’m devastated and terrified. So many women and so many girls are going to die because of this and I wanted to dedicate this next song to the five members of the Supreme Court who have showed us at the end of the day they truly don’t give a shit about freedom. This song goes out to the justices Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Amy Coney Barrett and Brett Kavanaugh. We hate you”. Lily Allen, who had been flipping the bird at each named justice, added “We hate you” and then they let rip.

So, the performance of swearing in (2) exploits various illocutionary and perlocutionary functions and effects of swearing (i.e., what the speaker is intending to bring off in making the utterance): it was explicitly motivated by a woman disempowered, who very evidently has the illocutionary intention to abuse those justices of SCOTUS that she feels have demeaned her—employing function (ii), see Section 4. In the discussion which follows it will be demonstrated that the performance of swearing in (2) also has expletive function, (i)—see Section 3; spicy language is deliberately employed for more forceful effect than plain orthophemistic complaint could achieve, (iii), see Section 5; and other event participants on stage and among the audience show solidarity with Roderigo by joining in the perlocutionary intention and effect, (iv), see Section 6.

I know of no existing study that focuses on the pleasure and pain of swearing, even though, as will be seen, many researchers have referred to one or the other when discussing swearing. In brief, swearing may be motivated by an utterer’s response to pain (“An unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage” (Raja et al. 2020, p. 1976)) and, on occasion, swearing may give pleasure to the utterer (Katz 2016). Swearing may give pain to the audience (whether or not this is intended by the utterer) and on other occasions may be found pleasurable by the audience. Such evaluations of swearing depend on the context of utterance: the utterer, his or her apparent intention, the situation of utterance, the disposition and/or attitude of the audience (on context, see Allan 2018, 2023 and works cited there). Throughout this essay, examples are taken from a variety of corpora, the sources being identified below in the Appendix A preceding the list of References cited. I make standard use of the terms “orthophemism”, “dysphemism”, and “euphemism” as defined in Allan and Burridge (2006) (and elsewhere). I also use the terms “locution”, “illocutionary intention”, “perlocutionary intention”, and “perlocutionary effect” filtered through the prism of Bach and Harnish (1979) rather than as found in Austin (1962), see Allan (2001) for justification. The rest of this essay is constructed as follows: Section 2 examines established psychological and physiological effects of taboo violation; Section 3 elaborates the expletive function, (i); Section 4 reviews swearing as insult, abuse, or banter (ii); Section 5 illustrates the use of swearing to spice up the locution, (iii); Section 6 deliberates the social function of swearing, (iv); Section 7 illustrates the discourse function of some swearing; Section 8 discusses the sixth function of characterizing an individual’s behaviour as a frequent swearer from an audience point of view; Section 9 rehearses shifting attitudes to taboos on swearing; while Section 10 sums up the findings on the pleasure and pain of swearing as an example of taboo exploitation.

2. Psychological and Physiological Effects of Taboo Violation

Research in psychology, physiology, and neurology corroborate that taboo terms are processed differently from ordinary language and are subject to more acute recognition and recall. As Allen Read once flamboyantly described it:

The ordinary reaction to a display of filth and vulgarity should be a neutral one or else disgust; but the reaction to certain words connected with excrement and sex is neither of these, but a titillating thrill of scandalized perturbation. (Read [1935] 1977, p. 9)

Such a powerful motivation no doubt accounts for the consistent historical failure of legislation and penalties against swearing. “Cursing intensifies emotional expressions in a manner that inoffensive words cannot achieve” (Jay 1992, p. 68; 2000, pp. 91, 137). We recognize swear words (and other taboo terms) and recall them more readily than other vocabulary.

The results showed that those 12 high interactional content sentences with profane and sexually suggestive language elicited responses quite different from those elicited by the remaining 44 high interactional content sentences. [...] Sentences with off-color language possess a memorability that is quite independent of their role in a conversation. (MacWhinney et al. 1982, p. 315)

It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a general tendency for any derogatory or unfavourable denotation or connotation within a language expression to dominate the interpretation of its immediate context (Jay et al. 2008; Madan et al. 2017).⁶ This is exactly the motivation for (1) and also for (2) and many other examples of swearing cited in this essay.

Swearing and other taboo language has a special place in our neural anatomy. Compared to other vocabulary, swear words evoke stronger skin conductance responses (Dinn and Harris 2000; Gray et al. 1982; McGinnies 1949; Zajonc 1962). Swearing in one’s first language (L1) creates a stronger skin conductance response than swearing in any other language (LX) (Eilola and Havelka 2011). Stephens et al. (2018) demonstrated increased strength and power performance when a person was swearing versus not swearing. Stephens et al. (2022) report that repeating a swear word not only benefitted physical strength, it increased positive emotion, humor, triggered distraction, and boosted self-confidence—leading to more risky behavior. In a Stroop Task reported in MacKay et al. (2004) swear words were displayed in a salient color, and participants were asked to name the color and ignore the word. There were three significant effects. Participants were slower in naming the color of the swear words than the color of the non-taboo words, apparently because they were distracted by the disturbing nature of taboo words. Interestingly, this effect diminished with word repetition, which is consistent with the fact that the affective power of frequently encountered words diminishes (see Section 9). The second effect was superior recall of swear words in surprise memory tests following color naming. A third effect was better recognition memory for those colors that were consistently associated with swear words. Other experiments have also demonstrated that swear words impair immediate recall of the preceding and succeeding words in rapidly presented lists.

All these experimental findings are consistent with the strong emotional reactions triggered by culturally potent taboo expressions.

There is plenty of linguistic evidence for the emotional quality of obscene expressions. Even across languages, they can contaminate other words, bringing down innocent expressions that sound similar. For example, some Thais get apprehensive about using the Thai words *fâg* “sheath”, *fâg* “to hatch”, and *fuk* “gourd, pumpkin” in the presence of people likely to know English *fuck*. *Fuk* is used for the name of the main character in the award-winning Thai novel *Kham Phi Phaksa (The Judgement)* by Kobjitti (1983), and there was much speculation about how the name would be transliterated when the novel was translated into English. The translator chose *Fak*. Thai English teachers experience some embarrassment (and their students some amusement) with the English word *yet*, which is the equivalent of “to fuck” in colloquial Thai. Similar reports of cross-language effects have been reported elsewhere.

In the Nootka Indian language of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, the English word *such* so closely resembles the Nootka word meaning “cunt” that teachers find it very difficult to convince their students to utter the English word in class. (Farb 1974, p. 82)

Moreover, taboo senses have a saliency that will dominate and suppress other senses of a language expression—cf. English *cock*, *ass*, *gay*.⁷

Inadvertent, unintended swearing can result in the pain of grave embarrassment as witnessed in <https://www.lortica.it/2022/05/10/la-gaffe-di-emma-raducanu-che-cazzo>.⁸ At the May 2022 Italian Open in Rome, the 19-year-old British tennis player Emma Raducanu was asked by a female Italian TV interviewer if she had learned any Italian. Raducanu paused and said “I did, like, *che cazzo* [≈what the fuck]?” The interviewer’s reaction is “Uh-oh”. Raducanu covers her mouth with her hand: “Is that a bad word?” The interviewer: “It is, it is”. Raducanu, touching her throat and looking embarrassed, responds: “My friend told me that. . . . What does it mean?” The interviewer replies, “I will tell you later”. So Raducanu, laughing in an embarrassed manner, goes “Really? Have I sworn on camera?” and lowering her head to her knees, before raising it: “Oh my God!”.

A perlocutionary effect of discovering one has unwittingly publicly uttered an oath is illustrated in the image in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Emma Raducanu, embarrassed (9 May 2022).

3. The Expletive Function

Obscenities [. . .] are fighting words, gross words, dirty words, words charged with power; they are hurled like insults, heaped up to contaminate and defile, to incite or inflame, or just to let off steam. They leap out before we can stop them. They draw attention, they get us into trouble. The emotion and the obscenity proceed together, as if fused, overriding cortical inhibitions in a quick, involuntary burst. (Morris 2000, p. 174)

As we saw in (2), Fuck you SCOTUS, much cussing is an emotive response to anger and/or frustration (Stephens and Zile 2017), reaction to something unexpected and, frequently but not necessarily, undesirable: imagine being disempowered by a court of law, stubbing a toe, being cut off in traffic (Popușoi et al. 2018), being uncomfortably cold on a windy railway station waiting for a long-delayed train, or being ignored by a government official. As already mentioned, it is an established fact that swearing gives a positive short-term boost by increasing heart rate and pain tolerance (hypoalgesia) compared with not swearing (Stephens and Umland 2011). Consequently, swearing has an expletive function: the use of a swear word lets off steam. Expletives are kinds of exclamatory interjection, and, like other interjections, they have an expressive function; cf. *Wow!*, *Ouch!*, *Oh dear!*, *Gosh!*, *Shit!* which sometimes also function as discourse particles (function (v), see Section 7).

- (3) Welfare, my arsehole.
- (4) Oh bugger I should’ve got the lunch bucket.
- (5) Well, bollocks to that.
- (6) It’s my bloody birthday goddamn it.
- (7) Fuck me that was close.
- (8) Shit! Has that tiger picture gone mouldy just from sitting there?

Unlike such typical expressives as greetings or apologies, interjections like (3)–(8) are not normally addressed to a hearer (audience, reader). At best, hearers are treated like overhearers or bystanders and therefore not, strictly speaking, addressees. Instances of expletives, and other interjections uttered without an audience, are aggressive expressions of auto-catharsis—the release of extreme emotional energy (Pinker 2007). Even where they

are used with an audience of bystanders, expletive interjections are concomitantly displays of auto-catharsis: the illocutionary intention is to display a particular attitude or degree of feeling to oneself and anyone who happens to be in earshot. This kind of swearing may be motivated by pain or frustration, but seeks the illocutionary and perlocutionary effect of pleasurable relief (Popușoi et al. 2018). Montagu (1968, p. 89), commenting on Ross (1960), notes that she found “those who swear are likely to suffer less from stress than those who do not swear”.

Since taboo terms make good dysphemisms, they also make good expletives and many share this particular function. Furthermore, the very fact that a language expression is taboo may enhance its value as auto-cathartic: the breaking of the taboo is, ipso facto, an emotional release (Allan and Burridge 2006). Auto-catharsis through swearing is a conventional way of violating a taboo: a convention that is not socially approved of, but one that is grudgingly excused by society. In both public and private, an individual’s self-control will determine the choice of vocabulary used. Where a situation provokes dysphemism, a speaker can choose between using a full-blown swear word such as *Fuck!* or one of the many euphemistic disguises like *Oh fiddle-faddle!* The latter is a euphemistic dysphemism where the locution is at variance with the reference and illocutionary point of the utterance (in other words, what the speaker is intending to bring off in making the utterance).⁹ The expressive exclamation *Shit!* typically expresses anger, frustration, or anguish, and is ordinarily a dysphemism. Its remodelled forms *Sugar!*, *Shoot!* *Shivers!* or *Shucks!* are euphemisms for a thought that can be castigated as dysphemistic. As the following examples show, euphemism is not confined to expletives but occurs in other functional types of swearing as well.

- (9) Oh shucks Tony could’ve made a gourmet.
- (10) Oh sugar. We’ve burnt it.
- (11) “Get stuffed”, answered Witcharde.
- (12) This advert sucks.
- (13) I was going gosh don’t you remember anybody?
- (14) These screwed up men then screw up women.
- (15) You’ve been screwing someone else.

(9)–(15) are prime examples of the censoring of language for the purpose of taboo avoidance (for *stuffed* and *screwed* understand *fucked*). (15) is a pained accusation from a female speaker in which “screwing” is less forceful and more socially acceptable than *fucking* but displays more emotional intensity than *sleeping with*. A person may feel the inner urge to swear (for pleasurable release) but at the same time not wish to appear overly coarse in their behavior (causing pain). Society recognizes the dilemma and provides an out—a conventionalized euphemistic dysphemism like *Oh shucks!* or *Oh sugar!* Such euphemistic dysphemisms exist to cause less face-loss or offence (pain) than an out-and-out dysphemism (although they will not always succeed in doing so).

Conversely, there are locutions that are dysphemistic while the illocutionary point is euphemistic and these are labelled dysphemistic euphemisms (Allan and Burridge 1991, 2006). Where the situation provoking an emotional outburst is pleasing and there is no call for dysphemism, it is less likely that a taboo term will be used. However, there are also situations under which euphemistic uses of taboo terms are appropriate; for example, in (16) the use of the superficially offensive expression *Shit!* is at odds with the positive emotions that lurk behind it. Similar things can be said about (17) (which reveals the more social function of swearing discussed in Section 6).

- (16) SHIT that’s great.
- (17) DAVEEEE; crazy hockey cunt. Love him.

In examples like (16)–(17) the swearing is intended to be pleasurable to both the utterer and the audience.

4. Swearing to Abuse or Insult

As seen in (2), *Fuck you SCOTUS*, speakers may resort to swear words when talking about situations and/or people that frustrate and annoy them, that they disapprove of and wish to disparage, humiliate, and degrade. The speaker will often find this behavior pleasurable to themselves and the intention is to cause pain to the target (if the target is sentient). It will often be the case, as with (2), that the target is unaware of the intended insult or will make no response to it, but this barely reduces the pleasure of delivering the insult.

- (18) It's a pain in the arse.
 (19) Yes it is a bugger.
 (20) You are a stupid little shit!
 (21) Fuck you.
 (22) You asshole. You're a fucking tight-assed cunt! Get fucked!
 (23) But he's a ARSEHOLE, man.
 (24) Nice tight poncey jeans. I hope they cut your balls off.
 (25) One word to say to you Mollie, BOLLOCKS.
 (26) Going to get you, kidfucker!
 (27) [H]e called me a slut, cunt, worthless bitch, I slapped him at some point, then he followed me to the porch, where I'd gone to cry, to tell me how I spread my legs for anyone who walks by, and how I have no respect for myself because no one taught me to respect my body when I was a teenager. [. . .] This is not the first time he's called me a slut/whore/cunt/bitch/etc. He accused me of cheating 2 weeks ago (I'm not, nor will I ever because of family history with cheating) with a coworker. [. . .] I put a hand out and said "If you lay one finger on me, I will scream and call the police". This is when he proceeded to call me a fucking cunt, bitch, and a piece of shit (he'd called me worthless earlier in the week, again not for the first time).

In (27), the author slapped her husband because she was distressed by the fact that he was insulting her: it was not only the perlocutionary effect of his words but, there can be no doubt from the wife's report and our own onlooker observation, it was the illocutionary intention of the husband. Terms like "slut/whore/cunt/bitch/etc". imply that the wife was being demeaned and humiliated by being accused of sexual promiscuity.

Typically, insults pick on a person's physical appearance and mental ability, character, behavior, beliefs, and familial and social relations to degrade. The language of abuse is normally intended to wound the addressee or bring a third party into disrepute, or both. Abusive swearing can involve epithets derived from tabooed bodily organs (*arsehole/asshole, prick*), bodily effluvia (*shit*), and sexual behaviors (*whore, fucker, poofier, arse-licker, dipshit, cock-sucker, wanker*). Maledictions often utilize images of sexual violation (*Motherfucker! I was stuffed. We got fucked/screwed. What a ball buster/breaker. He was just jerking us off.*) A dysphemistic epithet like *Short-arse!* picks on real physical characteristics that are treated as though they are abnormalities. Then there are racist dysphemisms, and dysphemistic epithets based on behaviors that the speaker disapproves of, such as homosexuality or promiscuity. There are many imprecations and epithets invoking mental subnormality or derangement: *Dickhead! Fuckwit! Fuckhead! Shithead!* These are doubly-dysphemistic in that they not only ascribe mental derangement, but do so using a dysphemistic locution which unscrambles as "your wits are (your head is) fucked (deranged)". *Shithead!* has much the same meaning as *Shit for brains!* where the figure is spelled out.

5. Spicing Up the Locution

As seen in (2), *Fuck you SCOTUS*, swearing often displays an attitude of emotional intensity towards what is being said or referred to. (28), too, is obviously motivated by psychological pain.

- (28) This is what it is like. It is not a choice for many of us to be on welfare. It is shameful and it is embarrassing, and it is bloody tough. For you to take more money off those

people, you have no idea how bloody tough it is. Every little cent counts to these people, what you are doing is shameful. . . . That's what it's like to be at the bottom of the crap pile through no fault of our own.

In (2) the motivating pain is the perceived disrespect for a woman's personal choice by denying her the right to legal abortion. (28) was spoken in parliament by Australian Senator Jacqui Lambie (23 March 2017, <https://youtu.be/nz8GnRxXWTg>) with great emotional intensity, as is clear from video evidence. But, as seen in (1), swearing is also often employed to spice up what is being said: to make it more vivid and memorable than if orthophemism were used. The same is true for (2), where a crowd of 200,000 chorusing at SCOTUS: "Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you very, very much . . . Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you! Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you, fuck you!" is more pleasurable to the utterer than would be more sedate statements condemning the Supreme Court decision. Further examples are (29)–(38).

- (29) Don't phone me yet as I am having both my ears transplanted to my nuts so I can listen to you talk through your arse.
- (30) . . . freeze your balls off in winter.
- (31) He also decided to get ripped to the tits.
- (32) Yeah we're hooking up with them in Adelaide. We'll swab the decks; finger each other in the arses; y'know all that sorta shit.
- (33) On the wall of his office was a framed Elbert Hubbard homily, If You Work For A Man, For Heaven's Sake Be Loyal To Him, blasphemously known to the apprentices as the bumsuckers' oath.
- (34) [The shop] was called Beauty Spot. That's a suckful name.
- (35) Did you hear about the new Irish Airways? They just had—They were allowed to come into Australia for the first time. Anyway they were flying into Perth n the conning tower—There was a lotta cloud over the bloody skies n everything. N the conning tower called up. He said "Irish Airways, Irish Airways", he said. "You can't land yet we'll have to get you to circle round the airport". So he says "Can you give me your height n position please?" So the little Irish bloody pilot gets up n he says "I'm five foot two n I'm sitting up the bloody front".¹⁰
- (36) Yeah but when we eat a bloody meal ya bloody can hardly move when you've finished it.
- (37) She leaped at the opportunity, as she always did in such places, to go and have the total beauty treatment—face massage, manicure, pedicure, everything-bloody-cure!
- (38) Being held accountable for your own actions isn't called discrimination, it's called being, you wouldn't believe it—a goddamn bloody adult.

Although the swearing in some of (29)–(38) is perhaps motivated by pain, the deliberate perlocutionary intention of most is to generate pleasure.

6. The Social Function of Swearing

Swearing can act as an in-group solidarity marker within a shared colloquial style—especially when directed against out-groupers. As such its function is to deliver pleasure rather than pain. This was one function of (2): the video (<https://users.monash.edu.au/~kallan/LSI/FUSCOTUS.mkv>) clearly confirms that the onstage condemnation of SCOTUS was managed in such a way that the 200,000 strong audience was encouraged to join in the swearing at (and obscene gestures towards) the justices who promulgated the anti-abortion decision: the crowd was expressing solidarity with the performers and all other engaged participants. Some further examples:

- (39) S1: Pray to baby Jesus open up your heart let god's love come pouring in. Let god's love shine down on you like it has me and Miss Suzanne over here. S2: Oh fuck off.
- (40) Yeah and I didn't even know I was and I feel like I feel like I did real shit work you know I feel like I let everyone down again.
- (41) Like Jane walked off to the loo or something and come back and put mousse all over my head and we ended up in this big fight with like all this powder and shit all over

the house and we're running around the place n doing laps of the flat so everyone's sort of looking out at us.

- (42) Marketing strategies [for this uni project] are going to be interesting. Are you just choosing prostitution to be a smart arse?

Ross (1960) examined swearing among a group of five male and three female British zoologists in the Norwegian Arctic during continuous daylight. Ross found that "Each individual had his own vocabulary and habitual level of swearing and tended to keep to the same rank order in the group however much the total swearing level rose or fell".

The amount of swearing increased noticeably when people were relaxed and happy, though it also increased under slight stress, it decreased when they were really annoyed or tired. In fact there seemed to be two types of swearing: "social" swearing and "annoyance" swearing. Social swearing was intended to be friendly and a sign of being "one of the gang"; it depended upon an audience for its effect, while annoyance swearing was a reaction to stress regardless of audience. Social swearing was by far the commoner. (Ross 1960, p. 481)

Ross also confirms that social swearing typically diminishes if there are non-swearers present (see Section 8). Shared swearing patterns indicate a membership to the group. Like the so-called "incorrect" language of non-standard grammar, swear words fall outside what is good and proper, and they therefore help to define the gang. Thus, the social function of swearing covers expressions of mateship and endearment like *fuckster*, and the epithet "cute little shit" in *Have you seen Edna's baby boy? He's a cute little shit isn't he?*, or "silly bugger" in *Joe's a silly bugger, he should never have married that woman*. Speakers often report that the more affectionate they feel towards someone, the more abusive the language can be towards that person (Baruch et al. 2017; Daly et al. 2004; Stapleton 2010). Though there are contextual constraints on this kind of banter, the various corpora examined bear this out. Examples like (17) and (43) are commonplace.

- (43) Fuck. You're exaggerating, bitch [laughs].

Many younger speakers when in the company of good mates engage in what can only be described as a kind of ritual insult.

- (44) [Two urban working class teenage Australian Aboriginal females]

A: Gimme the smoke if you want it lit Eggbert.

B: Here shit-for-brains. [passes the cigarette]

A: Geez you're a fuckin' sook. I swear to God.

B: Shut up fucker . . .

A: If I had a pussy like yours I'd take it to the cat's home and have it put down . . .

B: If I had brains like yours I'd ask for a refund . . .

A: Well, if I had tits like yours I'd sell them off for basket balls. (Allen 1987)

- (45) [Two urban working class teenage Australian Aboriginal males]

A: Have you got a match?

B: Yeah, your prick and a jelly bean. (Allen 1987)

Ritual abuse of this nature is banter, a competitive game, a kind of teasing. It utilizes the same categories as the kind of insults to out-groupers (or people cast as out-groupers). Yet, it is not an attack on an enemy or someone who is an outsider despised or disparaged, but an expression of in-group solidarity. It behooves me to distinguish banter from insult (see Allan 2016; Wald 2019). With insult the agent has the perlocutionary intention when making the utterance to assail the target with offensively dishonoring or contemptuous speech or action and/or to treat the target with scornful abuse or offensive disrespect. The utterance has the perlocutionary effect (perhaps realizing the agent's perlocutionary intention) of demeaning someone and/or of affronting or outraging them by manifest arrogance, scorn, contempt, or insolence. Banter, on the other hand, is a form of competitive verbal play and upmanship in circumstances where it is mutually understood that there is no serious attempt to wound or belittle the interlocutor: the agent needles a sparring

partner with critical observations on their physical appearance, mental ability, character, behavior, beliefs, and/or familial and social relations. In summary, insult is blatantly dysphemistic (seeking to cause pain) whereas banter is not, though—because the locution is often superficially dysphemistic—it might be branded as dysphemistic euphemism with the alternative intention of pleasing the target by establishing in-group solidarity (camaraderie).

Another instance of bantering is when women or gay men address each other as *bitch* in amity. Lisa Jervis, editor of the magazine *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture* (<https://www.bitchmedia.org>) wrote in 1996, how the word *bitch* was not meant as an insult but because “a confrontational stance is powerful”. This was reiteration of the stance in Jo Freeman’s *Bitch Manifesto* of 1970:

Bitches seek their identity strictly thru themselves and what they do. They are subjects, not objects. [...] It is a popular derogation to put down uppity women that was created by man and adopted by women. Like the term “nigger”, “bitch” serves the social function of isolating and discrediting a class of people who do not conform to the socially accepted patterns of behavior.

There is a meme widely distributed over the internet: “My best friend can’t stop being my best friend. The bitch knows too much”. Tongue in cheek it may be, but it clearly maintains the banter of camaraderie.

As already mentioned, swear words make good offensive epithets for the same reason that they make good insults. At least one occasional reason for using taboo terms—for insult, as epithets, or expletives—is to savor the hearer’s adverse reaction. A related reason is for the speaker to flaunt his or her disrespect for social convention (this is presumably one motivation for writers of graffiti, and it may play a part in (2), Fuck you SCOTUS). However, in the verbal stoushes of ritual abuse this inverts to a respect for the social convention of the game.

If we make the solidarity function of ritual insult the criterion that distinguishes it from true insult, then we have to class what is sometimes called friendly banter as ritual insult. It is marked by the use of normally abusive address forms or epithets which are uttered without animosity, which can be reciprocated without animus, and which typically indicate a bond of friendship.

(46) FIRST YOUTH: Hullo congenital idiot!
 SECOND YOUTH: Hullo, you priceless old ass!
 DAMSEL: I’d no idea you two knew each other so well!
 (*Punch* cartoon quoted in (Stern [1931] 1965, p. 323)

A more modern example is offered from the novel *Trainspotting* (using the Leith dialect of Edinburgh, Scotland).

— Granty. . . ye didnae hear? . . . Coke looked straight at Lenny.
 — Naw. Wha. . .
 — Deid. Potted heid.
 — Yir jokin! Eh? Gies a fuckin brek ya cunt. . .
 — Gen up. Last night, likes.
 — Whit the fuck happened. . .
 — Ticker. Boom. Coke snapped his fingers. — Dodgy hert, apparently. Nae cunt kent about it. Perr Granty wis workin wi Pete Gilleghan, oan the side likesay. It wis about five, n Granty wis helpin Pete tidy up, ready to shoot the craw n that likes, whin he jist hauds his chist n cowps ower. Gilly gits an ambulance, n they take the perr cunt tae the hospital, but he dies a couple of ooirs later. Perr Granty. Good cunt n aw. You play cairds wi the guy, eh?
 — Eh. . . aye. . . one ay the nicest cunts ye could hope tae meet. That’s gutted us, that hus. (Welsh [1993] 2001, p. 99f)¹¹

A newspaper report of Phil Grant’s fatal heart attack, even if equally sympathetic to the “perr cunt”, would—as a matter of social appropriateness—necessarily use very

different language partly because the writer would have to mark the social distance from both the subject and the readers of the newspaper.

As mentioned earlier, there is a psychological gain in letting off steam and expressing extreme emotion when expletives, forbidden words, automatically come tumbling out. It is not surprising therefore to find that many societies have public acts of ceremonial misbehavior to function as a social safety valve. Flyting, playing the dozens, and other kinds of competitive ritual insulting appear to manifest this function. When players bait and tease each other, trying to outdo with insults, this represents a conventionalized breaking of taboo, a way to let off steam without harming themselves or others.

The phenomenon of subversion of swear words is not so strange when we compare it with the existence of contronyms¹² in the vocabulary, e.g., *bound* “fastened to a spot” vs. “heading for somewhere”; *cleave* “adhere to” vs. “separate”; *consult* “offer advice” vs. “seek advice”; *dust* “remove fine particles” vs. “cover with fine particles”; *fast* “moving quickly” vs. “fixed, unable to move”; *give out* “provide, supply” vs. “stop for lack of supply”; *hold up* “support” vs. “impede”; *overlook* “supervise” vs. “neglect”; *sanction* “approve” vs. “boycott”; *trim* “decorate” vs. “remove excess from”; etc. There are many more, including some that are controversial, for instance *infer* is used to mean both “imply by saying” and “understand from what is said”; *rent* and *let*¹³ can be ambiguous between “allow the use of something in return for being paid” and “use something in return for payment to the owner”. What contronyms show is that speakers and writers and their audiences can happily operate using a word or phrase with contrary meanings relying on context to disambiguate—which is exactly what normally applies with terms of abuse and their contronymic subversions.

Swearing not only marks solidarity within a group (Allan and Burridge 2009; Daly et al. 2004; Dynel 2012; McEnery and Xiao 2004; Stapleton 2003) it also serves as an identity tag to characterize an individual’s behaviour within a group (Bednarek 2015; Beers-Fägersten 2017; Generous et al. 2015), function (vi) discussed in Section 8.

7. The Discourse Function

(47) Hayduke, under the hair and sunburned hide, appeared to be blushing. His grin was awkward. “Well, shit”, he said. “Fuck, I don’t know, I guess . . . well, shit, if I can’t swear I can’t talk”. A pause. “Can’t hardly *think* if I can’t swear”.

“That’s exactly what I thought”, said Bonnie. “You’re a verbal cripple. You use obscenities as a crutch. Obscenity is a crutch for crippled minds”.

“Fuck”, said Hayduke.

. . . “Exactly”.

. . . “Fuck off”. (Abbey 1975, p. 153f)

Hayduke’s “Well, shit, . . . Fuck, . . . shit” uses *shit* and *fuck* as discourse particles—where other people might use *like*, *well*, *I mean*, *you know*, and the like. Bonnie’s is a fairly common reaction to the impositive face affront she perceives to be inflicted upon her. Her judgment that “Obscenity is a crutch for crippled minds” is a commonly held prejudice; but there is no evidence whatsoever that it is correct (Jay and Jay 2015; Jay 2019). And, judging from elsewhere in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, in (47) Bonnie is probably not especially distraught by the obscenities themselves (though some people would be); what seems to motivate her here, is that Hayduke’s frequent use of obscenities distracts her from readily and easily understanding the rest of what he is saying.

8. Swearing That Characterizes an Individual’s Behaviour

Stapleton (2010) identifies one function of swearing as “constructing and displaying identity” which is preferably described as a character trait attributed by others to an individual on the basis of frequent use by that person of swearing in any one or more of functions (i)–(v). For instance, reconsider (47). Hayduke is characterized by his frequent

use of swear words almost every time he opens his mouth. Hayduke uses swearing in a number of functions in the novel (*The Monkey Wrench Gang*), but in (47) the function of the swear words is as discourse particles or expletives. It would be fair to say that their function as attributed by author Edward Abbey is to characterize George Washington Hayduke.

In 1960 I worked for a couple of weeks in a carpet warehouse on the Old Kent Road in London alongside a middle-aged man whose every utterance contained an oath; he would greet you with “Fucking good morning” or “Good fucking morning, eh?” and continue in the same vein all day long. It was an amusing character trait.

Celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay OBE is a celebrated frequent swearer: “Ramsay’s television appearances are defined by his bluntness, fiery temper, strict demeanour, and frequent use of profanity” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_Ramsay). Ramsey featured in a cookery program called ‘The F Word’—a transparent pun—that ran for five series in Britain from 2005–2009.

Another public figure known for frequent swearing where others probably would not is Tim Minchin AM, Australian comedian, actor, writer, musician, poet, composer, and songwriter, see for instance a press interview at <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/nov/13/tim-minchin-comedian-musician-matilda-weve-forgotten-how-to-be-innocent>; <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2023/apr/29/tim-minchin-interview-politics-affects-my-mental-health-i-feel-gaslit-groundhog-day-matilda>.

Generous et al. (2015) asked students about teachers swearing in the classroom. In addition to identifying swearing in functions (i)–(iv), there are these characterizations of the teacher’s personality: “I believe the teacher used the word because it is force of habit” (cp. Hayduke) and “He has a very free-spirited way of giving his lectures and I believe he uses these words as part of his personality/teaching method” (Generous et al. 2015, p. 134, Table I). As with the fictional George Washington Hayduke and the real Gordon Ramsay or Tim Minchin, we are identifying an attributed character trait; its cause more likely psychological than pathological or neurological.

Certainly, such people are not Touretters; their swearing is either a lack of conventional inhibition in, or a flaunting of disrespect for, what others deem situations not intimate or casual enough to sanction public swearing. The findings of Stephens et al. (2022) that swearing increases positive emotion, humor, boosts self-confidence and leads to more risky behavior are almost certainly relevant to people displaying this character trait.

People manifesting Gilles de la Tourette Syndrome display a disorder that is a neurological pathology associated with frequent and repetitive involuntary vocal tics (utterances of noises or words) and motor tics (muscle movements). The range of symptoms seen in Touretters includes the compulsion to vocalize or write obscene or other socially unacceptable words or phrases (coprolalia, coprographia), the compulsion to make obscene gestures (copropraxia), as well as the mimicking of other people’s language and movements (echolalia and echopraxia). The tics increase with stress and decrease when the person is relaxed or concentrating on an absorbing task. A number of researchers have described Tourette syndrome as a breakdown of the brain’s inhibitory mechanisms. In other words, the characteristic tic disorders are understood to be conditions in which there is a failure to inhibit aspects of normal behavior (see Finkelstein 2019; Martino and Leckman 2013; Van der Kolk 2014). It is a frequent behavioural trait of Touretters that they swear.

The fact that swearing is “conduct which offends against the standards of good taste or good manners which is a breach of the rules of courtesy” probably explains why women are said to swear less than men and the “working” class is thought to swear more than the “upper” class. It is beyond doubt that women swear, as do the “middle” and “upper” classes. Esteemed political figures are recorded swearing: for instance, John F. Kennedy, 35th POTUS, described as a ‘fuck up’ the excessive expenditure on a maternity suite for his wife at Otis Airforce Base in July 1963 (though this was never printed at the time). In the Canadian Parliament of 1971, Liberal leader Pierre Trudeau was accused of telling the Tories to “fuck off” (though he denied it). The Watergate scandal of 1972 brought President Nixon’s expletives into strident public controversy. In the British House of Commons,

Labour MP Reg Race became the first member ever to be recorded uttering the word *fuck* in 1982; since 2003 British Hansard has explicitly recorded 12 utterances of *fuck* in the Lords, Commons, and Westminster Hall, with increasing frequency. *Spare*, the autobiography of the Prince Harry Duke of Sussex records many instances of swearing by, among others, Harry himself and his brother William Prince of Wales (Prince Harry 2023). Frequency of swearing is a character trait of an individual less inhibited by convention than her or his peers and that it is nowadays recorded in public media reflects a change in the social acceptability of taboo violations.

9. Shifting Attitudes

Despite Bonnie's complaint in (47), swearing like Hayduke's bleaches out the standard force of obscenity; this bleaching effect was found in the Stroop Task reported in Section 2 as well as by Brophy and Partridge (1931); Ross (1960); Stephens and Umland (2011). This bleaching also affects the judgments of magistrates as reported in Allan and Burridge (2006, p. 36f) where a justice concludes:

I ask myself this question—what difference would it make to the reasonably tolerant person if swear words were used or not. I answer that there would be little difference indeed. (*Police v Butler* [2003] NSWLC 2 before David Heilpern J, 14 June 2002)

Such legal decisions reflect the change in social attitudes: taboos on various kinds of profanity have been relaxed. Instead, since the 1980s, speakers have shown a growing apprehensiveness of how to talk to and about people perceived to be disadvantaged or oppressed. There is today more severe censure of ableist, sexist, sizeist, racial and ethnic slurs like *fatty*, *faggot*, *dike*, *queer*, *dago*, *kike*, *kaffir*, *nigger*, *mick*, *wog*, *boong*, *abo*. There has been a gradual establishment of legally recognized sanctions against what Allan and Burridge (1991, 2006) dubbed *-IST language*. The *-IST* taboos are today significantly more dysphemistic than irreligious profanity, blasphemy, and sexual obscenity. Nonetheless, by and large, swearing remains "conduct which offends against the standards of good taste or good manners which is a breach of the rules of courtesy" (Heilpern J, Allan and Burridge 2006, p. 36).

10. The Pleasure and Pain of Taboo Exploitation

This essay has examined the pleasure and pain of swearing as an example of taboo exploitation. Swearing may be motivated by an utterer's response to pain and, on occasion, swearing may give pleasure to the utterer. Swearing may give pain to the audience (whether or not this is intended by the utterer) and on other occasions may be found pleasurable by the audience. Such evaluations of swearing depend on the context of utterance: the utterer, his or her apparent intention, the situation of utterance, the disposition and/or attitude of the audience. Swearing, like slang, is normally restricted to colloquial styles; as we saw when discussing Emma Raducanu's gaffe in Section 2, because swearing is commonly perceived to be a breach of the rules of courtesy it offends against the standards of good taste and good manners. The purposeful breaking of this taboo is, in consequence, an emotional release. Auto-catharsis through swearing is a conventional way of violating a taboo: a convention that is not socially approved of, but one that is grudgingly excused by society. In both public and private, an individual's self-control will determine the choice of vocabulary used. There is evidence that, in groups where swearing is very frequent, swearing will often diminish in circumstances of high stress. Shared swearing patterns indicate group membership and so help to define the gang. Such social swearing typically diminishes if there are non-swearers present, and under such circumstances, the people who condemn swearing are judged uptight.

Research in psychology, physiology, and neurology corroborate that taboo terms are processed differently from ordinary language and are subject to more acute recognition and recall. Swearing seems to be located and processed in a different part of the brain than other language.¹⁴ Thus, people with certain kinds of dementia and/or aphasia may curse

profusely, producing what sound like exclamatory interjections as an emotional reaction; however, when called upon to repeat the performance, they are unable to do so because they have lost the capacity to construct ordinary language. The fact that swear words and slurs pour forth in these particular mental disorders and from people with Tourette syndrome is only possible because they are perhaps stored separately and certainly accessed differently from other language (Allan and Burrige 2006; Bowers and Pleydell-Pearce 2011; Finkelstein 2019; Jay 2000; Valenstein and Heilman 1979). It has not been experimentally established whether or not this accounts for the effectiveness of swearing in displaying pleasure and managing pain and/or the physiological effects of swearing in laboratory studies, but it may do so. Certainly, swearing and other taboo language does have a special place in our neural anatomy and that could be why there is a general tendency for any derogatory or unfavourable denotation or connotation within a language expression to dominate the interpretation of its immediate context.

I identified and discussed five functions for swearing from the utterer's as well as the audience point of view, though the functions often co-occur. There is the expletive function, (i), which marks an intensity of emotion in the utterer: *It's my fucking birthday, goddamn it; That's bloody fabulous, love!* There is abuse and insult or banter, (ii): *Bastard motherfucker* can be either. Insult seeks to cause pain whereas banter has the intention of pleasing the target by endorsing camaraderie. As banter it is an expression of social solidarity, (iv), like *Oh, you lucky bitch!* Such uses are also spicier, (iii), than, respectively, *You're an evil man* and *You're a lucky girl*. Another instance of spicing up the message is *Being held accountable for your own actions is called being a goddamn bloody adult*. Then there is the discourse function, (v): *Fuck, I don't know*. In (2), *Fuck you SCOTUS*, the swearing has expletive function, (i); spicy language is deliberately employed for more forceful effect, (iii); and it explicitly motivates a disempowered woman, and other participants show solidarity by joining with her in perlocutionary effect, as was undoubtedly the intended illocutionary intention to insult, (ii). In addition to the utterer-based functions (i)–(v), there is the sixth function of characterizing an individual's behavior from an audience point of view as a frequent swearer, (vi).

In conclusion: swearing is “conduct which offends against the standards of good taste or good manners which is a breach of the rules of courtesy”. The study of this particular taboo violation shows it to intersect in complex ways with the giving and taking of pleasure and coping with pain or, conversely, the bid to inflict pain. The taking of pleasure and often the management of pain derives from achieving perlocutionary success that fulfils the swearer's illocutionary intention. Swearing can have the illocutionary intention of establishing or maintaining social solidarity as a pleasurable perlocutionary effect. On other occasions, swearing serves to inflict pain—sometimes by unintended perlocutionary effect, but mostly as part of a deliberate illocutionary and perlocutionary intention to cause distress or at least to register denigration. So, swearing is not purely taboo violation, but taboo exploitation!

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Appendix A. Sources for Examples

Australian Corpus of English comprising written texts from 1986
Australian Radio Talkback Corpus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-ZLr9ePuj8> [(1) Where the bloody hell are you?, accessed June 2023]
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=999205527464374> and <https://users.monash.edu.au/~kallan/LSI/FUSCOTUS.mkv> (2) Fuck you SCOTUS [accessed June 2023]
<https://twitter.com/i/status/1540413102059298817> Phoebe Bridgers [accessed June 2023]
<https://youtu.be/yFE6qQ3ySXE> Lily Allen Fuck You [accessed June 2023]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZTOj49YXx0> [accessed June 2023]
<https://youtu.be/nz8GnRxXWTg> Australian Senator Jacqui Lambie [accessed June 2023]
<http://www.joffreeman.com/joreen/bitch.htm> [accessed June 2023]
<http://forums.thenest.com/discussion/12002898/husband-called-me-a-c-t-b-ch-sl-t> [accessed September 2013, no longer online]
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/nov/13/tim-minchin-comedian-musician-matilda-weve-forgotten-how-to-be-innocent> [accessed June 2023]
<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2023/apr/29/tim-minchin-interview-politics-affects-my-mental-health-i-feel-gaslit-groundhog-day-matilda> [accessed June 2023]
ICE-AUS Corpus (1991–1995)
ICE-NZ Corpus (1990–1998)
Report of Police v Butler [2003] NSWLC 2 before Heilpern J, 14 June 2002
Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English (1988–1994)
Wellington corpus of written New Zealand texts (1986–)

Notes

- ¹ The Australian Minister for Tourism, Fran Bailey, responded: “This is a great Australian adjective. It’s plain speaking and friendly. It is our vernacular”, and she successfully persuaded the British to broadcast the ad. Although (1) has become notorious, the campaign it headlined failed to attract tourists to Australia and was described by then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd as “an absolute rolled gold disaster” (Sydney Morning Herald 25 June 2008).
- ² Many of the examples of swearing included in this essay and some of the argumentation were also used in (Allan and Burrige 2009).
- ³ The previous evening (24 June 2022), singer Phoebe Bridgers got the crowd to chant “Fuck the Supreme Court!”. Following the chant, she continued: “Fuck that shit. Fuck America. Like, fuck you. All these irrelevant, old motherfuckers trying to tell us what to do with our fucking bodies. . . Ugh. I don’t know, fuck it, whatever”. (<https://twitter.com/i/status/1540413102059298817>). There were similar cursings by other irate performers, too.
- ⁴ Gregory Kurstin and Lily Allen’s song (<https://youtu.be/yFE6qQ3ySXE>) includes lines “We’re so sick and tired of all the hatred you harbor . . . you say it’s not okay to be gay, well, I think you’re just evil . . . you’re just some racist . . . your point of view is medieval . . . we hate what you do . . . we hate your whole crew . . . do you really enjoy living a life that’s so hateful? . . . there’s a hole where your soul should be . . . no one wants your opinion”.
- ⁵ This is no longer available but, as of June 2023, can be seen at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=999205527464374> and for the next few years at <https://users.monash.edu.au/~kallan/LSI/FUSCOTUS.mkv>.
- ⁶ Anonymous reviewer 1 commented: “This . . . also happens with the breaking of taboos, especially sexual taboos, which are sometimes explicitly referred to with the intention of attracting the attention of the receiver, i.e., potential buyer. For example, the titles of some books suppose an overt violation of the sexual taboo: *Coños* (literally ‘cunts’) by Juan Manuel de Prada and *Fuck Machine* by Charles Bukowski are good examples”.
- ⁷ Anonymous reviewer 1 commented: “[T]his saliency becomes evident in the sexual taboo. The taboo sense of once ‘innocent’ words like *come* or the Spanish *huevos* (‘eggs’), has led to a lexicalization of these words with the meanings of ‘reaching orgasm’ and ‘testicles’ respectively. The sexual meanings dominate in the interpretation of these words and many others from the field of sex. The tension between the literal and the sex-related meaning is a major source of puns and word play (see Crespo-Fernández 2011, pp. 65–67)”.
- ⁸ No longer available but is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZTOj49YXx0>.
- ⁹ The illocutionary intention is indistinguishable from the perlocutionary intention: what the speaker is intending to bring off in making the utterance. The perlocutionary effect, however, is the actual effect on the audience that results from (mis)interpreting the utterance.
- ¹⁰ Apologies to my Irish ancestors.

- ¹¹ A translation for those who need it. “Granty [Phil Grant] . . . did you not hear?” Coke looked straight at Lenny. “No. What?” “Dead. Stone dead. [Potted head is rhyming slang for “dead”, its literal meaning is “brawn”]” “You’re joking! Eh? Give us a fucking break, you cunt . . .” “Honestly. Last night”. [“Likes” = like I say approximately “I’m telling you”]. “What the fuck happened?” “Ticker [heart]. Boom”. Coke snapped his fingers. “Dodgy heart, apparently. No cunt knew about it. Poor Granty was working with Pete Gilleghan on the side [illegally]. It was about five and Granty was helping Pete tidy up, ready to go [shoot the craw/crow is rhyming slang for “go”] and that, when he just holds his chest and keels over. Gilly [Gilleghan] gets an ambulance, and they take the poor cunt to hospital, but he dies a couple of hours later. Poor Granty. Good cunt and all. You play[ed] cards with guy, didn’t you?” “Eh . . . Yes . . . One of the nicest cunts you could hope to meet. That’s gutted me, that has”.
- ¹² Also called contranymy and autoantonyms, among other things.
- ¹³ There are also the verb let “allow” as in *Let me pay* and the noun let “hindrance” as in tennis (when during service, a ball is hindered by the net cord).
- ¹⁴ Anonymous reviewer 2 objects that “‘located’ implies a computer-like model of hardware/software that does not agree with the current processual understanding of the brain”. It is true that brain imaging often shows processing to activate a number of different locations in the brain, but they are nonetheless locations.

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