

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The second Chapter is review of related the theoretical foundations related to profanity-based intensifiers, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, English language learning, and students' comprehension of informal English media.

A. Sociolinguistics

Language is more than a set of grammar rules and vocabulary. It is also a way that people interact with each other and show their relationships, identities, cultures and what they want to communicate. The study of how language and society are connected is called sociolinguistics. According to Holmes (2013), sociolinguistics looks at how language changes based on things like age, gender, job, ethnicity, social class and the situation in which people are communicating. Of looking at language as something that stands alone sociolinguistics helps us understand why people choose certain words or phrases to get a specific point across.

Recently researchers have been looking at how people use language on the internet and in media. This includes things like media, streaming services, online games and virtual communities. These places have created ways for language to change and evolve. People use language, slang and words that are specific to the internet in these environments. They also use language that is not typically used in educational settings (Tagg & Seargeant, 2021). One of the ideas in sociolinguistics is that language can vary. People do not use the language all the time. They change the way they speak based on the situation, who they are talking to what they want to say and what is considered normal in their group. According to Holmes (2013), these variations are natural consequences of social interaction and communicative needs.

Research conducted by Wu, Miller, and Zhang (2024) Found that people learning English as a foreign language often come across swear words when they are online or watching movies. The study showed that many of these learners knew what the words meant. They were not sure how to use them properly or when it was

okay to use them. The researchers thought that English classrooms should teach students about these kinds of words because they are a part of real-life communication. Similarly, Harmaini (2026) about how young people in Indonesia learn English through media. The study found that platforms like YouTube, TikTok and Instagram can help people learn English words and phrases even if they are not trying to learn English. This is because they are exposed to English language in these environments that provides continuous exposure to authentic English vocabulary and expressions. Students often acquire new lexical items incidentally while focusing on entertainment rather than language learning. This phenomenon supports the concept of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), in which learners improve their English competence through activities outside formal educational contexts. Lately researchers have been looking at words in a different way, just thinking of them as profanity they are trying to understand how they are used in communication. Crespo-Fernández (2025) that researchers are now studying words to see how they are used to express emotions create relationships and add humor to conversations.

Informal language is becoming more important for people learning English because it is often different from the language taught in classrooms. Digital media, like movies and social media are where many university students hear English spoken. They come across slang, abbreviations and swear words that are not typically taught in school. From a perspective swear words are a type of language variation. They can be used to express emotions create relationships and add humor to conversations. To understand swear words you need to know the context in which they are being used not what they mean. Sociolinguistics is a way to understand how language is used in different situations. It helps us see how language changes based on how people interact with each other and the context in which they are communicating. This is important for English language education because it helps learners understand how to use language in real-life situations.

Therefore, sociolinguistics is a foundation, for this study. It helps us understand how profanity-based intensifiers are used in English media and how English Education students understand them.

B. Profanity and Taboo Language

Taboo language is made up of words or expressions that people do not say because they are about things that are considered private or embarrassing. These things are different in societies because people have different ideas about what is polite what is right and wrong and what is acceptable. Therefore, something that is considered offensive in one place might be okay in another place. According to Allan (2023), we should not just look at the words themselves to decide if they are taboo. We need to think about how language, culture and what people expect from each other are all connected. Words become taboo because people in a society decide they are bad. So, whether a word is considered offensive or not depends on the situation what the person saying it means who is. What they are trying to communicate.

There are kinds of taboo language. Allan (2023) says that some common kinds include words that're against someone's religion, sexual words, words about bodily functions, words that are mean to certain groups of people and words that are mean to family members. Among these kinds profanity is something that people talk about a lot because it is used much in everyday conversations and in movies and television shows. Stapleton and Beers Fägersten (2023) said that swearing is used for reasons, including to control emotions to be funny to show friendship to create an identity and to make a point in a conversation. Their research shows that people often use profanity on purpose to show emotions to make friends or to show what they believe in. This way of thinking is different from the idea that profanity is always impolite or unacceptable. Similarly, Love (2021) analyzed a lot of conversations in English. Found that swear words are used more and more in informal conversations in Britain. The study showed that people use profanity when they are talking to friends and family which means that these words are now a part of conversations and not just used to be mean.

Recent studies in English language education have highlighted this issue. Wu et al. (2024) studied what people learning English think about English swear words. Found that many of them know what the words are but are not sure what they mean in different situations. These learners often hear profanity in movies,

videos, games and on media but they do not learn about it in their English classes. So, they are learning about it on their own from the media or from their teachers.

Profanity is also used a lot in movies, television shows, video games and online content. The people who make these things often use words to make the characters seem real to show emotions or to make the conversation sound natural. Xavier (2024) argued that taboo language in media helps to tell the story make the characters more believable and create relationships between them. So, profanity is not just used to be offensive. It is also used to make the story better and to keep the audience interested.

Profanity usually refers to swear words that people use to express emotions like anger, surprise or excitement. It is different from insults because it is often used to make communication stronger. Recent studies have shown that swear words can be used in different ways not just to be offensive. It is also important to know the difference between profanity and pragmatic profanity. Literal profanity is when someone uses a word to directly insult someone. For example, calling someone a bad name is profanity because it is meant to hurt their feelings. On the hand pragmatic profanity is when swear words are used to add emotion to what someone is saying but they are not meant to hurt anyone. For instance, saying "That's fucking amazing" or "This is damn difficult" uses profanity to make the sentence stronger. It is not meant to be mean. This difference is important for people learning English. If they think that every time, they hear a word it is meant to be mean they might not understand what is being said. They might think that someone is being hostile when they are just trying to show emotions.

In classes profanity is a challenge because teachers might not want to talk about it because of cultural differences and because they do not want to offend anyone. Learners are going to hear these words outside of class anyway. So, if teachers do not teach them about it the learners might not know how to understand it when they hear it. For this reason, learning about profanity should be part of learning how to communicate in English. Learners need to know when profanity is

used to insult someone, when it is used to show emotions and when it is used to make a sentence stronger. Knowing this will help them understand English better and be able to communicate effectively.

In this study profanity is the main thing being looked at. It is not about how profanity is bad language. It is about how profanities used in informal English especially in media. By studying how learners understand these expressions this research will help us understand more, about how languages used in society how people communicate and how to teach English better especially with all the informal English that learners are exposed to through the internet and social media.

C. Profanity as Adjective Intensifiers

People often change adjectives to show levels of strength. Of just saying something is "good" or "bad " people often make their opinions stronger by adding extra words. These extra words are important in communication because they help people show feelings, opinions and personal views clearly. In English these extra words appear not only in formal language but also in daily talks, movies and online messages. According to Quirk et al. (1985) These extra words are parts of language that change how strong an adjective or adverb is. Common examples are "very " "extremely " "really ". Quite." These words make the meaning stronger without changing the type of word. For example, in the sentence "The test was very hard " the word "very" acts as an intensifier because it makes "hard" stronger.

Recent studies show that English speakers are using unusual intensifiers, especially in casual talks. Love (2021) after looking at spoken British English found that casual speech is using expressive words instead of the usual ones. Many of these words come from words that are normally not allowed in conversation especially swear words because they show stronger feelings than normal words. This change is part of something called bleaching. Semantic bleaching is when a word loses some of its meaning but becomes more useful in how it is used. According to McEnery et al. (2023) Many words that were once considered offensive in English have gone through semantic bleaching because they are used so much that their strong meaning has faded in some situations. Because of these

words like "damn" and "fucking" are often used to show emphasis of as real offensive words.

Using words as intensifiers is also connected to being real in conversation. People often use these words to show that they are being natural, honest and emotionally involved. Stapleton and Beers Fägersten (2023) say that swearing helps in talking to others by showing how much someone really cares about what they're saying. Of just being offensive swearing can show that someone is being genuine and emotionally connected. Wu et al. (2024) Found that students who are learning English as a language often hear swear words in movies, online videos, games and social media. Even though these students usually know the swear words they often don't know how they are used in real situations. Specifically, they have trouble telling the difference between words that are meant to hurt and those that are used to show strong feelings.

For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, however, understanding these words is hard. Students often learn vocabulary in classes where swear words are not discussed. As a result, students might know the words. Not how they are used in real communication. Profanity-based intensifiers are swear word that are not meant to be offensive anymore. Are used to make adjectives stronger. Their use is different from their meaning. For example, in the sentence "That movie was fucking amazing " the word "fucking" does not insult the person. Refer to its actual meaning. Instead, it makes "amazing" stronger showing a positive opinion. Similarly, expressions such as "damn difficult," "bloody brilliant," "damn funny," and "fucking ridiculous" show how swear words are used as intensifiers instead of insults. These examples show that swear words have changed in how they're used in modern English. Their main purpose is usually to add feelings instead of to hurt anyone.

How people understand words as intensifiers depends a lot, on the situation. The same word can mean things depending on how it is used and why it is used. Think about these examples:

- "You're a fucking idiot."

Here, "fucking" strengthens an insult directed at another person.

- "This is fucking difficult."

In this example, "fucking" intensifies the adjective "difficult" without targeting another individual.

Although both sentences contain the same profanity word, their pragmatic functions differ substantially. The first performs a face-threatening act, while the second expresses frustration toward a situation.

When we talk to each other online, we often use strong words to show how we feel. You see this on media when people play games together on streaming sites, podcasts and videos. People say things like "good" or "bloody annoying" or "fucking incredible". When people who speak English naturally hear these words, they know the person is just showing feelings they do not think the person is being rude.

If you want to learn English it is helpful to understand what these strong words mean. This way you can understand what people are really saying when you listen to them talk. You will be better at understanding conversations especially when you watch videos or listen to podcasts.

This study is looking at how students understand these words. It is not trying to get students to use these words. To understand what they mean when other people use them. The goal is to help students get better at understanding how people talk in life especially when they watch English videos or listen to podcasts.

D. Pragmatics and Meaning in Context

Understanding language is not about knowing words and how they are put together. People often share meanings that're not exactly what the words say. The field of pragmatics looks at how meanings created using the situation what the

speaker wants to say and how people communicate with each other.

According to Yule (1996), pragmatics is about what the speaker means what the situation means and how people understand what is said at a moment. It is not about what words mean in a book. Pragmatics looks at what the speaker's trying to say and how people understand that message. Pragmatics is very important because it helps us understand what people really mean when they say something.

New ideas in pragmatics focus on language as something people do together than just how it is structured. For example, Interpersonal Pragmatics looks at how people use language to build relationships show feelings create who they are and handle talks (Stapleton & Beers Fägersten, 2023). This way of thinking is very important when looking at swearing because words that are not nice often do things in conversations that're not what the words say. Swearing is an example of pragmatics because pragmatics looks at what the speaker is trying to say and how people understand that message.

Context is very important when understanding swearing. Without knowing the situation people might not get what the speaker really meant. For instance, the phrase "That exam was fucking difficult" might seem rude if taken literally. In the situation where it is said the swearing is just making the speakers feelings stronger about the test. Pragmatics helps us understand what the speaker really means. That is important when looking at swearing.

Levinson (1983) explained that understanding what is said depends on things that work together. These include who is speaking how the people talking know each other, where the conversation is happening and what people know together. These things decide if a sentence is seen as strong, sarcastic or friendly. Pragmatics is, about understanding what the speaker means and that is why it is so important.

What the person wants to say changes what is understood. Two people can say the sentence but mean different things. For example:

Speaker A:

"That movie was fucking amazing."

Speaker B:

"You're fucking useless."

The two sentences have the words but they are used in different ways. The first sentence is saying something the person are really happy. The second sentence is an insult it is saying something about someone.

This illustrates one of the central principles of pragmatics: meaning cannot be understood independently of context.

This shows that the meaning of words is not about the words themselves but about how they're used. You have to think about the situation and the people involved to understand what is being said. Recent studies support this interpretation. Wu et al. (2024) found that people learning English as a language often know what profanity mean but they do not know how to use them in the way. They get confused about what the words mean like are they being used to be funny or to show anger. The people doing the study said that being able to use language in the way is very important for communicating. Using language in the way means being able to understand what people really mean not just what the words say. It is about being able to pick up on the feelings and ideas behind the words. Taguchi (2023) that this is a skill for people learning a language.

When you watch movies or TV shows. Play video games you need to be able to understand the language in a way. The people in these things often use words to show feelings, like excitement or frustration. If you only know the meaning of the words you might not understand what is going on.

Another thing that is important is understanding how words can make people feel. Words are not just about what they mean. About how they make you feel. According to recent research by Beers Fägersten and Stapleton (2023), using words can be a way to show feelings and be real. It is not always, about being mean. About being honest and connecting with people. Profanity is often used to show how someone is feeling than to be hurtful.

For example:

"The concert was fucking incredible."

The speaker expresses excitement.

"This traffic is fucking terrible."

The speaker expresses frustration.

"That is a damn good idea."

The speaker expresses strong approval.

In each example, the profanity modifies emotional intensity instead of functioning as a direct insult.

These practical features show why strong swear words are hard for people learning English. People learning English need to know what the words mean and also understand how they are used in a conversation what the speaker is trying to say how they feel and what they want to communicate. To really get this people learning English need to be around English a lot. This study uses how people really talk as one of its ideas. The study looks at how students understand strong swear words by seeing if they can figure out what they mean in a conversation not just what the words mean. This way of thinking is in line, with what the study's trying to find out which is how students who want to teach English understand strong swear words they see in informal English media like profanity-based intensifiers.

E. Informal English Media and Incidental Language Learning

Learning a language is no longer just for classrooms. The fast growth of tools has changed how people see and learn foreign languages. People who want to learn English now meet language through movies TV shows, video games,

streaming sites, podcasts, social media and online groups. These places give chances to see real English that is very different from what is in school books. So, people often come across words, slang, expressions that are not used in school and even bad language.

One idea that explains this is called Informal Digital Learning of English or IDLE. According to Lee (2020) IDLE is when people learn English by themselves using tools outside of school. Unlike school IDLE is based on what people like and what they do every day not on goals. Students learn English while watching YouTube videos joining game groups talking on social sites or watching English shows.

Lee (2020) argues that IDLE helps people learn better because it gives real language experiences. When people see language many times they learn words, expressions, how to speak and how to use language in the right way. Digital places also show people the kinds of English that are used today like words and bad language so they can see how real people talk in real life. Another idea that is important for this study is called Incidental Language Learning. Hulstijn (2001) says that this is when people learn a language without trying to remember the language itself. Instead, they learn it while doing something like reading, listening or playing games.

Even though this idea came before the rise of tools new research shows that this kind of learning is now very important online. Harmaini (2026) investigated how Indonesian young people learn English through media. The study found that people learned words and phrases when they watched videos on YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and other sites. They did not try to study English. They learned new words naturally by seeing real media. These results show that digital media helps people learn words and know how to use them better.

Video games are also a source of real English. Unlike books games have talks that sound like real speech. Characters use words, slang, short forms and even profanity to make the game feel real. As players watch the story and talk they see language in situations, which helps them learn new words without trying. Movies and TV shows also show real life English. These media mix words with pictures

helping people guess what the words mean from body language, faces and what is happening. According to Xavier (2024), profanity in movies help make characters real. Show strong feelings. Swear words are not just for being rude. To show how real people talk and feel.

Social media has become a way to learn informal English. Sites like X, Reddit, TikTok, Instagram and Discord make people talk quickly creatively and in a way. People use slang, short forms, emojis, jokes and profanity to share thoughts. Since this is how people really talk learners see a type of English than what is in books. Research by Wu et al. (2024) Found that many English learners first see words through digital media, not school. People said they heard language when watching movies, playing games reading comments playing online games and talking on social media. However, Many learners also said they were unsure what these words meant or when it was okay to use them because school didn't teach them.

This creates a problem for teachers. Even though learners meet words in real media school programs usually do not talk about these words because of culture and ethics. So, learners figure it out on their own by watching and hearing them again and again. Some learn the meaning others think all profanity are rude no matter the situation. From the point of view of teaching English using media helps learners get better at talking. Real media shows people how to use language, including words, how to speak how people talk and how to use language in the right way. Learning about words should be part of learning how to use language correctly not about using profanities. In this study informal English media is the way students see profanity. Expressions like "difficult," "bloody brilliant," and "fucking amazing" often appear in movies, shows, games and online chats.

F. Students' Understanding of Profanity-Based Intensifiers

Understanding language is not just about knowing what each word means. To communicate well students, need to know how to put words what the speaker is trying to say and what is okay to say in different situations. When people are learning a language understanding what is being said is a big part of being able to

communicate.

According to Nation (2022) knowing a word is not about knowing what it means in the dictionary. Students also need to know how to use the word what words it goes with and when it is okay to use it. This is especially important for words because they can mean different things depending on how they are used. For example, a student may know that the word "damn" is a word. To really understand what someone means when they say "damn good" or "damn difficult" the student needs to know that "damn" is being used to add emphasis not to insult someone. If the student does not know this, they might think the person is being mean when they are really just trying to show feelings

Being able to understand what people mean in situations is a big part of language comprehension. Taguchi (2023) defines that this means being able to understand and use language in a way that's appropriate for the situation the culture and the people involved. Students who are good at this can tell what the speaker is trying to say even if they are not saying it directly. have shown that students learning English as a language often have trouble understanding informal expressions that include profanity. Wu et al. (2024) found that learners usually knew what the profanity meant. They were not sure how to use them in context. The students were not sure if the expressions were being used to show anger, surprise or excitement.

These findings suggest that understanding profanity requires both lexical knowledge and pragmatic awareness. Students need to be able to tell the difference between words that are being used to insult someone, words that are being used to show feelings and words that are being used to add emphasis. Exposure also plays an important role in language comprehension. According to Lee (2020), learners who use the internet and watch English language videos are more likely to understand expressions than students who only learn in the classroom. When students see and hear language in use, they can start to recognize patterns and understand what the words mean.

Repeated exposure to profanity-based intensifiers may therefore contribute to

students' understanding. Learners who frequently watch English-language films, play narrative video games, or participate in online communities are more likely to encounter expressions such as "fucking amazing," "damn funny," or "bloody ridiculous." Over time, repeated contextual exposure enables learners to recognize these expressions as markers of emotional intensity rather than literal offensive language.

Just seeing and hearing the language is not enough. Students' backgrounds, language level and what they have learned before also affect how they understand the language. In some cultures, students may be taught that all profanities are impolite so they may not understand that some expressions are used to add emphasis not to insult. Consequently, they may fail to recognize the grammatical function of profanity-based intensifiers in authentic communication. Within English language education, understanding authentic language is an important component of communicative competence. Learners should be able to interpret expressions according to their communicative purposes rather than relying exclusively on literal meanings. This objective aligns with contemporary approaches to language teaching, which emphasize authentic materials and contextualized language use.

G. Review of Previous Studies

To understand what we already know we need to look at what other people have found out. Many recent studies have looked at how people use language like swearing and informal English when they talk to each other. Not many of these studies have looked at how students understand when bad language is used to make something sound stronger or more extreme in informal English media.

The first study was conducted by Love (2021), entitled *Swearing in Informal Spoken English: 1990s to 2010s*. The study employed a corpus-based quantitative approach to investigate the frequency and distribution of swear words in spoken British English. Using the Spoken British National Corpus 2014 and comparing it with the 1994 corpus, Love found that the use of swear words had increased considerably over the two decades. The study also demonstrated that swear words no longer functioned solely as offensive language but frequently

appeared as conversational markers, emotional expressions, and intensifiers. Although the study provides valuable evidence regarding contemporary English swearing, it focuses on native speakers' language production rather than English learners' comprehension. Furthermore, it does not specifically examine profanity functioning as adjective intensifiers.

The second study was conducted by Khusna, Pertiwi, and Eskarina (2022), entitled *Indonesian Youths' Perception toward Swearing and Taboo Expression*. Using a quantitative survey distributed through Google Forms, the researchers investigated Indonesian youths' attitudes toward swearing. The findings indicated that respondents generally perceived swearing as context-dependent. While many participants considered swearing inappropriate in formal situations, they accepted it in informal communication among friends. The study contributes to understanding Indonesian perceptions of taboo language. However, it focuses on attitudes and perceptions rather than linguistic comprehension or grammatical functions of profanity.

Another relevant study was conducted by Stapleton and Beers Fägersten (2023), who examined interpersonal functions of swearing from a pragmatic perspective. Their study argued that swearing serves multiple communicative purposes, including emotional regulation, humor, solidarity, identity construction, and conversational emphasis. Rather than viewing profanity as merely offensive language, the researchers demonstrated that swear words function as important interpersonal resources in everyday communication. Although their study strengthens the theoretical understanding of swearing, it does not investigate second-language learners or educational contexts.

Wu, Miller, and Zhang (2024) conducted one of the most relevant studies for the present research. Their study, entitled *Beware and Swear: English-as-a-Foreign-Language Learners' Perceptions and Experiences Regarding Swearing in English*, explored how EFL learners perceive and experience English swearing. Using questionnaires and interviews, the researchers found that participants frequently encountered swear words through movies, online videos, video games, and social media.

A qualitative study conducted by Xavier (2024) analyzed taboo language in films from the perspective of audiovisual discourse. The findings suggested that profanity contributes to characterization, emotional authenticity, interpersonal relationships, and narrative realism. Swear words were found to perform numerous communicative functions beyond expressing anger or aggression. This study supports the argument that audiovisual media expose learners to authentic language. However, it focuses on discourse analysis rather than learner comprehension. Daulay, Dimas, and Alvindi (2024) investigated taboo language in the film *Uncut Gems*. Using qualitative content analysis, the researchers identified various categories and communicative functions of taboo expressions appearing in the script. The findings revealed that vulgarity constituted the most frequent category, while provocation represented the dominant communicative function. Similar to previous studies, the research focused on linguistic analysis of media texts rather than students' understanding.

More recently, Harmaini (2026) investigated incidental English learning through social media among Indonesian Generation Z learners. The study employed a quantitative survey to examine how exposure to English-language content on digital platforms contributed to language development. The findings indicated that students frequently acquired vocabulary and expressions incidentally while consuming entertainment content. Although the study did not investigate profanity specifically, it provides strong evidence that digital media serve as important sources of authentic English input.

Overall, previous studies demonstrate that profanity has important linguistic, pragmatic, and social functions in authentic English communication. They also show that English learners frequently encounter swear words through digital media. However, limited research specifically measures English Education students' understanding of profanity-based intensifiers functioning as adjective modifiers in informal English media. Most previous studies examine attitudes, frequency, discourse functions, or media representations rather than learners' comprehension. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill this gap by quantitatively investigating students' familiarity with and understanding of profanity-based intensifiers using questionnaire data collected through Google Forms.

H. Conceptual Framework

The current study assumes that English Education students are often exposed to English communication through informal media, such as movies, television shows, video games, streaming services and social media. These types of media often include words that are used to increase the strength of emotions not to be offensive in a way.

According to the theory of Informal Digital Learning of English (Lee 2020) students learn language through activities that happen outside of school. Also, incidental language learning means that students pick up vocabulary and how to use language properly naturally while they are focused on entertainment of trying to learn the language on purpose (Hulstijn, 2001). Because of this being regularly exposed to English media helps students become more familiar with informal ways of speaking. Understanding words that are used as expressions also depends on how well someone can use language, in context (Taguchi, 2023). Students need to figure out what the expressions mean based on the situation not just what the dictionary says. Students who know more about English communication are likely to see these words as a way to add emotion not as actual insults.

Based on these theoretical foundations, the conceptual relationship of the study is illustrated below.

1. Exposure to Informal English Media
2. Exposure to Profanity-Based Intensifiers
3. Students' Familiarity with Profanity-Based Intensifier
4. Students' Understanding of Contextual Meaning
5. Interpretation of the Communicative Function of Profanity-Based Intensifiers

In this study, exposure to informal English media functions as the source of authentic language input. Students' familiarity represents the knowledge developed through repeated encounters with profanity-based expressions. Students'

understanding refers to their ability to recognize the contextual meanings and communicative functions of profanity-based intensifiers. Finally, interpretation of communicative function reflects learners' pragmatic competence in distinguishing emotional emphasis from literal offensive meaning. Based on this framework, students' understanding is measured through a questionnaire consisting of comprehension questions and Likert-scale statements distributed using Google Forms.