

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research Problem

The word profanity was derived from late Latin *profanus* ('not sacred'). It was used to refer to the act of disrespectfulness towards holy things. Today, however, it is also used to refer to particular forms of a language that some people in a culture judge as intolerable in certain settings (Bergen, 2016:15). For instance, the word *hell* would be acceptable if a preacher in a church said, "Those who don't believe in God deserve **hell**." It would be deemed as improper, nevertheless, if a newscaster in a broadcast says, "I don't even know what the **hell** the government is doing right now." It is because the word *hell* is meant literally in the first sample. Meanwhile, it is used to express discontent in the second example.

Furthermore, there have been many studies of profanities and their uses. Jay and Janschewitz (2008:267) state that profanities are used to express emotion, especially anger and frustration. However, studies proving that profanities can be used to express positive emotions as well. Wang (2013:75) and Wang et al. (2014:424), for instance, found that profanities can be used to show surprise, joy, sadness, love, thankfulness, or solidarity.

The results of those studies are in line with the general observation conducted by the researcher. It was observed that profanities can be used to convey positive emotions. One of them, in particular, is to compliment someone or something. In the linguistic study, it is also known as a compliment speech act.

The first observation was conducted towards a television series entitled *How I Met Your Mother*. The main character, Lily, asked his husband, Marshall, to keep her pregnancy secret for the time being. However, Marshall, who encountered many babies at a party they were in, could not contain the secret. Lily uttered *son of a bitch* while complimenting the baby held by Marshall (Alexander & Fryman, 2010):

- (1) Lily : *Marshall, stop it. Stay strong. You can't let holding some, some little baby, oh with the cute little cheeks and the...the little arms and little legs. This son of a bitch has knee dimples.*
- Marshall : (smiles and laughs)
- Lily : *Let's go tell everyone I'm pregnant*
- Marshall : (laughs) *Yeah!*

The phrase *son of a bitch* is lexically meant as “a general term of contempt or abuse” (Oxford Online Dictionary, 2019). Nevertheless, the aim of using *son of a bitch* in the example is not as a contempt or abuse reference to the baby. It was proved by the context and the utterance surrounding that phrase. Lily described how cute she thought the baby was, by stating, "...with the cute little cheeks, little arms and little legs." Marshall's response by smiling and laughing indicates that he understood that the phrase *son of a bitch* was not intended as an insult and that the whole utterance is a compliment for the baby.

In another television series, *Brooklyn 99*, the use of profanities in a compliment speech act was also found. *Brooklyn 99* is a comedy series about police officers. In Season 4 Episode 15, when the two main characters, police officers Jake and Charles, chased a criminal, Charles stated that he had planted a GPS tracker for the criminal. Jake complimented him and used the word *bastard* (Campbell & Mendoza, 2017).

- (2) Charles : *I planted a bug with a GPS tracker on it.*
Jake : *Chip Rockets, you beautiful **bastard!***
Charles : (smiles and lifts his shoulders)

Chip Rockets is Jake's address term for Charles. Jake, who was happy that Charles did something to help them chase the criminal, said, "Chip Rockets, you beautiful *bastard!*" The word *bastard* is a term for a person whose parents not married to each other (Oxford Online Dictionary, 2019). However, from the context of the conversation, Charles and viewers understood that what Jake meant is to compliment Charles. It was confirmed by Charles' response, where he smiled and lifted his shoulders, showing that he was happy with the compliment and proud of it.

Moreover, profanity usage in compliment speech acts was also found on social media communication, such as on Twitter. Twitter is a social networking service allowing its users to interact through messages called *tweets*. It is claimed as the second most popular social media website, with 326 million monthly active users (Maina, 2016; Statista, 2018).

In some tweets, samples of profanities in compliment speech acts were found. For example, Noah Centineo, a celebrity with a verified account, on August 30th, 2018, tweeted:



Figure 1. Noah Centineo's tweet

(Source: <https://twitter.com/noahcent/status/1035195255136514048>)

In his tweet above, Centineo stated, “**Fuck**...you’re so cute”. Although the statement is not directed to a specific person, judging from people’s replies to the statement, it was considered as a compliment. For example, one said *I know thank you*. In this context, the word *fuck* is not an exclamation used to “express annoyance, contempt, or impatience” (Oxford Online Dictionary, 2019). It was used to show Centineo’s surprise of how attractive someone is.

Another example is from another Twitter user, who on November 28th, 2018, tweeted,

   Follow ▼

UM EXCUSE ME YOU CUTE LITTLE FUCKER I'M TRYING TO GET SOME WORK DONE HERE



2:51 AM - 28 Nov 2018

1 Retweet 11 Likes 

 3  1  11 



  · 28 Nov 2018 ▼
Replying to @ 
NO WORK ONLY PETS

   1 

  · 28 Nov 2018 ▼
Replying to @ 
Omg that is so soft.

   1 

Figure 2. User X's tweet

(Source: <https://twitter.com/KaijuGreaser/status/1067506217138843648>)

The user X uploaded some pictures of her dog bothering her while she was working. She tweeted, “um excuse me you little **fucker** I’m trying to get some work done here” in capital letters. The use of uppercase letters on social media is generally understood as a sign of intense emotion. In this context, the capital letters emphasize the compliment. The word *fucker* is an abusive term used to refer to a stupid person (Oxford Online Dictionary, 2019). In contrast, in this tweet, it was used in a compliment.

The examples stated above and the findings from the previous studies (Wang, 2013:75; Wang et al., 2014:424) interest the researcher to study this language phenomenon. Up to now, there has not been found any study about profanities in compliment speech acts. Therefore, this appealing language phenomenon is chosen by the researcher to be her research title.

1.2 Scope and Limitation of the Research

Profanities have been studied from different perspectives. Among the studies are semantics, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics. This study is based on a pragmatic perspective.

The focus of this study is the use of English profanities in compliment speech acts found on Twitter. The scopes of the study were to find: 1) the linguistic forms of the profanities, 2) the themes of the profanities, 3) the pragmatic meanings of the profanities, and 4) the pragmatic functions of the profanities. The theories from Radford (1988:167) and Almos (2013:9) were used to identify the linguistic forms of the profanities. Meanwhile, the theories from Hughes (2006:326) and Ljung (2011:35) were used to investigate the themes of the profanities.

The third scope was to find the pragmatic meanings of the profanities. The identification of the pragmatic meanings of the profanities was based on the theory of meaning by Kreidler (2002:49). Kreidler proposes four types of meaning: lexical meaning, grammatical meaning, linguistic meaning, and utterance meaning. His theory was used in this study to determine the pragmatic meanings of the profanities found in compliment speech acts on Twitter.

Finally, the last scope was to find the pragmatic functions of the profanities. The theory of profanity functions by Ljung (2011:30) was used. He mentions fourteen functions of profanities grouped into three categories: stand-alones (expletive interjections, oaths, curses, affirmation and contradiction, unfriendly suggestion, ritual insult, and name-calling), slot fillers (adverbial/adjectival intensifier, adjective of dislikes, modal adverbials, anaphoric use of epithets, and noun supports), and replacive swearing.

1.3 Identification of the Problem

This study concerns with profanities. The profanities were found in compliment speech acts on Twitter. Research questions can be derived as follows:

1. What are the linguistic forms of profanities found in compliment speech acts on Twitter?
2. What are the themes of profanities found in compliment speech acts on Twitter?
3. What are the pragmatic meanings of the profanities found in compliment speech acts on Twitter?
4. What are the pragmatic functions of the profanities found in compliment speech acts on Twitter?

1.4 Objective of the Research

As stated in 1.3, this research investigates profanities found in compliment speech acts on Twitter. Based on the statements of the research problem above, some objectives of this research can be drawn. The objectives of this research can be stated as follows:

1. To identify the linguistic forms of profanities found in compliment speech acts on Twitter
2. To investigate the themes of profanities found in compliment speech acts on Twitter
3. To describe the pragmatic meanings of the profanities found in compliment speech acts on Twitter
4. To explain the pragmatic functions of the profanities found in compliment speech acts on Twitter

1.5 Significance of the Research

This research is expected to have a significant contribution to students' (especially students of linguistics) understanding of profanity usages from the pragmatic perspective. On the other hand, as a practical contribution, this research hopefully can ensure EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers to teach the use of profanities to their students. EFL students are usually expected to practice their communication skills in English in the English-speaking environment. Since the closest English speaking environment for them are social media and the use of English profanities in compliment speech acts are found on Twitter, this research hopefully can help them avoid misunderstanding while communicating in English with other English speakers, especially on social media.