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An Assessment of Emotional-Force and Cultural Sensitivity The Usage of English Swearwords by L1 German Speakers

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**An Assessment of Emotional-Force and Cultural Sensitivity
The Usage of English Swearwords by L1 German Speakers**

Sarah Dawn Cooper

**Thesis submitted to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
at West Virginia University**

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts in
World Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics**

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**Morgantown, West Virginia
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**Keywords: L2 learners, German L1, English L2, English swearwords, taboo language,
ESL, media, swearword intensity, global competence, intercultural communicative
competence**

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ABSTRACT

An Assessment of Emotional-Force and Cultural Sensitivity The Usage of English Swearwords by L1 German Speakers

Sarah Dawn Cooper

This study examines the usage of English swearwords by L1 German speakers and poses the following three questions: (1) Which English swearwords do native-speakers of German use? (2) In which situations do German speakers use English swearwords? Why do they use English swearwords instead of their German counterparts? (3) What emotional weight do they apply to swearwords in English (i.e. How taboo are they)? In an effort to understand Germans' use of swearwords today, potential attributing factors were assessed and evaluated in a 15-question survey comprised of both qualitative and quantitative components that was taken by 403 participants from Germany and Austria. The potential contributing factors to English swearword usage that were assessed were: proficiency level, number of years spent studying English, instructional setting type, English instructor's origin and native-language, frequency of swearing in German, and media interaction. These variables were applied to other questions that sought information about (1) the German swearwords Germans use most frequently and their personal perception about swearing in English; (2) qualitative and quantitative information regarding the social settings in which English swearwords are encountered; and (3) emotional-force responses by Germans to nine English swearwords. The findings of this study show that the more media German speakers interact with, the more likely they are to use English swearwords. The study also shows that German speakers interact with a multitude of English-language media that go beyond mainstream social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. The majority of respondents indicated that film and music were the most influential English-language media sources. Furthermore, the study found that German speakers are more likely to use English swearwords in spoken language than in written language, use English swearwords more often with other German speakers than with English speakers, and find English swearwords useful when referencing pop-culture. The study then hypothesizes why German speakers perceived English swearwords differently than U.S.-American speakers. In sum, implications for the ESL classroom are discussed, urging instructors to reevaluate the way in which taboo language is handled in the ESL classroom in the globalizing world.

for those who have supported me yesterday, today, and tomorrow,

*for my loving parents who believe in my ventures
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Chapter One: Introduction

Present Study and Research Questions

In early December 2018 Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel stirred a reaction of confusion and amusement among native-English speakers in Great Britain, the United States, and other regions of the English-speaking world with a comment that put the accuracy of translation and the usage of English swearwords by non-native speakers into question. As recounted by New York Times columnist Melissa Eddy, Chancellor Merkel made a speech at a technology conference in which she told an anecdote describing an incident that had happened five years earlier. She said that she had been mocked by critics after making a previous speech in which she called the Internet "uncharted territory" (Eddy, 2018). After a moment of reflection on the memory, she used the English word *shitstorm* to describe the media backlash she had received for making the observation (Eddy, 2018). Days later, a chorus of United States-based news outlets published articles reporting on the statement, incorporating various statements from native-English speakers who commented on the utterance. Some of these commentators found it shocking or even amusing that a politician would use such a word on an official platform and others found it unusual. Many wondered why Chancellor Merkel had chosen an English word to describe the scenario, and even more, why she would choose a relatively taboo term. With much speculation, writer David Simon questioned why the German language did not have a more appropriate word of its own to describe the scenario as the German speakers seem to "have a word for everything" (Eddy, 2018).

This comment raises questions about how words like "shitstorm," which have a more vulgar and versatile meaning in English, are loaned into German, and whether or not the German use of the term actually maintains the same meaning as the English term (Eddy, 2018). It also

raises the question as to whether or not the German language is more likely to adopt words from other languages with Germanic etymology. In fact, the word *shitstorm*, a compound word in which both the words *shit* and *storm* are of Germanic roots, was adopted into *Duden*, a standard dictionary for German in 2013. As its entry shows, is not entirely like the English word from which the German version is etymologically derived. A quick Google search of the definition of *shitstorm* in English brings up results from various dictionaries labeling the word as “vulgar slang” and defining it as a situation marked by violent controversy. *The Cambridge Dictionary* calls the word offensive and very informal, defining it as “a situation in which a lot of people are disagreeing and arguing with each other” (Definition, 2018). Yet the *Urban Dictionary* for slang terminology has a different definition, one that is more descriptive. It states that the word *shitstorm* describes a situation that leads to calamity in which normalcy is construed into a farce that could cause one “to go to jail or lose their job” (“Shitstorm,” 2006). It is “a course of action that would appear to lead to a good outcome, but when undertaken, leads to a situation that is utterly out of control beyond human comprehension” (“Shitstorm,” 2006). Hence, the English version can be used to define an array of scenarios in which there is some sort of controversy or sense of ensuing chaos. In English, *shitstorm* can be applied to any situation, is widely considered informal, and to be lacking good taste by native-English speakers. Despite this versatility, an U.S.-American or British politician is extremely unlikely to be caught saying this in a public speech, which is why most of the English-speaking world was taken aback by Chancellor Merkel’s choice of the word.

Given the reaction of the native English-speaking politicians, one can deduce that the word *shitstorm* is viewed by most professionals in English-speaking parts of the world as an inappropriate term for use on a public platform. Why, then, would Angela Merkel use the word

so frequently that its German usage and incorporation into *Duden* is claimed to be a result of her speeches containing the word (John, 2018)? Similarly, the definition in *Duden* defines *shitstorm* as a “Sturm der Entrüstung in einem Kommunikationsmedium des Internets, der zum Teil mit beleidigenden Äußerungen einhergeht,” linking the word *shitstorm*’s usage specifically to describing online situations (Shitstorm, 2018).¹ *The New York Times* claimed that most Germans are unaware of the fluctuation in meaning between the English and German word’s usage, citing an anecdote provided by Michael Steen, the head of media relations for the European Central Bank, in which he proclaimed “I’ve been explaining to German colleagues echoing Merkel’s regular-ish use [of the word *shitstorm*] for at least five years that [it] isn’t really [okay] in English,” (Eddy, 2018). In the same *New York Times* article, Anatol Stefanowitsch, a professor of English linguistics at the Free University in Berlin, was cited as noting that when a word is loaned, it is ultimately taken out of its original context, softened and shifted, into a more suitable meaning for the recipient language which makes the word’s usage more acceptable in the recipient language and culture (Eddy, 2018). Interestingly, in the same article, Mr. Stefanowitsch comments, “[Merkel] can use a word like this in English because it does not have the associations that have grown over time in the original language” (Eddy, 2018). This begs the question of what the development of new associations with English loanwords entail and to what the changing associations of a word etymologically derived from English is attributed (Eddy, 2018).

Angela Merkel’s use of a swearword in an unconventional situation without a full understanding of its import yet it is not unusual when examining the use of English swearwords by German speakers. When Merkel used the word *shitstorm*, she was likely not aware of the

¹ In English, a “storm of outrage on an Internet communication medium that is oftentimes accompanied by offensive commentary.”

word's potential impact, especially due to the fact that L1 and L2 emotional resonances differ greatly. Given the frequency of English swearwords in media outlets and their usage, it is a common situation that L2 learners of English encounter swearwords and begin using them in German. Perhaps these swearwords allow them to fill in metalinguistic gaps at times in which the German swearword does not do the situation justice, or maybe their usage alludes to something more, such as a desire to feel more connected to the rest of the world. Whatever the case, these speakers who are avid users of the Internet regularly encounter swearwords through social media or other forms of media such as film but will have difficulty understanding the weight the words may carry because they have a weaker attachment to the cultural weight and emotionality of the word. They cannot effectively relate to the word in the way they would to a similar word in their own language.

The borrowing of English swearwords by German speakers of English became apparent to me after spending time abroad or happening upon interactions on the Internet, where a German speaker made use of English swearwords or slang in ways that I perceived to be inappropriate. As a result, I was intrigued as to whether media played a role in the loaning of swearwords and chose to examine this potential correlation further, as well as relevant linguistic and non-linguistic variables that constitute a person's likelihood to swear. As a result, the following research questions were posed for this master's thesis and are related to ESL teaching in Germany:

- (1) Which English swearwords do native-speakers of German use?
- (2) In which situations do German speakers use English swearwords? Why do they use English swearwords instead of their German counterparts?

(3) What emotional weight do they apply to swearwords in English (i.e. How taboo are they)?

Based on these research questions, this study aims to provide more insight into the use of English swearwords by native German speakers by asking why and for which reasons German speakers use English swearwords. It further attempts to see with which factors their usage is affiliated. Corpora for swearwords in English and German are gathered, and various cultural perspectives surrounding swearing and the presence of swearing in media are briefly assessed. The research design implements both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to obtain a more holistic baseline assessment of the phenomenon. These aspects, including this research's findings, are applied to and discussed within the realm of the ESL classroom in order to encourage educators to reconsider the way in which they go about interacting with swearwords and taboo concepts in the ESL classroom. The use and treatment of swearwords when teaching English as a Second language creates a conundrum for the second language teacher. The entanglement of cultural influences and their inevitable differentiation are difficult to perceive as an L2 speaker and just as difficult to teach as an instructor. The notion that taboo words should remain taboo in the ESL classroom, despite students learning them naturally outside of the classroom, is a bit perilous. If not armed with resources to help independently understand a particular culture and if left to decipher meaning on their own, L2 learners run a higher risk of insulting a native-speaker by using inappropriate wording, are more likely to never develop a more appropriate emotional connotation with the swearword, and are increasingly likely adopt the word into their everyday L1 vernacular – all the while with a weakened relation to the word's original meaning. It is crucial, then, to understand the phenomena of borrowing and incorporating L2 swearwords into the L1, especially as empirical research shows that the L2 acquisition of swearwords will never

match up with the same emotional valence as do those learned in the L1. By understanding the nature of the phenomena, we can move towards better equipping ESL instructors to work with taboo language in the classroom and lead informative discussion among themselves, their students, and their supervisors surrounding swearword occurrences and their associated implications.

With this premise, this thesis consists of five chapters with the following headings: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, and Conclusion. In this chapter I provide background information on Anglicisms in German, discuss the role of swearing in society and its tabooeness across generations, note the nuances between U.S.-American and British swearing, and detail the media perspectives, influences, and constraints on swearword usage in United States, United Kingdom, and German societies. In Chapter 2, I provide information concerning how taboo language is understood and learned in the L1 and how this is comparable to taboo language differences across the world, and then discuss the concept of what it means for a word to become taboo. Thereafter, I highlight previously done research concerning the language conventions of bilinguals, which showcases how they differentiate between their L1 and L2 on an emotional level and how this may impact their relationships with others, especially their interlocutor. In Chapter 3 I discuss my posed research questions and hypotheses for the study, detail my methods, including the choice of using a Likert-scale, qualitative, and quantitative methods and thereafter note previously done research that inspired segments of the methodology. Within this chapter I also detail the survey that was distributed and analyzed, as well as the survey participants. In Chapter 4 the results to the study are presented and various graphs and tables are included with explanations of each and relevant statistical information that consolidate the findings. Throughout this chapter I speculate as to why some of the findings, such as

discrepancies in English swearword strength for U.S.-Americans and Germans, are contributing factors to the phenomenon and yielded the results they did in this study. In conclusion, in Chapter 5, I identify the limitations of the present study and propose remedies for these limitations while suggesting topics of future research for the given phenomenon. Other relevant non-linguistic variables to swearing are also discussed and suggested for future research. Subsequently, I discuss ramifications for the ESL classroom and speculate various critical-thinking exercises that can be implemented into instruction to help bolster sociocultural competence in the L2 as a possible solution for misinterpretations of English swearwords obtained by German speakers. I highlight the objectives for instruction, which emphasize awareness-raising rather than deterrence from borrowing English swearwords. This is suggested as a means to help aid L2 learners in understanding the implications of the words they may choose to borrow, especially when these words rely heavily on cultural and emotional factors.

Historical Overview of Anglicism Usage and Modifications in German

The everyday news reader may have become aware of the phenomenon that English swearwords are being used ever more frequently by German speakers of English. They may have noticed the more frequent occurrence of English swearwords used internationally through social interactions provided by a technology-rich, globalized world. In fact, the usage of English words and their adoption into German is not solely a modern phenomenon, and the transformation of the nuanced meaning of such words into is fairly common (De Ridder, 2014). The German language's history of borrowing words from English can be dated back to as far as the latter half of the 16th century. At that time the English Revolution paved way for new ideas of democracy that led to the future ideals of 17th-century England as it "expanded its foreign activities" and became "an interesting example for many European countries because of its parliamentarianism

and its legal system based on individual rights” (De Ridder, 2014, p. 14). In short, English institutions were considered fashionable, as were the words describing them. The introduction of Anglicisms into the German language arose because England served as a role model in the political sphere (De Ridder, 2014).² The words that were fully adopted into foreign languages at an increasing rate did not necessarily maintain the meaning of the original English word, as was the case with German (De Ridder, 2014). Throughout the subsequent centuries English became an influential “donor language” to German, as Germans viewed “all things English” to be highly cultural and therefore an indicator of prestige (De Ridder, 2014, p. 14). Most of the words adopted from English into the German language became “well-established” and assimilated to German typology and gender (De Ridder, 2014, p. 14).

In the later part of the 18th century, Anglicisms accounted for approximately 8% of all loanwords in German, while by the end of the nineteenth century the number had reached a staggering 40%. Given the frequency of English words in the language, English arguably became the “most important donor language” to German (De Ridder, 2014, p. 14-15). This development in the late 1700’s was attributed to “Britain’s early industrialization” and its leading role in technology, which generated new concepts and new terminology that influenced parts of Europe (De Ridder, 2014, p. 15). Despite its steady advancement as a donor language, the English influence on German began to fluctuate in the twentieth century during the years surrounding World War I, when purist ideals concerning language and other aspects of German heritage pinnacled following the rise of national-socialist ideology and right-wing politics that sought to redefine what it meant to be German (De Ridder, 2014, p. 15). Great Britain’s power, both

² An Anglicism can take many forms but is generally described as an “English word or phrase used in another language” in which the occurrence of a particular word can be traced back etymologically to the English language whether it be of British or American origin (De Ridder, 2014, p. 13).

politically and as a linguistic contributor to the German language, was toppled by US-American English in the interwar era and remained secondary in the decades following World War II.

After World War II the United States' influence on Germany slowly began to exceed Great Britain's influence, causing Anglicisms to be loaned from the United States more frequently than in the past (De Ridder, 2014, p. 15). Because both British and U.S. troops occupied parts of Germany, English words became more present in the German language than they had been previously. As Britain's position as a world power decreased during the interwar period, leading the way for the United States to take its seat, "the influence of American English exceeded that of British English" (De Ridder, 2014, p. 15). After 1945 the number of Anglicisms introduced into the German language continued to grow immensely, not only as result of British and U.S. occupation, but through a speculation that the German population had a desire to "compensate for the time of National Socialism" by embracing other cultures and taking part in a newfound sense of internationalism rather than resorting back to a wartime sense of isolationism (De Ridder, 2014, p. 15). The German language increasingly incorporated words for new objects coming from the United States, such as *die Cornflakes*, and substituted English words for German words, thereby making the German equivalents obsolete, i.e., *das Waldlauf* became antiquated and *das Jogging* was substituted in its place (De Ridder, 2014, p. 15). Distinctions between British English and American English origins of words are difficult when examining Anglicisms in German because British and American English consistently influence one another (De Ridder, 2014, p. 13). Today the English language maintains a steady influence on German as it continues to be considered the major donor language to German's. English as it is spoken in the U.S. continues to rise in importance through technological means, such as social media, among other means of communication or media production, such as film (De Ridder,

2014, p. 16). The English language is used as a lingua franca in areas of politics, business, and economics, and within the technology or entertainment industries. Most movies are available in English or with English subtitles, and musicians preferring to write music in English rather than in their native language in order to reach a larger fanbase.

The Role of Swearing in Society³

The act of swearing is an age-old concept that has been necessary to society for thousands of years (Mohr, 2013).⁴ Swearwords are used for a variety of reasons in order to serve various functions. They are tools to express anger and happiness, to release intense emotions in an act of catharsis, and to indicate one's personal opinions about one's social status (Mohr, 2013). They seek to upset social controls and power structures in a given culture, which is why they remain taboo and "off-limits" to certain speakers under certain circumstances. Concepts of taboo language change over time as societal power structures fluctuate among generations. Historically the concept of cleanliness, for example, was not as taboo in the Middle Ages as it was during the Renaissance which is when the word *shit* became a swearword (Mohr, 2013). "Contemporary attitudes to swearing have been shaped by centuries of developing perspectives on what constitutes powerful and legitimate forms of speech and swearing has been classified in most languages as illegitimate and lacking in prestige" (Horan, 2011, p. 17).

Swearwords challenge concepts of cleanliness, social order and hierarchy, patriarchy and matriarchy, governing bodies, and faith – all of the things that we use to help both define and

³ For the purposes of this study, the words "swearwords," "vulgarisms," "vulgarities," "swears," and "taboo-words" will be used interchangeably to refer to the same concept of using words that are considered to be taboo for a given culture. These words are often broken up into different categories of meaning, but this paper aims to get an overview of the reasoning for and frequency of using English-language-based taboo-words in German, rather than compartmentalizing these words into categories.

⁴ This source references an interview with NPR in which Melissa Mohr discusses her book, "Holy Sh*t: A Brief History of Swearing."

understand ourselves and our societies. Throughout his career, sociolinguist William Labov has studied the crossover between the individual and the speech community, claiming that “we can say that the linguistic behavior of individuals cannot be understood without the knowledge of the speech communities that they belong to,” meaning that, understanding the speech community or society in which an individual belongs, is also vital in understanding the linguistic undertakings of the individual (Hazen, 2011, p. 25). True language competence is determined by social and economic factors imposed by a developed linguistic standard that is maintained by those in power, the upper-class (Bourdieu, 1991). Labov (1996) studied different ethnic groups on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, New York City and their speech variances with year of birth, ethnicity, gender, and generation being significant factors in understanding individuals’ speech patterns within a group as defined by social factors. With these factors applied to class ranking, it was found that the notion of an upper-class upheld linguistic standard for a language does not hold true among all members of a given society, and that lower classes deviated the most from this upheld linguistic standard. Linguistic standards can either be viewed as advantageous or suppressive for lower-classes. Given that citizens considered to be of lower-class are more likely to swear, the idea of a linguistic standard signifies that the lower-class should conform to the linguistic standard in order to advance in their place in society. Some of these speakers conform to the standard “in order to enjoy a degree of social and economic success,” (Horan 2011). In contrast, some speakers choose to not conform to the linguistic standard of their society in an act of rebellion against the society’s constructs and the upper-class notions of what is and is not proper. Swearing and “bad language” are strategic ways in which speakers seek to exclude themselves from the establishment and connect to social groups outside of that realm (Horan, 2011).

Assessing Swearword Strength

It is difficult to accurately measure the strength of swearwords among a populace given that a variety of non-linguistic factors come into play – the strongest of which are age and the definition of what taboo terminology is by a particular generation. Any assessment of the taboo quality of a swearword falls into a spectrum for individuals, but also entire cultures in which they are used, and the language to which it is tied are significant factors in developing and providing the norm for that given word. These norms therefore change over time as language, culture, and social constructs all continue to develop and constantly change as new ideas form. Despite each individual having a subjective experience with swearing, there is a fairly objective consensus regarding the spectrum of offensiveness. The following analysis of swearwords demonstrate the relative reliability of such a lexical continuum.

The Conventions of British and U.S.-American Swearing

Even though they share the same language, Brits and Americans have different swearing habits – it’s been speculated that British film tends to contain less profanity than U.S.-American film, leaving those who view U.S.-made films with the perception that U.S. culture is fairly lax when it comes to swearing, which is not necessarily true (Moore, 2015).⁵ That notwithstanding, film from the United States industry and film from the United Kingdom feature different swearwords that may be deemed more offensive in the other culture (i.e., the word *bloody* carries more weight in the United Kingdom than it does in the United States). U.S.-Americans tend to consider it surprising or shocking when a public figure held in high esteem goes against convention and swears in an unexpected setting. President Obama made a statement in which he

⁵ Erin Moore is the author of the book “That’s Not English: Britishisms, Americanisms, and What Our English Says About Us.” The book explores historical and cultural differences and features information concerning swearing in England and the United States.

said there was intention to find out “whose ass to kick” in connection with a BP oil spill (Moore, 2015). As quoted in Moore (2015), this statement ushered a response from TIME Magazine that claimed, “the comment wasn’t particularly vulgar... coarse language always seems shocking when it comes from the mouth of a President.” “Americans – even presidents – use all kinds of language, but in real life, swearing retains more of its shock value than you would imagine, if your primary contact with American culture were its movies” (Moore, 2015.) American swearing habits tend to come across as confusing and unpredictable to Brits for a variety of reasons. Americans may generally substitute swearwords for more lighthearted words that sound similar to the target swearword. For instance, the phrases *what the fuck* and *what the duck*, with other examples being *gosh* and *golly* for *god*, *heck* for *hell*, and *darn* for *damn*, among others (Moore, 2015). In other instances, everyday words that are not swearwords yet seem to have a tinge of disgust for U.S.-Americans and may reference social constructs of hygiene and cleanliness, like the word *toilet*, are generally avoided altogether and replaced by the word *bathroom* or even more formally, *restroom*.

Brits, by contrast, tend to link humor and close friendship with “colorful language” rather than the coarseness, vulgarity, and confrontation their American counterparts tend to associate and experience with swearing (Moore, 2015). A plethora of online blog-posts even warn Brits against swearing in the United States, pointing out that the word *cunt* and *nigger* are among United States’ most taboo and shocking words when heard being used in a careless manner, and that British swearwords like *bloody* don’t carry the same weight in America as they do in the United Kingdom – a warning to heed for Americans traveling to the United Kingdom. Whereas cursing involves the invocation of a divinity and the sacrilegious, i.e., terminology relating to God, the devil, the occult, or otherwise, swearing has to do with concepts of familial relation,

cleanliness, and intelligence (Horan, 2011). The distinction between the two is largely made in British English and wanes in U.S.-American English cultures, with U.S.-American English not maintaining this distinction. Pegged as frequent users of the swearword *bloody* and users of what seem to some U.S.-Americans as pseudo-swears or insults, like *tart*, British society as a whole is perceived to be much laxer when it comes to swearing than U.S.-American society is and swearing in British society has been tied to social cues that give off an air of friendliness, closeness, and good humor (Moore, 2015). Words like *bloody*, *bugger*, *bastard*, *fuck*, and *cunt* are some of the most frequent Swearwords used in Britain that were tested by Williamsson (2009) in a corpus study in which particular words related to a five-part scale of offensiveness devised by the British Board of Film Classification, which is responsible for classifying the severity of negative language in the sphere of media. After an analysis of the five words within the British National Corpus (BNC), it was found that British males preferred using stronger variants of English swearwords than females, who ultimately chose to use milder ones in comparison (Williamsson, 2009). It was also apparent within Williamsson's study that younger speakers and adolescents were more frequent users of swearwords. (Williamsson, 2009). 15 to 25-year-olds were found to be more frequent users of the word *bloody* with female participants being the most frequent users within that category. *Bugger* was used far less frequently than *bloody*, and the word *bastard* was the least frequent swearword among all of the five swearwords chosen. The word *fuck* was noted as being highly frequent among youths aged 0 to 14 years-old than it is in the overall aggregate, yet those identifying as male were more than twice as likely to be using it than those who were female (Williamsson, 2009). Accordingly, the higher a speaker was in social status, the more their likelihood of being an avid swearer declined and the lower they were in social status, the more often they swore (Williamsson, 2009). This is in congruence

with the concept that power structures seek to maintain a standard in order to uphold prestige and that this standard generally does not include profanity, which is relegated to the lower-class.

Media Perspectives and Influences

The majority of British swearing habits appear offensive to Americans, though not all of the words used carry the same weight. Americans have a tendency to “dismiss swearing as coarse and vulgar, whereas, for Brits, it can signify affection or a well-rounded sense of humor” (Margolis, 2013). Brits prefer “jovial insults” – the stronger the friendship is, the more the friends can “lay into one another” (Margolis, 2013). In American society this is not the case, and the use of jovial insults would most likely actually result in the damaging of a friendship (Appendix B). Though products of U.S. society, like film, suggest that Americans are avid swearers, Margolis (2013) maintains that they swear far less in comparison to the Brits, though some speculate that the way in which American culture views profanity is changing. However, the “loosening up of language that is altering the way we speak and think” has touched areas of “politics, arts, economics, social and sexual relationships, and family interactions” (Chirico, 2014).

The growing, global popularity of television shows like *South Park* incorporate regular swearing, and top-of-the-chart music genres, such as rap and rock, make frequent use of profane language. In one episode of *South Park* alone, the word *shit* can be heard 162 times in 23 minutes; Limp Bizkit’s song “Hot Dog” contains the word *fuck* 48 times over the course of four minutes, and some movies have been known to contain anywhere from 367 to 824 repetitions of the word *fuck* in anywhere from 178 to 93 minutes (Grimm, 2010). Well-known films like *Pulp Fiction* and *Goodfellas* respectively contain 265 and 300 counts of the word *fuck* (Grimm, 2010).

U.S.-American-made and U.S.-American-owned applications like Instagram, Twitter and

Facebook allow for the quick sharing of information in various languages and even the in-app translating of foreign comments so that using English as a lingua franca isn't entirely necessary. A large portion of those who use apps like Instagram, who are not native-speakers of English, make their posts in English and use a plethora of English-language hashtags in order to make their content more obtainable and to more quickly overcome language barriers. In 2015, there were approximately 77.6 million Instagram users in the United States alone, with the projected user number to surpass 111 million users in 2019 ("Instagram," 2018). As of June 2018, there were approximately 1 billion monthly, active Instagram users around the world ("Instagram," 2018). With the growing in numbers of users, these applications and websites also expand in the amount of material that is being produced and exchanged, as these platforms are largely user-based – meaning that the users take part in a two-way exchange of information, in which they themselves are both the creators and sharers of the content and that this content, for the most part, remains comparatively unregulated. Users may report content that is obscene, but there seem to be no available, hard guidelines concerning what defines this obscenity other than the subjective reporting of the incident by the person encountering the content and the reviewal of the labeled offense by the platform's board. Even in these cases, it seems that incidences such as nudity are reported and removed more frequently, whereas the usage of vulgarities is not. This is just one of many examples that shows how accessible and influential U.S.-American media can be in various communities around the world.

German Perception of Swearwords in the United States

Anglicisms, words of English etymological origin, and the increase in *Americanisms*, also known as words of U.S.-American etymological origin, have made their way into German language and culture – doing so at a steady rate since the end of WWII. In 2010, as the

discussion between the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and other officials ensued in the United States regarding whether or not swearwords should be permitted on television and the radio, German audiences sat back and looked at the matter as trivial, regarding swearing in media as more legally pursued in the United States than elsewhere.

Die von der gestrengen Medienaufsicht FCC (Federal Communications Commission) in den siebziger Jahren eingeführten Regeln seien „von einer gegen die Verfassung verstoßenden Unbestimmtheit“, urteilte ein Berufungsgericht in New York und verwies auf die Meinungsfreiheit. Das bedeutet wohl das baldige Ende für ein Ärgernis, das in keinem anderen Land so exzessiv betrieben wird wie in den USA: das lästige Überpiepsen von *fuck, shit & Co.* (Grimm, 2010).⁶

Swearing and its Regulation in German Society

In the Middle Ages, swearing in Germany was considered taboo, just as it was in many other Western European cultures. At that time, popular religious pamphlets or dictionaries called *Teufelsbücher* were published, warning the public of what havoc could concur in their lives if they partook in swearing (Horan, 2007.) These publications viewed swearing to be intertwined with other activities that were considered the vices and perils of the general public, such as gambling and drinking (Horan, 2011). The act of swearing in German society remains stigmatized today, though its everyday use alludes to regional identity, embodies various cultural functions such as being a provider of entertainment, and expresses language interest (Horan,

⁶ “The rules introduced by the strict media supervision board, the FCC or Federal Communications Commission, in the 1970’s, were ruled by the New York court of appeals to be of an indeterminable violation to the Constitution, referencing the freedom of expression. That means that this nuisance, that has been not been pursued as excessively in other countries like it has in the United States, will soon be at its end – the irritating bleeping out of “fuck,” “shit,” and the like.”

2011).⁷ Its use is forbidden in formal situations, is avoided at all costs within Germany's education systems, and is legally constrained in some cases. German swearing itself is more or less regionally determined and therefore closely tied with dialect, which signifies that the deviation of the societal standard for what is proper or rather vulgar, as exhibited by the act of swearing, is married to straying from the overall standard German (Horan, 2011). It could hence be said that the swearwords chosen by an individual correlate more so with the perspectives of their state, *Bundesland*, or regional dialect in Germany, than they do with the German nation as a whole or the upheld linguistic standard of the German language. This is exhibited by the expressions and word choices present in easily accessible and extensive *Schimpfwörter* dictionaries or lists online, that are comprised of swearwords belonging to each dialect, e.g., two examples being a compilation of *Bayerische Schimpfwörter*⁸ with definitions in *Hochdeutsch*⁹, and a twenty-eight-page dictionary containing 691 *Schwäbische Schimpfwörter*¹⁰ (Tuermer, 2014; Mangold, n.d.).

Regardless of heavy dialectical influences, German swearing is comprised of motives within the following three categories: *adressatenorientiert*, *sprecherorientiert*, and *am Dritten orientiert* (Scheffler, 2011).¹¹ The first is a situation in which the goal is to deprave, offend, or provoke one into a sense of defeat, the second is a situation in which the speaker finds himself needing to shed and express strong emotions arising from a sense of tension whether it be from an irritant or sense of contentment, and the third is a situation in which someone is degraded in the presence of others (Scheffler, 2000). With swearing in Germany being legally constrained by

⁷ For a brief corpus of German swearwords see Appendix C.

⁸ "Bavarian swearwords."

⁹ "Standard-German."

¹⁰ "Swabian swearwords."

¹¹ "...addressee-oriented, speaker-orientated, and oriented to a third person."

the *Strafgesetzbuch*,¹² the first and third categories can be regarded as an act of aggression. Depending on severity, the use of such terms may result in fines or imprisonment. Many online resources provide legal information for those caught in the act and they explain what would happen if one swore at colleagues in the workplace, for example, and what legal action could be taken (Horan, 2011).

Angela Merkel is not the only German professional whose public swearing met a conglomeration of both ridicule and a sense of awe and admiration through the media. Two relatively prestigious individuals in the public sphere, Joschka Fischer and Rudi Völlmer, both swore in instances in which they should not have used profanity as defined by German cultural parameters. The first swore in a speech and the second on television during an interview, albeit their utterances being rather well received by the general public (Horan, 2011). Due to curiosity of swearing, it does not come as a surprise that it is not difficult for German speakers to test their ability to understand English swearwords in their downtime. Online quizzes testing L2 familiarity with English swearwords are readily available for German speakers to take at their leisure, resources on learning how to swear in English can be found by the dozen, accompanied by lengthy explanations as to how to use the words, all the while highlighting the importance for an L2 speaker of English to become familiar with English swearwords. An example from one of these resources prefaces a list of English swearwords with explanations on the contexts in which they are best understood in English and reads as follows:

Nicht das wir unbedingt auf Konflikte aus sind, aber wir sind der Meinung, dass man nun einmal auch die unschönen Worte einer Sprache kennen muss, um tatsächlich sagen zu können derer mächtig zu sein. Schimpfwörter sind Teil des

¹² "...penal or criminal code..."

Wortschatzes einer Sprache und sie zu kennen, hilft uns auch dabei, die angelsächsische Kultur besser zu verstehen. Zudem ist es wichtig, die gebräuchlichsten zu dominieren, um sicher zu sein, ob uns jemand gerade ein Kompliment macht oder uns auf den Mond schießen möchte. Auch wenn man das natürlich an Gestik und Tonfall ebenfalls versteht (The ABA Journal, n.d.).¹³

It is true that one needs to be able to understand the conventions of a particular swearword's usage in a given society, because it is important to know the nature of the situation one finds themselves in - especially when swearwords are encountered in everyday speech. A German speaker of English should possess a linguistic competence as well as a sociocultural competence for English, so that they can better understand English-speaking cultures and whether someone is paying them a compliment or insulting them all-the-while through the usage of the same swearword. Knowing that words like *fuck* can both compliment and insult is advantageous for the L2 speaker, because they will have the metalinguistic knowledge to support the assumptions they make based on their observations of the interlocutor's gestures and tone. Otherwise, the L2 speaker could either misinterpret what is being said, i.e., take something as a compliment when it is indeed an insult or take something as an insult when it was meant as a compliment. Without this metalinguistic knowledge and sociocultural competence, the L2 speaker could use their misinterpretations of swearing conventions and employ swearwords under inappropriate circumstances and at inappropriate frequencies as defined by the target culture. For example, German L2 speakers of English may take the word *fuck* for a solely

¹³ "It is not that we are really looking for conflict, but rather that we believe that you should also learn the 'unattractive' words in a language in order to actually be able to say that they are powerful. Swearwords are a part of the lexicon of a language and, at the same time, to know them helps us better understand Anglo-Saxon culture. In addition, it is also important to have a command of the most used words in order to make sure we understand whether someone is paying us a compliment or wants to blast us all the way to the moon – even when you can, of course, understand this through someone's gestures or tone."

emphatic expression, venture to the United States, and when surprised by items on the U.S.-American restaurant menu, state loudly *what the fuck*. In this situation, the speaker's interlocutor would be caught by surprise and those in the restaurant would turn their heads at the phrase, because it is deemed inappropriate to use in an atmosphere like a restaurant. The phrase could be taken two ways and it depends on the context. In this situation, those hearing the phrase would think that something is wrong with the menu or that the speaker is being rude.

Ultimately, the frequency of happenstances in which public figures are swearing on media outlets or in the professional realm and the substantial amount of resources listing German swears in various dialects, as well as resources for the German learning of English swears, are a powerful force that bring light to German swearing habits and interests. These aspects allude to new developments regarding the way in which modern German society may perceive swearing in general, i.e., to what degree a swearword is considered taboo and in which sphere this sense of taboo is applicable, as well as in which language – English or German. They also indicate that Germany's younger population may be engaging with swearwords in ways in which they have not in the past, or that there is a rise in a generational divide in swearword perception among modern Germans. Perhaps swearwords not only allow for a multitude of expressions, but they entertain the mind and amuse the public through a sense of shock (Horan, 2011). In this case, media influence and foreign or second language learning could be fostering a deeper fascination with swearing and swearwords than previously recognized that does not convolute itself entirely with the heavy concept of "taboo." In fact, native-speakers of U.S.-American English will be surprised to hear English swearwords being played in songs on-air on the radio in Germany as United States citizens are accustomed to "clean" versions of the songs that omit them.

The United States, United Kingdom, and Germany take measures to protect their citizens from what is considered obscene and they take into account that the word “obscene” is an ever-changing concept. This means that L1 speakers are warned about taboo words and generally educated about them in some way, whether that be through their parents or by understanding what makes a film Rated R. L1 speakers tend to choose the content they view more carefully, as well as when and where to watch it. Yet, someone viewing material from their L2 may observe a laxer governance and labeling of what is or is not obscene as this concept also varies across cultures. A person watching German television meant for a mature audience may watch mature English programming and not have the same understanding of what is meant as mature. Though there are set hours for viewing certain content, the Internet has allowed for a spill-over and breaking of digital curfew rules. Guardians can supervise their children, taking care to decide what content their children are exposed to, yet these children will someday develop autonomy and navigate the Internet on their own. Due to the lack of instruction concerning concepts of taboo nature in various cultures in the L2, including swearwords, bilingual children who grow autonomous in choosing the content they view are going to be exposed to these concepts with only the background knowledge they have from the L1. Bilingualism, in a sense, defies the conventions of swearing and the forms of legality that come with it.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The Definitions, Experiences, and Connotations of Taboo Words in the L1

Our first encounter with swearwords when we are growing up is most likely hearing one and having to ask someone what the word means, accidentally or perhaps purposefully saying one and being reprimanded by our guardians or watching someone yell one and observing the reactions of those around us. Whatever the case, the swearwords we hear are embedded in our

surroundings and culture no matter how desperately our parents may try to keep us from being exposed to or using them. “Without knowing it, the laughter of a friend, the disappointment of a parent, [and] the fury of an enemy” taught us how to swear (Byrne, 2018). These swearwords contain semantic meaning that is derived through the society we find ourselves in, and this same society defines what constitutes something as being “taboo” or prohibited and restricted in use (Jay, 2009). Taboo and hence forbidden in nature, a swearword is typically a form of pejorative that can function as a simple utterance of negative emotion, an insult, or a slur (Whiting, 2013). According to Steven Pinker, swearwords can, however, crisscross this boundary by extending their meaning and usage into the following five functions, with swearwords being used “descriptively, idiomatically, abusively, emphatically, and cathartically” (qtd. in Harbeck, 2015)¹⁴ For example, depending on the context in which the words are used, some swearwords are more flexible in their meaning and can either express disdain or positivity, i.e., saying *you piece of shit* as an insult, and then saying, *you’re the shit*, relay two different emotions on this spectrum. The first is an abuse in Pinker’s terms, and the second is an emphatic expression. We learn swearwords in our L1 by observing who says what to whom, and by taking note of both the reactions to the word and the context in which it appears, we form our own answer to the question of why it was said (Byrne, 2018).¹⁵ Through exposure to swearwords in the L1 and with the convention-based understanding that certain words and activities are taboo, we develop negative connotations with words like *shit*, because we recognize how they make others around

¹⁴ James Harbeck writes a BBC article referencing a book by Steven Pinker called “The Stuff of Thought” in which swearing is discussed. That is where these five functions are outlined and are exemplified using the word “fuck,” which can fit into each of these five categories. However, it should be noted that not all swears can appropriately fit into all categories. For example, at this given time, the word “whore” in English is not likely to be used cathartically, but the word “shit” is.

¹⁵ Emma Byrne is the author of “Swearing is Good for You: The Amazing Science of Bad Language,” and shares information about her findings and book in this referenced article in *TIME* Magazine.

us feel. Ultimately, we learn what our society expects from us when it comes to the appropriacy and implications of using such terminology (Byrne, 2018).

Recent studies have indicated that there are positive aspects to swearing. Emma Byrne, author of *Swearing is Good for You: The Amazing Science of Bad Language*, asserts that taboo language is “fundamental to the way we communicate,” serves purpose in enlivening everyday discourse, “deadens pain,” and provides an outlet for emotional release and thereby fosters pain relief (Byrne, 2018). As we grow up, we have a “limited window in which” we are able to learn “what constitutes ‘real’ swearing” in our L1 (Byrne, 2018). In the languages learned before adolescence, swearwords “carve deep emotional paths” into the psyche that cannot be equated with those in the subsequent acquisition of an L2 – residually making the psychological and physiological impact of swearing in the L2 less emotionally jarring or cathartic in comparison to swearing learned in the L1 during this “window” (Byrne, 2018). “Swearwords learned early are” such effective “pulse quickeners, memory sharpeners, and pain killers” that those learned in the L2 or subsequent languages dull in comparison no matter how diligently an L2 acquired post-adolescence is learned (Byrne, 2018). In essence, bilinguals acquiring an L2 after the closing of this “window” will “never feel the same way about [these] strongest components” (Byrne, 2018). These “ins and outs of swearing,” knowing whether or not swearwords are permissible and when, as well as what degree of negativity or positivity they are expressing in a given context, is something we learn almost exclusively through experience.

What defines a society’s encompassing social norm transforms over time, effectively shifting the offensiveness and appropriacy of swearwords and the definition of what is and is not taboo. This shifting often creates a generational divide within the perception of swearing for a given culture. “Words that would have caused our grandparents to have conniptions now pass

without remark” and the racial slurs that “frequently appeared in [their] nursery rhymes and books” deliver a heavier “emotional payload” for subsequent, contemporary generations (Byrne, 2018). Due to the ever-changing social constructs surrounding the taboo nature of words, it is difficult to accurately establish the strength and power of profanity. It is constantly changing among members of a society as the society itself develops and changes in terms of its social constructs (Byrne, 2018).

Examples of Taboo Language and Social Constructs in Various Languages and Cultures

Ultimately, “strong language earns its place through use and custom” (Byrne, 2018). It is curious that not all taboo language constitutes swearwords and the act of using swearwords may also not always constitute feeling “strongly” about something. The usage of swearwords intends “to upset power structures” by involving things of desire that are not supposed to be desired within a given power structure at a given point in time (Harbeck, 2015). Uttering a word pertaining to female genitalia is more taboo in Italy than it would be if a male one is used, yet in China and Russia both are equally permissible, which reveals much about the patriarchal versus matriarchal power dynamic present in those areas (Harbeck, 2015). In some languages or language families, like Slavic, Balkan, Arabic, and Chinese, insulting one’s mother is more or less the mother of all insults in that it is considered the most taboo of all. In contrast, cultures like those in Bosnia, Albania, and Turkey allow one to insult masculine figures and the extended family, with Mandarin viewing an insult to “your ancestors to the 18th generation” being the worst form of cursing, which shows the importance these mentioned cultures place on ancestry and immediate elders (Harbeck, 2015). Even then, the cultures “that swear the most about their mothers tend to swear about prostitutes” – in Polish the usage of “kurwa” can be equated to the word “fuck” in English though it deals with prostitution, and in French, Spanish, and Italian

variants of the word for whore – respectively putain, puta, and puttana – are widely used and thereby not traditionally perceived to be the most “taboo” or “insulting” swears that may be present in those languages or cultures (Harbeck, 2015).

Similar to taboo language in Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish, English maintains swearwords that deal with church undertakings and Christianity, i.e., words like damn and hell, but in Quebecian French strong language constitutes things found in the church itself, i.e., equivalents for tabernacle or chalice (Harbeck, 2015). There is discrepancy among the variants of French, however, as French speakers in France veer from using religious-based swearwords and involve themselves “in the British-French-German circle of shit, merde, and Scheiße” focusing on “cleanliness-focused social controls” (Harbeck, 2015). From disease to cleanliness to animals to familial hierarchy, each language and culture around the world constantly develops and alters its notion of strong language. Though one culture may use a particular swearword that is viewed as highly offensive, a different culture speaking the same language may not actually find the profane word offensive at all, and though words like “shit” are used commonly in the “British-French-German circle” with a comparative amount of emotional valence, the frequency, time and place, as well as with whom or around whom this word may be uttered is not necessarily the same.

In English, regardless of whether it be of British or U.S.-American origin, this “strong language” can be compartmentalized into four different categories: religion, sex or body, toilet, and words describing people based on ethnicity/race/nationality, sexual orientation, intelligence, or physical disability (TEFL, 2015). These words and their categories pose a unique obstacle for learners of English in the ESL or EFL classroom for many reasons.¹⁶ The words are frequently

¹⁶ In the context of this thesis, both ESL and EFL are used interchangeably.

used in entertainment and on social media platforms. They're difficult to fully understand without a background knowledge of the target culture, and they are integrated and used in other languages at a significant rate. In addition, there is discrepancy concerning what constitutes something being taboo across various English-speaking cultures and the students' L1 cultures. Above all, it is considered extremely taboo in most cultures to utter swearwords in the classroom – leaving students with a slim chance of actually understanding what the breadth of the L2 taboo language they may encounter in everyday life entails.

Twenty-four years ago, before the Internet and mass media sharing was at its height, Robin-Eliece Mercury (1995) published an article in the *TESL Canada Journal* in which she pleaded for instructors to reconsider the way in which they viewed taboo language in the classroom. She urged them to reassess its overall importance to the language learning process and the importance of regulating the students' usage, appropriation, and perception of these swearwords, which they will inevitably encounter no matter how avoided they are in the ESL classroom. Mercury recounted that, despite her attempts to sway students' attention away from taboo language in the classroom, they were still hearing it in films outside of the classroom and began posing questions about specific words in the personal journals they kept during the course (Mercury, 1995).

In one instance, and with good intention, a student asked for Mercury to help her understand a swearword that she had heard while watching a movie. It was then that Mercury became painfully aware of the battling forces of formality and social constructs that prevented her student from entirely understanding the society she was learning about. At the time, Mercury operated under the mindset that taboo words were superfluous and unnecessary, and that meaning and understanding could be achieved without them, but after reflecting on the incident

and reassessing her perspective, she noted that “because obscenities are often proscribed, teachers shy away from them and virtually fail to consider their sociolinguistic importance” (Mercury, 1995, p. 28). She then provided her student with an answer to the question in her journal, which prompted Mercury to further ponder the necessity of sociolinguistic competence regarding taboo language. She realized that, by helping students understand such words, they gained deeper cultural insight and had better, more native-like connotations with the swearwords as they developed a base awareness of sociocultural aspects and appropriacy through formal instruction. “...EFL/ESL speakers often misunderstand and misuse obscene language simply because they are left on their own to learn about its use” (Mercury, 1995, p. 31). In her view, it is not that students must learn swearwords but rather they must “learn that swearing entails an understanding of the relevant variables involved in a speech situation” (Mercury, 1995, p. 35). They must also understand the differences between the variations of English they are learning and are exposed to, as taboo words are deeply embedded in culture. If learners do not understand the context of swearword use, they “may get a distorted idea of obscene language use due to the influence of movies, hit songs, and popular books where obscene language seems to flow unchecked” (Mercury, 1995, p. 35). Mercury’s experience and argument remain contested in the modern ESL classroom and contradict what many institutions and TESOL/TEFL resources hold to be proper classroom etiquette despite the empirical evidence showing that the psychological and physiological impact of taboo language in an L2 is far weaker than in the L1, that taboo language cannot necessarily be accurately learned in the L2 after a certain timeframe, that English remains a steadfast contributor to other languages, such as German, and that this often constitutes exposure to taboo language through a variety of resources. Despite all of these factors, most educators still choose to draw attention away from swearwords.

Pre-existing Assessments of Emotional-Force and Connotations for Swearing in Bilinguals

L1 and L2 Emotionality Spectrum. A large body of literature has examined the way in which bilinguals process taboo terminology in their L1 and L2, and whether or not the emotions they associate with such vocabulary in their L1 is similar to that of their L2. The majority of these qualitative and quantitative studies reveal that bilinguals process their L2 differently, especially in regard to words that carry heavier emotional valence. Dewaele (2004) surveyed approximately 1039 multilingual individuals through a self-report questionnaire concerned with the ties between bilingualism and emotions, which revealed that “the perceived emotional-force of S-T words is highest in the L1 and gradually lower in languages learned subsequently” (p. 204).¹⁷ The survey revealed that participants who learned one or more of these subsequent languages in a naturalistic or partly-naturalistic environment, “gave higher ratings on the emotional-force of S-T words in that language, than instructed language learners” (Dewaele, 2004).¹⁸ This means that a German speaker of English who did not learn the majority of the language in a naturalistic setting should not draw native-like connotations to English swearwords. Likewise, German L2 speakers of English who learned the majority of the language in a naturalistic setting should rate English swearwords as having more emotional-force than those who did not learn English in a naturalistic setting. These findings suggest that there is a prevalent link between emotional-force and the environment in which swearwords or taboo words are acquired in the L1, and that this link is central in understanding how emotions and their degree of strength interact within the psyche of the speaker. Dewaele (2004) also suggests that age is a related factor in the development of emotional-force connotations, as “languages

¹⁷ Dewaele uses the abbreviation of “S-T” to refer to both swear- and taboo-words.

¹⁸ Here, a naturalistic environment is defined as learning outside of the classroom in ways similar to how the L1 is acquired.

learned early in life seem to have a stronger emotional resonance than languages learned later, which seem to have a weaker emotional hold on the individual,” (p. 207).

In another 2004 study, Dewaele noted that proficient multilinguals use profanity from their L1 more often than they do from their L2, despite perceptions of the contrary. Though the speakers perceived that they were swearing more in their L2, they were, for a variety of reasons, swearing more frequently in their L1. Dewaele (2010) studied the same phenomenon years later but with a different group and declared that swearing does occur more frequently in the speaker’s dominant language, that being the L1. One group of 386 adult multilinguals and a second group of 20 multilinguals were studied (Dewaele, 2010). The first group took part in a questionnaire in which they declared their language proficiency to be maximally proficient and indicated that they constantly and interchangeably use their L1 and L2 (Dewaele, 2010). The second group had a similar sociobiographical profile and was interviewed on their language choices for expressing and communicating emotion (Dewaele, 2010). After examining the data, the results from Dewaele (2004) were congruent with the results of Dewaele (2010). Once again, despite similar levels of self-perceived proficiency in the L1 and L2, “the L1 was used significantly more for swearing and L1 swearwords were perceived to have a stronger emotional resonance” (Dewaele, 2010). The quantitative element of this study further confirmed these statistical findings and provided more details as to why multilinguals swear in their L1 more frequently, as well as the speaker’s “difficulties in deciding which languages to choose for swearing” (Dewaele, 2010).

Chapter 3: Methodology

In order to understand German speakers’ usage of English swearwords, a general evaluation of the phenomenon’s frequency, as well as the settings in which English swearwords are encountered by German L2 speakers, must be assessed and compared to the aforementioned

external factors that may provide swearword input, foremost social media, film, or music usage.¹⁹ This assessment must be done so that EFL/ESL instructors can begin to reexamine how swearwords are discussed in the classroom and how swearwords are a component of authentic language learning. Pinpointing swearword habits is vital in understanding how taboo-language is considered in the ESL classroom. Knowing when learners are likely to swear and use English swearwords can help ESL instructors better understand the instances in which their students may want to use English swearwords and thereby guide their choices. The following research questions form the framework for this study:

- (1) Which English swearwords do native-speakers of German use?
- (2) In which situations do German speakers use English swearwords and why do they use English swearwords instead of their German counterparts?
- (3) What emotional weight do they apply to swearwords in English (i.e. How taboo are they)?

To answer these questions, a survey was comprised of both qualitative and quantitative components in order to give a more holistic view of the use of English swearwords and the emotional-resonance that German speakers of English associate with them. Participants indicated which swearwords they use the most overall, under which circumstances they use them, and in which language they prefer swearing, and when. Participants also indicated their familiarity with English swearwords and were prompted to state the three German swearwords they believe they use the most. After participants completed the survey, the results, which were at all times in aggregate form with no identifying information connected to the participants, were analyzed in accordance with the outlined research questions and hypotheses.

¹⁹ See Appendix D for a brief corpus of English swearwords that have been loaned into German, i.e., are present in German dictionaries and have received gender markings.

Discussion of Research Questions

The first question aimed to gain insight into which English swearwords German speakers use the most frequently and to see if the surveyed speakers were able to self-assess their reasoning for using the words. Questions were devised to determine swearword usage and frequency as they are tied to Internet usage, social setting, and relationships with friends and coworkers.²⁰ The aim was to highlight potential deviation from native use of swearwords or the maintenance of German-usage of the words. Other relevant factors to English swearword frequency and usage in German were evaluated through the survey, including English-language level, number of years studying English, the settings in which English was learned, and the origin of the instructors the participant had. The findings based on the first research question serve as a foundation for the results of the subsequent research, given that they examine the degree to which social factors impact a speaker's' use of an English swearword.

The second research question targeted a qualitative response to a respondent's reasoning for swearing in English. Participants were asked to assess their reasons for switching between the languages in a more elaborate manner, which allowed them to contemplate the scenarios in which they felt English swearwords were more appropriate than German swearwords and vice versa. This portion of the survey mirrors studies done by Dewaele (2004; 2010), in which bilingual couples and multilinguals were asked to discuss qualitatively the languages they would use depending on the emotional valence of a situation.²¹ Given the historical loaning of English words into German based on a variety of aspects, including a speaker's desire to appear prestigious in particular situations, it was possible that participants would indicate that the same

²⁰ These social factors covered in these questions were inspired by Mercury (1998).

²¹ Participants felt more able to express their anger in their L1 than in their L2, although they were highly proficient in their L2 and used this language to speak with their marital partner regularly.

desire for prestige would be relevant in the borrowing of swearwords from English today. That is to say, if German users equated using English swearwords with having a more worldly perspective and social connection rather than a closed-mindset, they might have been more likely to use them. It also targeted the social connotations participants had with the use of English swearwords.

Question 3 targeted the impact of English instruction on German speakers' use of swearwords and how instruction type affects emotional associations with those words. The question attempted to uncover whether inappropriate use of English swearwords could be linked to lacking sociocultural competence, and the subsequent data suggested directives for classroom teaching relating to the formal introduction of swearwords in instruction.

Research Hypotheses

The present study is predicated on the following hypotheses:

- (1) The environment in which the L2 is learned and from whom or where it is learned have an impact on the way swearwords are perceived in the L2.
- (2) L2 speakers who interact with and use social media and other media frequently have a higher chance of encountering English swearwords, which affects their usage and perception of these swearwords.

Research Design

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures. A 15-question survey comprised of four main components was made using Qualtrics software and then distributed on a Facebook forum for students at the Otto-Friedrich Universität Bamberg in Bamberg, Germany. A majority of the students attending the university join and remain in this forum after they have completed their

studies. A cover letter describing the study and its purpose accompanied the survey.²² The cover letter followed current guidelines from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at West Virginia University and informed participants that some of the language in the study, namely the swearwords, could make participants feel uncomfortable. Participants were permitted to skip over questions they did not wish to answer, and they could quit the survey at any point if they chose to do so. Overall, it was expected that the survey would take an estimated five to ten minutes for each respondent. After the initial post, various students voluntarily shared the cover letter and survey link on other forums, though the name of the forums were not given by those who shared the survey. One participant who voluntarily shared the survey online contacted the researcher to notify her that the survey information had been posted to a Facebook forum constituting approximately 15,000 people from Germany and Austria. Otherwise, the survey's estimated exposure to the population is unknown. The survey was made available on December 21st, 2018 and closed to the population on January 4th, 2019 after being open for a two-week timespan.

The first component of the survey gathered applicable background information on the participants, such as their years of experience with the English language. The second component gathered information on the frequency of each participant's social media usage and overall swearword conventions. The third component of the survey intended to acquire information concerning students' own perception of their German swearword usage and discuss the scenarios in which they prefer to use German swearwords over English swearwords and vice versa. The

²² West Virginia University has a partnership exchange program for students with the Otto-Friedrich Universität Bamberg. The Otto-Friedrich Universität Bamberg has four different college faculties offering a variety of degrees in Humanities, Social Sciences, Economics, and Business Administration, Human Sciences and Education, Information Systems and Applied Computer Sciences.# The University itself enrolls approximately 13,000 students per year.

final component gathered participants' ratings of English swearwords on a five-point Likert scale so that their emotional resonances with the words could be assessed in correlation with participant responses for parts one and two.²³ All of these facets combine the previously discussed, relative factors to swearword usage - environmental, social, experiential, and personal. The full survey, which is discussed in detail in what follows, is presented in Appendix H.

Likert Scale Implementation. The usage of a Likert scale was implemented instead of a semantic differential rating scale or a slider scale. First, because the words chosen are not always used in a negative manner, the usage of a semantic differential rating scale was impractical, as such a scale aims to find the value of the space between two polarities, i.e., warm versus cold. The goal of this research was not to find the difference between two polarities, but to rather understand how negative a particular swearword is perceived in general. Thus, it is argued that a slider scale, which essentially allows participants to move the slider at a point on the scale between 1 and 5, though not always, gives the participant the ability for a more accurate rating that better mirrors their perception of the word being assessed. Had this research focused solely on swearword perception and not also gathered information concerning media influence and each individual's linguistic background, a slider scale would have been implemented to measure each word's intensity. However, given the number of other elements assessed, using a five-point Likert scale made data analysis more efficient and allowed for easier computation. Because this study, as previously stated, aimed to get an overview of the phenomenon, finding the correlation between swearing in English for German speakers and the attributed influence was ultimately of more importance than obtaining a perfect evaluation of how intense the swearwords were for the speakers. In addition, gauging the intensity of the studied swearwords was also emphasized as a

²³ Unless indicated otherwise in the tables, all questions on the survey utilized a five-point Likert scale.

key aspect of understanding the phenomenon's effect. In future studies, it is advisable that swearword perception be the main element assessed and that slider scales be implemented in order to hone in on the smaller nuisances of swearword perception.

Biographical Questions. Participants were asked five questions concerning their native language, the settings in which they learned English, the years they had been speaking English, the English teachers they had in the past, and their perceived proficiency level based on the Common European Framework (CEFR).²⁴ The first question determined whether participants were native speakers of German. The second question concerned the participant's experience with English and the environment in which English was encountered as an L2. The second question gave participants the following options: secondary school (ex. Gymnasium), technical college (ex. Fachhochschule), university, internship, travel or work in an English-speaking country, study-abroad program, self-taught (online or through books), grew up in an English-speaking country, and other. The third question asked how many years the participant had been learning and using English. The fourth question addressed the background of the instructor to see if the instructor's L1 played a role in the respondents' ability to relate sociocultural valence to swearwords. The options for participants to select were as follows: a native speaker of German, a native-speaker of American English, and a native-speaker of British-English.

Swearing Frequency and Media Usage. The next eight questions of the survey were designed to gain an overall understanding of the respondents' swearing practices in both German and English and to see how often respondents swore in both languages. Question six asked

²⁴ The Common European Framework (CEFR) uses a six-point scale to identify language proficiency in an L2. There are beginner levels (A1, A2), intermediate levels (B1, B2), and advanced levels (C1, C2). A1 levels are considered beginners, whereas C1 level speakers are considered native-like. The scale assesses listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing. Germany is a country that uses the CEFR scale to identify student proficiency levels and assess their abilities within those levels when learning a second or foreign language in schools. At universities, students may register for a course in accordance with their CEFR level.

speakers how often they use swearwords in German, allowing them to indicate their usage frequency on a Likert scale: 1 = *never*, 2 = *every few months*, 3 = *once a month*, 4 = *weekly*, 5 = *every day*. They were then prompted to list the three German swearwords they use the most in Question 7. This was done in order to gain insight into the individual's swearing practices and to see if they swore differently between German and English. By allowing the participants to indicate which German swearwords they used the most, it was thought that pertinent parallels could be drawn during analysis. If participants typically used fewer offensive German swearwords, it was assumed that they would also be likely to use fewer offensive swearwords in English. Question 8 tested participants on their familiarity with English swearwords, so that their perceived familiarity with the swearwords could be compared to the frequency in which they claimed to use social media and other forms of media.

Question 9 asked participants to specify the environments in which they encountered English language swearwords on social media or other forms of media. The platform options were: 9GAG, Instagram, Facebook, Music, Movies/Film, Twitter, YouTube, and other. Questions 10, 11, and 12 focused on the participants' usage of swearwords, i.e., whether they were more likely to use the swearwords in spoken or written language and the occurrence of the following swearword patterns (German-English, English-English, or a combination of both).²⁵ Question 13 examined the social aspects of swearing, namely with whom participants swore in English and the environments in which the speakers found themselves likely to use English swearwords. Participants were able to choose from English-speaking friends, German friends, friends from other countries, colleagues, co-workers, and other. To obtain a qualitative

²⁵ The German-English pattern indicates that an L1 speaker of German is using English swearwords when using German. The English-English pattern indicates that an L1 speaker of German is using English swearwords when using English. Lastly, the combination pattern here denotes that an L1 speaker of German uses English swearwords in both English and German.

assessment of individuals' perception of English swearword usage for comparison to the quantitative elements of the survey, respondents were asked in Question 14 why they might use an English swearword instead of a German swearword.

English Swearword Ratings. After examining a variety of swearword corpora originating from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, brief lists of swearwords from each country were compiled and included in Appendices A, B, C, and D in order to gain an overall understanding of the nature of the swearwords used by each culture. The English swearwords chosen for this study spanned four different categories of tabooeness and were taken from the United States. They were chosen based on their frequency in everyday speech and the corpus Grieve (2015) developed through an analysis of Twitter, as well as Bergen's (2016) compilation of swearwords ratings as perceived by U.S.-English speakers (Appendix B). It should be noted here, though, that there could be some fluctuation in the changing of the swearwords' meaning and frequency between the years 2016 and 2019. The words were alphabetized for the purpose of the survey as not to bias the participants' gauging of emotional intensity. The participants were asked to rate the words on a five-point Likert scale with 1 being an indicator of the word being not at all negative and 5 with the word being extremely negative. How these results were compared is outlined at the end of this chapter, at which point a baseline corpus for analyzing the words that details how and why the baseline corpus was devised is presented. This baseline corpus is comprised of how English swearwords should rank in intensity as partially perceived by the researcher, a native-speaker of English from the United States and also on the empirical intensity ratings of the swearwords derived from Bergen (2016). To determine whether or not L2 speakers of English in Germany are able to gauge the emotional intensity of English swearwords

accurately, Question 15 utilizes a comparison of these lists, and provides a space for respondents to assess English swearword intensity.

Participants. In total, 403 responses were recorded, with some participants choosing to skip over certain questions. Therefore, not every question received exactly 403 responses. During analysis, some of the participants' responses were discarded if they did not answer enough of the questions crucial to the study, e.g., their swearword perception and if they indicated that they were non-native-speakers of German. For example, based on Question 1 alone, six respondents' data were eliminated because they were non-native-speakers of German. Likewise, if they chose to not answer a particular question, they were not included in the analysis of that question, which also caused fluctuation in the number of recorded responses per question. Participants were typically from Germany or Austria, as indicated by the forums in which the survey was posted or shared. In some cases, participants were of German heritage but residing in the United States or the United Kingdom at the time they took the survey. Age and gender were not studied in this research and were therefore non-applicable and not given.²⁶ Participants' occupations were also neither listed, nor included in the data analysis, but given the nature of the forums in which the survey was posted, it can be assumed that these individuals had access to the forum based on their current or former student status. A portion of the overall participants may have not be a part of this group of respondents at all, but they still fit the age and other demographic details of the study, such as having experience with the English language or being native-speakers of German.

²⁶ A discussion of the non-linguistic variables not studied in this thesis follows in the conclusion of this thesis for areas of future study.

Chapter Four: Results

Effect of Years of Study and Language Level on the Perception of English Swearwords

The more years an individual spent studying English, as well as their proficiency level, had an inconsequential effect on how emotional they perceived the English swearwords to be. As indicated below in Table 1, there is a slow change in the association with the strength of a swearword as the number of years of study increases. However, though there is a small increase, it is not large enough to declare that the number of years studying English does not help the speaker make better, more emotional connections with English swearwords and emotional language. Of the 401 responses examined for this component of the study, 85% of the respondents fell in the range of having learned English for ten or more years and had an average emotionality rating of 3.09-3.10 on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least emotional and 5 being the most emotional.

Table 1

Years of Study and Average Emotionality of English Swearwords

Years of Study	Average Emotionality	Number of Responses	Standard Deviation	Confidence Interval
1 (0-3 yrs.)	2.94	2	0.08	0.108886888
2 (4-6 yrs.)	2.73	10	0.37	0.230012365
3 (7-9 yrs.)	3.05	50	0.56	0.156297567
4 (10-13 yrs.)	3.09	113	0.57	0.105048935
5 (14+ yrs.)	3.10	226	0.64	0.08338484

The other 15% had an average emotionality rating of 2.91. This indicates that the words themselves were perceived, on average, to be fairly neutral in intensity and that, while there is a

slight increase in emotional connotations with the words, the increase between those who have learned English for three years or less versus those who have used it for more than 14 years is not significant.

Media Usage, Swearword Familiarity, and English Swearing Frequency Correlation

As shown below in Table 2, the majority of the respondents reported being frequent swearers in German with 95% of them reporting swearing in German at least once a month, weekly, or every day. In addition, 91% percent of the recorded responses indicated that the participants swore either weekly or every day, and 59% swore in German every day. Here, it was hypothesized that the more likely the individual swore in German, the more frequent they would use English swearwords, and, the more frequent they swore in English, the more they should indicate themselves as being familiar with English swearwords.

Table 2

Frequency of Swearing in German

Response Type	% Swearing in German	Number of Responses
1 (never)	0.75	4
2 (every few months)	0.67	12
3 (once a month)	0.74	19
4 (weekly)	0.86	128
5 (every day)	0.86	236
Total:	0.85	402

As shown below in Tables 3 and 4, 82% of the respondents also indicated that they were either familiar, very familiar, or extremely familiar with English swearwords. A confidence interval for the respondents was made, indicating that it is 99% certain that the entire German-

speaking population falls between the upper-bound and lower-bound of the interval. Both the upper-bound and the lower-bound of the interval figure the population to be either familiar or very familiar with English swearwords.

Table 3

Confidence Interval for German Population: Familiarity with English Swearwords

Upper Bound	Lower Bound
3.675020645	3.464979355

Table 4

Familiarity of English Swearwords

Familiarity of English Swearwords	Number of Responses
1 (not at all familiar)	11
2 (somewhat familiar)	58
3 (familiar)	105
4 (very familiar)	137
5 (extremely familiar)	84
Total:	395

The Influence of Media Sources

The more familiar the respondents were with English swearwords, the more likely they were to use them when speaking than when writing. Likewise, the majority of English-language swearwords seemed to be encountered through various media forms. The more media sources the participants interacted with, the more they reported frequently swearing in English. This is most likely due to the amount of swearword exposure various forms of media provide viewers or

general users. As a result, the increase in exposure to English swearwords prompts Germans to use them more. The exposure to English swearwords does allow the user to create a sense of meaning for the swearword, but the exposure to the swearword's entire meaning may be incomplete depending on the type of media source and how that media source portrays swearing. For example, an individual listening to rap music in English may only be exposed to one meaning of the word *nigger*, the re-appropriation thereof by African-Americans, rather than the racial slur. In rap music, African-Americans use the word *nigger* to upset power structures in place in United States' society, and they use it as a form of bonding with one another (Mohr, 2013). An epithet, in this case, is permitted to be said by a member of that group and not by someone outside of that group (Mohr, 2013). Therefore, while interaction with media sources is significant, the representation of all the meanings and contexts of English swearwords that Germans receive remains unclear. These findings are depicted in Figure 1 and Table 5.

Figure 1

Probability of English Swearing by Number of Media Sources

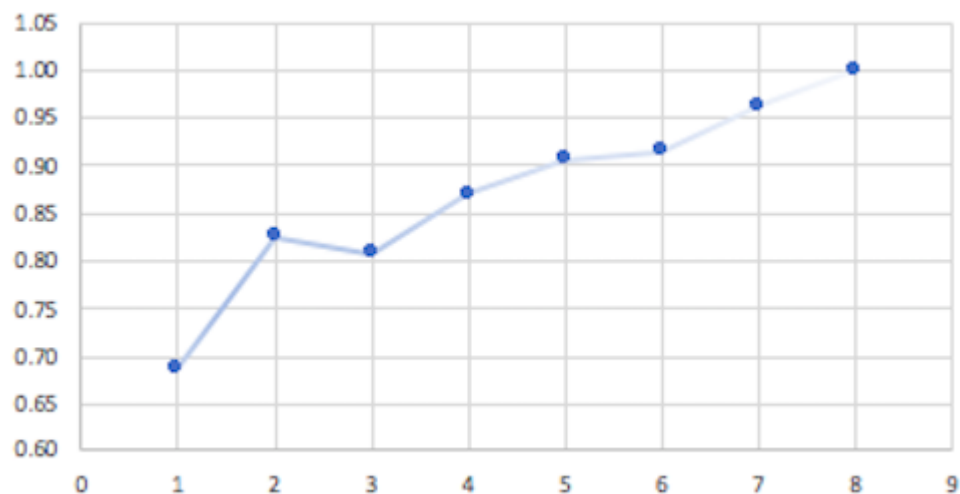


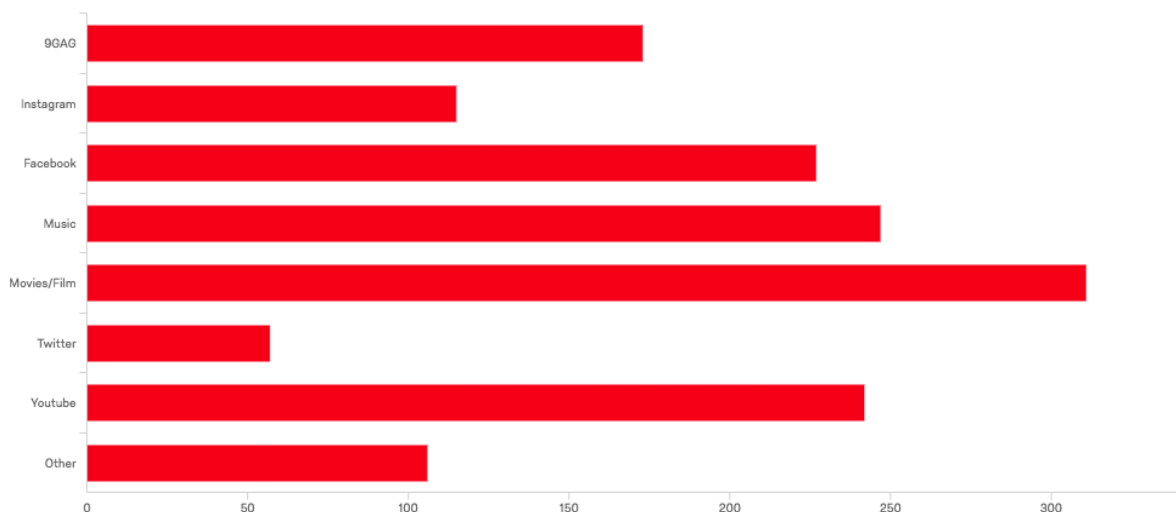
Table 5

Number of Media Sources and Swearing in English Correlation

Number of Media Sources	Average of English Swearing	Number of Responses
1	0.69	61
2	0.83	46
3	0.81	68
4	0.87	77
5	0.91	64
6	0.91	47
7	0.96	27
8	1.00	7
Total:	0.85	402

As seen in Figure 2 below, the majority of respondents indicated that they encountered the most English swearwords through movies and music, with YouTube and Facebook being the next most influential in this regard. As previously mentioned, both movies and music are capable of providing a large array of swearword input that has a tendency to misrepresent the ways which the U.S.-English speakers view swearing on a day to day basis. Because both categories were used by the vast majority of participants, it is likely that they were hearing the majority of swearwords in movies and music. 9GAG, an online platform known for the exchange of gifs and memes, followed. Instagram and Twitter were not as influential in regard to swearword exposure. The media sources listed by participants in the category of “other” were as follows: Reddit, through streaming, online gaming, books, pornography, eSports, magazines, WhatsApp, FaceTime, Skype, Twitch, 4chan, and memes.

Figure 2

Influence of Media Sources and Swearing in English**Social Atmospheres in which Swearwords are Encountered and Used**

When respondents were asked to indicate with whom they use English swearwords, the majority indicated that they use English swearwords more often with German friends than they do with English-speaking friends, though English-speaking friends were a close second. This shows that respondents were more likely to use English swearwords with Germans, and slightly less likely to use them with English speakers or NNs of English. Respondents did not seem to use swearwords as frequently in places of business or work. In the “other” section, many listed the following as places or social situations in which they encountered English swearwords: at the pub or when drinking, living in the United Kingdom, working in the United States, with friends and family, and in connection with the United States military stationed in Germany. This shows that both the United States and the United Kingdom are cultures with which German speakers interact outside of media. They are also likely to encounter U.S.-English speakers and British-English speakers in informal, social settings like bars. The influence of the United States military

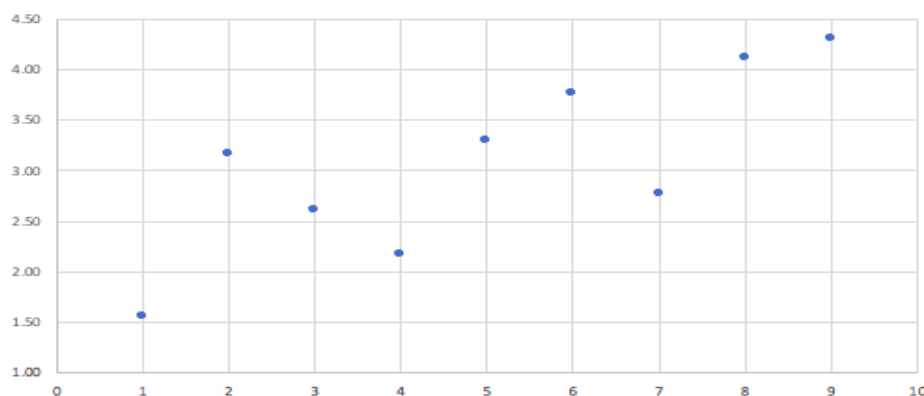
in this realm is also significant, as it shows that even 74 years after the end of WWII, the United States' presence in Germany remains a significant, linguistic influence.

Perceived Emotional Strength of English Swearwords for German Speakers

While the majority of German-speakers have an awareness of swearwords in English and use these swearwords frequently, they are not always able to gauge them in their intensity. The studied swearwords were given ratings in English ranging from 1 to 9, with 1 being the least negative and 9 being the most negative. The words were given the following rank in English: *damn* - 1, *bitch* - 2, *dick* - 3, *fuck* - 4, *bastard* - 5, *faggot/fag* - 6, *pussy* - 7, *whore* - 8, and *nigger* - 9. As depicted in Figure 3 and Table 6, this study shows that, while most of the swearwords matched up similarity with the English ranking, three swearwords remained outliers. The word *bitch* was rated as being almost twice as intense as it would be perceived by a U.S.-English speaker, the word *fuck* was less intense for the German speaker than for the U.S.-English speaker, and the word *pussy* was also less intense. Each of these words fell within a 1.5-2 point range from where they would be ranked by the U.S.-English ratings of emotional intensity.

Figure 3

German Swearword Rating by English Rank



damn - 1, *bitch* - 2, *dick* - 3, *fuck* - 4, *bastard* - 5, *faggot* - 6, *pussy* - 7, *whore* - 8, *nigger* - 9

Table 6

English Swearword Intensity for German Speakers

Swearword	German Rating	English Rank
Damn	1.56	1
Fuck	2.18	4
Dick	2.62	3
Pussy	2.77	7
Bitch	3.17	2
Bastard	3.29	5
Faggot (Fag)	3.76	6
Whore	4.11	8
Nigger	4.30	9

Interesting to note was the fact that the word *bitch* was rated as being more intense. This was likely based on the cultural parameters of Germany and Austria and their perception of women, meaning that, it is considered to be taboo to insult women, especially through the usage of swearwords. One participant noted in the qualitative portion of this study that the word *bitch* applied to both feminine and masculine friends in terms of endearment, specifying that the term did not solely apply to women, and it is not always negative. In the United States, *bitch* is also used to convey both friendliness and negativity. It could then be hypothesized that the word *bitch* is still used more often as an insult in the United States than it is in an act of friendliness. In conjunction with this statement, women in the United States most likely use *bitch* to refer to friends in a positive way and in contrast, males are hypothesized to use *bitch* to insult women. However, this projected dichotomy has not been studied in this thesis, is not widely studied at

this time, and is simply a speculation. Furthermore, the word *Zicke*, which is considered to be the German equivalent for *bitch*, was not among the frequently used German swearwords the participants reported using.

Similarly, the word *pussy*, also referring to aspects of the female, is hypothesized to be less intense for the German speaker, because they may not have an understanding of and have had adequate exposure to the swearword's entire meaning. In the United States, the word is used to refer both to someone who is weak or acting in cowardice and to female genitalia. It is proposed in this thesis that both meanings of the word *pussy* are more likely to be used by males than females in the United States. Just as the word *shitstorm* condensed in its German meaning, the word *pussy* may also have a more confined meaning in German than it does in English, in which *pussy* is used as an insult indicating cowardice rather than a reference to female genitalia. This speculation is supported by the response of a participant recorded in Appendix J, who claimed that they enjoyed using the word *pussy* when someone was "acting like one," meaning that the individual they were directing the word *pussy* towards was being cowardly.

Based on the versatility of these two English swearwords, it is apparent they are more difficult for German speakers to understand in an emotional and semantic sense, even if some uses of the words are understood and interpreted correctly. This suggests that the more versatile the words are, the more their meaning becomes largely context-driven, which makes it more difficult for L2 learners to gauge their overall intensity, usage, appropriacy, and frequency because cultural and sociocultural knowledge serves as a premise for accurate interpretation. For this reason, the word *fuck* was rated by German speakers as less intense than it actually is for the average U.S.-English speaker.

While *fuck* can feature a wide spectrum of both positive and negative uses, Appendix J shows that respondents described the word as being far more flexible than the German equivalent *fick* and capable of fitting any context. *Fick* was perceived as being more limited in its meaning, referring solely to sexual encounters. Though *fuck* is indeed versatile in meaning for both U.S.-English speakers and German speakers, it is not as versatile in its emotional intensity for both groups. It is rated as being more negative for U.S.-English speakers overall than for German speakers. This change in rating shows that *fuck* is in some way constrained in the context of its usage in comparison to other words like *shit* or *damn* that fall lower on the U.S.-English intensity scale. This constraint is present in the lower rating of *fuck*'s intensity for German speakers with them rating *fuck* as being closer to *shit* and *damn*. The less taboo the swearword, the more likely it is to be used in everyday speech, and the more frequently it will be used. For the word *fuck* to be rated higher than *damn* and *shit* on the U.S. scale, it means that the word *fuck* is not used as often as *shit* or *damn* and is consequently more taboo. In contrast, for the word to be less emotional in German, it is likely used more frequently, a statement which the responses recorded in Appendix J support. Many participants said that there is simply no other word like *fuck* in German and they use it all the time. One participant stated that they use *fuck* just as if it were the German *Scheiße*, which equivalates to *shit*. It is logical then, given this variable discrepancy in the meaning of the word *fuck* and its permitted usage as defined by both cultures, that German speakers would have a different emotional connotation with *fuck* than would U.S.-English speakers.

In summary, *shit*, *bitch*, and *fuck* are among the most frequently used swearwords in the United States and often appear in movies more than they do in real life, which adds another layer of difficulty for German speakers in understanding not only their versatile meanings, but also

their usage and frequencies. If U.S.-American media depict the frequent use of the word *fuck* despite the actual frequency in the everyday United States, L2 speakers will have a difficult time grasping the essence of the swearword's culturally condoned usage. The way in which media forms express swearing and the frequency by which the swearwords are encountered on online platforms are misleading for the L2 speaker while also being very influential.

Respondent Reasoning for Utilization of English Swearwords in German

English swearwords are gaining prevalence in the German language because of media influence and metalinguistic gaps in the language as perceived by native-speakers of German. Both of these aspects, as well as German speakers' perception that English swearwords are not as intense as German swearwords, are all reasons for which German speakers feel the need to borrow English swearwords. Many of the respondents to the survey noted that films, videos, video games, television shows, and rap music were all English-language media forms that they felt influenced them and their usage of English swearwords. When viewing videos with friends, talking about movies, or referring back to English language memes they found on the Internet, German speakers felt it more appropriate to use English than German, and thereby claimed to enfold more English swearwords into their respective discussions of these media.²⁷ Both American comedy and RuPaul's Drag Race were referenced in statements discussing the influence of pop-culture and how English swearwords, whether it be while viewing or while discussing pop-culture, are integral.²⁸ In sum, in all of these cases, German speakers find themselves using English swearwords in their discussions.

²⁷ A meme is a humorous image containing a form of inside joke that Internet users create. They tend to spread rapidly throughout the Internet and the nature of the intended joke can change depending on the context for which it was written and the background knowledge of the person looking at the meme.

²⁸ RuPaul's Drag Race is an American television series in which drag queens compete for the title of America's Next Drag Superstar, as well as other prizes.

Often, they felt that the English swearword didn't have as great an impact as the German swearword and that the English swearword felt less intense. They preferred to use English swearwords for their perceived humorous, ironic, or lighthearted effect, which further emphasizes that L2s are not as emotionally resonant as L1s when it comes to powerful language like swearwords. Some participants indicated that English swearwords were more fun to use and provided variety. Respondents stated that words like *fuck* had no equivalent in German, were easier and quicker to use, and could be used in many situations. One respondent claimed the use of the word *fuck* to be a substitute for *Scheiße*, one of the least offensive swearwords in both languages, which is interesting because the word *fuck* is not equated with the same level of emotion as *shit* on the U.S. scale. Many of them indicated that English words like *bitch* helped them relieve stress and negative energy when speaking, even if they were using the term in a positive way to refer to a friend. In contrast, only a handful noted that swearing in English was a bad habit for them, that it provided emotional distance in some capacity. A sample of the participants' explanations for their utilization of English swearwords in place of German swearwords is in Appendix J.

Extracted German Swearword Corpus and Frequency Among Participants

The corpus in Appendix I was created using the answers respondents entered for the seventh question of the survey in which they specified the three German swearwords they use the most. The swearwords in the "very frequent" category were all scatological in nature, dealt with body parts, intelligence, or bastardism and appeared more than 10 times in the responses. No English swearwords appeared frequently enough to be included in this category, but English swearwords did appear throughout the corpus, showing that German speakers view *shit*, *bitch*, *fuck*, *bastard*, *nigga*, *digga*, *gay*, *faggot*, and *damn* as being part of the German language. Note,

though, that the word *bastard* is considered to be both English and German so the speakers may be registering the word *bastard* as first German in origin and then English. They may also view *bastard* as being solely German. *Shit, bastard, bitch, and fuck* appeared in the “frequent” category along with German swearwords that dealt with scatological and religious terms or intelligence. The swearwords listed as “less frequent” appeared only one to two times in the responses. These swearwords had a tendency to be from dialect, were creative variations of other more frequent swearwords, were racial slurs, dealt with one’s sexuality in regard to homosexuality or Down syndrome. Within this category, *gay, faggot, damn, nigga, and digga* also appeared. These five English swearwords appeared less frequently because like the United States, modern German society does not exhibit mainstream acceptance of racial slurs or epithets that attempt to summarize someone in some way (Mohr, 2013). This less frequent usage means that, while Germans may have exposure to these swearwords through media and use them on occasion, Germans are registering *gay, faggot, damn, nigga, and digga* as taboo in their culture to some degree, even if it does correlate with the degree of the tabooeness of the terms in the originating culture.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Limitations of the Study

Pinpointing swearword habits is vital in understanding and discussing how taboo language is treated in the ESL classroom. Knowing when and why L2 learners are likely to swear and use English swearwords can help ESL instructors better understand the instances in which their students may be using English swearwords. By initially looking at environmental factors on swearing, it is much easier to apply the findings to a qualitative description of why non-native speakers would prefer to swear in English rather than in German, and thereafter, what

issues may arise from this usage, including the degree to which a German speaker perceive an English swearword's intensity, and the implications of this perception for communicative competence. By combining these aspects, the beginning of an overall assessment of how closely the German usage of English swearwords mirrors that of native U.S.-American or British speakers can be comprised, and any weaknesses or inappropriacy in connotations can be targeted. Contributing factors to faulty perceptions in swearword frequency, usage, or intensity can be investigated further by then examining a person's given social aspects to swearing. The speakers' occupation, gender, ethnicity, and age could also affect the swearwords they use and the contexts in which they use them. The nuances present in these relevant non-linguistic variables are exemplified by the notion of a generational gap within a culture's swearword perception. For the purpose of this study, these aspects were not examined in depth, based on the aim to obtain an overall assessment of the current phenomenon and understand how media usage can affect swearword usage and its perception by a native German speaker who has learned English as an L2. In future studies, researchers should make use of the results yielded in this study and integrate the evaluation of related non-linguistic variables in order to get more specific insight on the phenomenon's occurrence as related to socially defined aspects.

Discretion and Social Status. One's social status plays a role in swearing frequency and word-choice, with lower-class speakers being more frequent swearers than upper-class speakers. Jay (1992) hypothesized that if speakers perceive that their interlocutors possesses a higher social status, they are more likely to reduce the usage of obscene language. Jay (1992) also claims that savvy swearers, or those who know the conventions of swearing in their L1, are generally aware of these verbally restrictive situations. The frequency of swearing by lower social classes is likely due to the power dynamic presented to them by their placement in society.

This thesis did not take as its focus the effect of social status on swearing, and ultimately it is difficult to know how much of a role social status plays in the usage and integration of English swearwords in the German language. It also poses the question as to whether a person's placement in German society has anything at all to do with the usage of English swearwords.

The Gender Effect. The term "gender effect" expresses that the ways in which speakers approach swearing depend on their gender, and how this effect could have a greater influence in the L2 than in the L1 based on aspects such as L1 language transfer and culture differences. The gender effect could manifest itself as an individual's avoidance of swearing in the L2 because of the cultural parameters of swearing in the L1 for their gender, or, in contrast, swearing more in the L2 because the L1 permits swearing for the individual based on gender. So far, the gender effect qualifies that L2 female participants are less likely to employ or entirely understand swearwords whereas their male counterparts are more likely to do so. Register (1996) noted the onset of a gender effect through her analysis of self-reported feedback by university-level ESL students living and studying in the United States. In the analysis, "male learners comprehended more taboo terms than female learners and reported that they would use them more frequently," (Dewaele, 2004, p. 208). This discrepancy in swearword comprehension was rooted in conventions of the ESL students' L1 some cultures have different allowances for swearing among genders.

Toya and Kodis (1996) studied the causal link between the use of swearwords and their pragmatic indication of rudeness in L2, which links various registers of linguistic input and L2 user confidence. The authors "found that English NSs were more expressive in their verbal and nonverbal display of anger than Japanese students with advanced English proficiency," (Dewaele, 2004, p. 208). Japanese constituents tended to avoid using L2 swearwords, a

phenomenon attributed here to a “considerable gap between the L2 users’ knowledge of the definition of swearwords and understanding of their emotional load,” (Dewaele, 2004, p. 208). In this case, lower degrees of emotional force related to the taboo words derived from restricted input in which the studied ESL learners were not likely to come into contact with the swearwords. Due to seldom contact, these learners did not develop an emotional relationship with the words that would provide a gateway to related, appropriate connotations with the swearwords’ emotionality. Within the same study, female NNSs were more concerned with the properness of their choice to swear, given that “Japanese rudeness heavily corresponds to male/female language” (Toya & Kodis, 1996, p. 292). Yet “some informants who had stayed in English-speaking countries reported a preference for swearing in English rather than in Japanese,” (Dewaele, 2004, p. 209). Because it was considered improper for them to swear in their L1, the female Japanese students participating in the study were overall less likely to swear in English. These findings indicate that the ways in which the L1 culture view swearing and the usage of profane language infiltrate into the act of swearing in the L2.

Overall, these findings suggest that if a L2 speaker of English swears without consequence in the first language based on gender and social status then the speaker will seek out ways in which the L2 can compensate for not being able to swear in the L1 and maintain L1 swearing patterns. When compensating, the speakers will attempt to use L2 swearwords in the L2, but they may not have the same effect for their interlocutors. Furthermore, German speakers of English may be carrying over the conventions of their society regarding which gender is permitted to use swearwords when certain swearwords are permitted as well as their type and under what circumstances they are to be used. Both genders could be permitted to swear equally in the same environments, with the same words, at the same frequency; however, the researcher

of this thesis has observed that Germans seem to swear in front of their parents and around their families more than U.S.-English speakers do. It has also been observed by the researcher that some Germans living in or visiting the United States have a difficult time understanding the settings in which particular swearwords are used, causing them to often misuse English swearwords in context, location, or frequency. The gender of the speakers and the social setting in which the speakers find themselves set parameters for swearing and are also important factors in understanding the phenomenon of Germans swearing in English. Both these aspects seem to be foundations for swearing in English and could yield relevant ties between an individual's biographical circumstances and their swearing conventions in the L2.

Baseline Corpus for Analysis. At the time of writing, no corpus that specifically measured the intensity of U.S.-English swearwords in 2019 existed and only generalizations about the swearwords' emotional resonance could be made for usage within the U.S. population. The making of generalizations for the swearwords' emotional intensity could be contested for several reasons, i.e., swearwords have different emotional connotations for each generation and each individual; and without a contemporary compilation of empirical evidence for swearword ratings, there could be bias in the researcher's perception of a swearword if there are few existing empirical corpora involving emotionality ratings. For the purpose of this study, the researcher categorized the studied swearwords into groups based on the assumption of how negative the words would be in the United States at the time of the study and used findings from Bergen (2016) to place the words on a scale. These categorizations were based upon the researcher's own perception of the swearwords' strength and were combined with the information from the gathered corpus and findings of Bergen (2016) in Appendix B. It was then hypothesized that the swearwords should rank in the following order, listed from least to most negative: *damn*, *bitch*,

dick, fuck, bastard, faggot, pussy, whore, and nigger. Words that were racial slurs would be the most taboo, with words dealing with sexuality falling in the space thereafter. This ranking was based on the notion that *nigger* and *cunt* are the most taboo words in contemporary U.S. culture, though *cunt* was not studied in this research because it is likely not to be a word that a German would encounter in the media due to its relative infrequency. The word *fuck* falls somewhere in the middle of the scale, because it can be used at both extremes - either as an extremely negative insult or as a positive compliment. *Dick* and *bitch* would follow because they can be used more flexibly within the five different ways in which a swearword is utilized. Finally, *damn* and *shit* are two of the most common swearwords used in a variety of situations. These two swearwords can be used in all five ways as outlined previously and are hypothesized to be more frequent in everyday speech in comparison to the other swearwords studied. Unfortunately, despite careful editing, the word *shit* was meant to be studied, but omitted and should be studied in the future.

Likewise, updated swearword corpora containing empirical data for emotional-ratings across a group of speakers would yield more accurate results. In addition, some of the participants may have not taken components of the survey seriously, and as a result, some of the answers may have been meant to be humorous based on the nature of the survey. Therefore, some of the answers that were provided may not have been an actual reflection of the swearwords used, especially when respondents were asked which three German swearwords they used most frequently. These words are included in the “less frequent” category of Appendix I. They most often appear as a play on other swearwords originating from standard German or dialect.

Implications for Instruction

Understanding the emotional force or lack thereof that NNs of English associate with English swearwords has important implications for cultural learning and classroom instruction. We are afforded explanations and experiences in our L1 that allow us to make associations with taboo language, and this should be afforded to L2 learners as well. By attempting to reproduce the scenario of learning swearwords in the L1 with learners of an L2, the setting in which swearwords are learned becomes more naturalistic, allowing students to have a better understanding of swearwords and the contexts in which they are used. Germany focuses largely on the education of their youth in British English rather than U.S.-American English – the first serving as a lingua franca and the second something youth are generally left to explore outside of the classroom. British English and U.S.-American English are often conglomerated together into one common English language, yet there is much variance in what is or is not taboo. When German speakers attempt to understand correct usage of the English language, what is or is not taboo becomes even more obscured as each culture has its own definition of what makes something taboo. “Although research on language learning identifies learners’ (in)appropriate use of swearwords as being part of the acquisition of communicative competence, language learning materials rarely thematise swearing as a characteristic of everyday language” (Horan, 2011, p.16). In addition to the avoidance of swearwords in L2 instruction, this thesis has shown that swearword input is also not often integrated into the classroom environment for instructional purposes.

The ESL classroom in which Germans are learning English does not paint a full picture of the cultural conventions of language and media for the United States, despite substantial student involvement with these media and their pop-culture influence. It is therefore imperative

for ESL instructors to reconsider the way in which they handle the topic of taboo language in the swearwords both socioculturally and psychologically. ESL instructors should contemplate how their students may be interacting with English at home through social media, videos, video games, films, music, and other forms of media and consider ways in which their students could lack sociocultural or global competence when interacting on these platforms. Instructors must also consider how unmediated and uncontextualized access to these media may affect their students' interpretations of English swearwords and interactions with English-speaking interlocutors given that entertainment media can be misleading when it comes to conveying how a culture views taboo language. No matter how diligently ESL instructors attempt to avoid taboo language, students will encounter swearwords outside of the classroom and need to be given the proper metalinguistic tools to understand not only what is being said, but who it is being said by and for what reason. By having metalinguistic and sociocultural knowledge concerning swearwords, German L2 speakers of English can also make more informed choices with regard to the media with which they interact. German speakers would also be able to make better decisions when it comes to English swearword choices in their L1 and in interactions with native-speakers of their English, so that they know the implications of the words they borrow from pop-culture.

The concepts of global competence, intercultural communicative competence, and sociocultural competence are fundamental in obtaining an in-depth understanding of the L2, both linguistically and socially. In 2014, the American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages (ACTFL) released a position statement asserting that L2 learners must achieve both global competence and intercultural communicative competence in order to be effective communicators in the L2, and understand how both the L1 and L2 cultures interact (ACTFL, 2014; Dai & Chen,

2015, p. 100). Global competence is defined as the “ability to communicate with respect and cultural understanding in more than language,” and this concept evolves into intercultural communicative competence, which takes both language and culture into account (ACTFL, 2014). Developing intercultural communicative competence requires an exchange via and consequential development of affective abilities, cognitive abilities, moral abilities, and behavioral abilities for understanding the linguistic and cultural components of the L2 and interlanguage interactions (Dai & Chen, 2015, p. 108). When learners attain intercultural communicative competence, they exhibit the eight qualities of being multilingual, knowledgeable, open-minded, curious, respectful, collaborative, reflective, and observant (ACTFL, 2014). Not all of these aspects are innate for each individual, yet they can all be learned and fostered through classroom instruction and applied to both the language and culture being studied. Assisting students in their development of these aspects constitutes combining language knowledge and comprehension together with the products and practices of other cultures, all-the-while drawing comparisons with their own culture, and raising sociolinguistic awareness (ACTFL, 2014). Listening, observing, interpreting, analyzing, evaluating, and revising are all key skills in enriching an individual’s acquisition of intercultural communicative competence, which generates empathetic and respectful attitudes, as well as a sense of adaptability and flexibility for the learner throughout the investigation process (ACTFL, 2014). As “global competence is fundamental to the experience of learning languages whether in classrooms, through virtual connections, or via everyday experiences,” ACTFL’s position statement prescribes real-life scenarios, the usage of authentic resources, student reflection, and student autonomy in asking questions as useful tactics in developing global and intercultural communicative competence, with interpretive, presentational, and interpersonal modes of

communication being used as a form of assessment (ACTFL, 2014). The main initiatives of ACTFL's statement indicate that students should be able to do the following:

- (1) Recognize the multiplicity of factors that influence who people are and how they communicate,
- (2) Investigate and explain cultural differences as well as similarities, looking beneath the surface of stereotypes,
- (3) Examine events through the lens of media from different countries and cultures,
- (4) Collaborate to share ideas, discuss topics of common interest, and solve mutual problems,
- (5) Reflect on one's personal experiences across cultures to evaluate personal feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and reactions (ACTFL, 2014).

Having experiences with English swearwords is opportune for intercultural learning and encouraging learners to make sense of the sociocultural, pragmatic, and semantic associations of the swearwords in English. Unfortunately, the treatment of these words is often forbidden in the classroom. L2 speakers make more native-like connotations with English swearwords if they have spent time abroad in an English-speaking country, indicating that truly naturalistic settings foster a better understanding of the taboo language for a given culture. However, the classroom can provide approaches for mimicking real-life contexts in which swearwords are used. The objective is not to teach students the swearwords explicitly for individual use, but to integrate more of the media forms students interact with outside of the classroom that may contain swearwords into classroom instruction, so that they may fully understand the swearwords' implications. However, in some cases, depending on how students interact with an English swearword, how closely the emotions and meaning of the swearword match in both languages and cultures, and how inappropriate student usage or perception of the swearword is, students

will need to be instructed on the swearwords' entire meaning in a more explicit manner.

Accordingly, instruction should also not deter students from borrowing English words as this is seen as a purposeful linguistic tactic for a speaker, but individuals need to grasp the implications of borrowing emotion-laden words like swearwords.

The proposed integration of English-language media and pop-culture into the classroom serves as a foundation for critical analysis done by the students, so that they will more actively consider how their online and offline media interactions affect them. Students should be provided with media that showcase the true meaning of the English swearwords they use frequently, especially those swearwords that are seen as not having a strong emotional connotation. Along with pop-culture media analysis, relevant news articles or primary and secondary historical texts that shed light onto the swearword's historical perception and modern usage in the United States afford English learners a more holistic understanding of the swearwords. This pairing more accurately mirrors how the conventions of L1 swearwords are learned and understood, which, if afforded a similar experience, L2 learners will also make connections with the swearword that are comparable to the swearword's originating culture on a cognitive and behavioral level. In order to achieve a holistic overview of a swearword for the learners, both pop-culture and relevant texts need to be paired together for in-class analysis done by the students. Together with the integration of primary and secondary sources, the analysis of media should take social status and aspects, such as the political climate of the interaction from the originating culture, into account. Social status, age, gender, and political climate all affect the emotional force of a swearword for an individual, constrain or permit the swearword's usage, and forces such as political climate can alter the emotional intensity and constraints of a swearword rather rapidly.

For example, one of the participants in this study stated that he used the word *nigga* to refer to a friend, attributing the word to U.S. rap culture. The usage and conventions of the word *nigga* must be discussed in an L2 educational setting to guide learners in the context of the usage. In the United States, *nigga* is one of the most taboo words and is understood as a racial slur. It is considered inappropriate for those who are not considered African Americans to use it for a variety of reasons that lie in historical contexts. Here, it would benefit the students to learn about those contexts by delving more deeply into the civil rights movement in the United States, the social situation in urban environments, and the gap between rich and poor in the U.S. Such taboo terms like *negro* and *nigger* can then be treated in a contextualized setting. The integration of primary and secondary text sources or accounts would allow students to obtain a more direct experience with the meaning and emotional power and agency of the words. By giving students more extensive background knowledge on the word's usage, it better prepares them to understand the word within a contemporary context and to examine how its meaning, usage, and appropriation have transformed. As students gain more knowledge, they can examine modern-day usage of taboo terms and discuss who is using it and why, and how the meanings differ among African Americans and Caucasian Americans, as well as in modern society and past society.

As a tool during analysis, graphic organizers should be implemented in the classroom for the sociocultural parameters of a swearword, so that the students can better organize historical and modern contexts, decipher and note the meaning, non-related linguistic variables for the word's usage, and other aspects of the swearword that the instructor feels students should be more aware of during interpretation and interpretive assessments. Ultimately, this is an effort to raise the L2 learner's consciousness of the word while interacting with modern-day media. After

the graphic organizer is completed in class, students should then engage in an interpersonal activity by work in pairs to discuss how they perceived the word to change over time, or, depending on which swearword is analyzed, who uses the word when and what it means. Students should then engage in classroom discussion about the swearword's conventions for the L1 and L2. Thereafter, students should craft a presentational piece that explains the studied swearword's conventions, first comparing historical and modern meanings and settings of the word, second noting how it is used in modern media, and third, providing a personal opinion on whether or not they think it is okay for Germans to use this swearword, and if so, what are the conventions they would define for the swearword.

Similarly, Venn diagrams could be utilized at the beginning of the lesson to either predict cultural parameters for a swearword, or at the end of the lesson during analysis or in summarization of the topic. When using a Venn diagram, students would compare and contrast the following suggested aspects for the United States and Germany: where is the word seen, where is the word said, who uses the word, what does the word mean, how do people react when encountering the word, and how often does the word appear in everyday life. Afterwards, students should be asked if the word is appropriate to use and then prompted to argue their opinion as to whether or not the word's usage is fitting. Students should then interpret media forms that allude to the swearword's original usage and follow similar steps as those defined above. Instructors may also consider providing students with various scenarios in which Ns and NNs of English use the studied swearwords or taboo language and encourage the students to analyze and compare their usage between the two groups, evaluating whether or not they believe the NNs' usage of the examined term is appropriate.

Suggestions for Future Study

For future studies it is recommended that aspects such as age, gender, generation, swearing conventions in the L1, and settings in which one swears in both the L1 and L2 are assessed further as they are also key aspects in understanding the phenomenon of swearing in English. Having an up-to-date corpus of U.S. swearwords with their current emotionality ratings across generations would generate more accurate results in assessing the fluctuations between U.S. and German perceptions of swearwords. It would be beneficial to create a similar corpus of British English swearwords for comparison, because the true origin of the English language swearwords German speakers are using has not been pinpointed and could be attributed to either culture or other factors, such as the usage of English swearwords by speakers of other languages in other countries who also use English as a lingua franca. Fluctuations in immediate connotations with the swearword's versatile meanings seems to also be apparent. For this reason, it would be insightful to investigate which semantic associations individuals in the United States make with the word first, and how this compares to the immediate associations in meaning a German speaker connotes.

It also remains unclear as to whether the force driving the German borrowing of English swearwords is truly linguistic or social in nature, or rather a mixture of the two and to what degree this would be at work in the phenomenon. Perhaps the words, including swearwords, that German borrows from English are easier to assimilate into German etymologically if they have a German root, which makes them easier to use and pick up on to reference pop-culture and other mediums. It could also be that these words do fill metalinguistic gaps for German speakers in some cases. Perhaps Germans simply pick up on the most frequent English swearwords and use them after being exposed to them, because they become available to them through repeated

input. Whatever the case, future studies should examine the interaction between linguistic and social interactions that contribute to swearwords being loaned from English into German, rather than solely the sociolinguistic aspects of the speakers' usage in isolation.

Further research should also investigate whether German speakers are able to differentiate between swearwords from the United Kingdom and swearwords from the United States and understand the implications of this perception. It is then crucial to empirically understand which version of English currently has the most impact on the German language and specifically swearword loaning. Subsequent research should also be done more thoroughly on the specific psycholinguistic effect of social and entertainment media, as well as how meme culture comes into play in both sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. While there is a causal link between media interaction and frequent swearing in English for Germans, which platform has the most impact on the speakers and to what degree this impact is prevalent has yet to be determined. Those interested in further researching the implications for the ESL classroom should experiment with different critical-thinking techniques and the effect of instructional, in-class analyses of media on media interactions outside of the classroom and English swearword emotionality ratings, as well as appropriation.

Conclusion

Ultimately, English swearword use should become an object of analysis in the classroom if the emotional connotations with the swearword are weakened for the L2 speaker and the word's usage becomes derogatory. By raising student awareness of the swearword's L1 implications and by providing the students with relevant cultural information regarding swearword usage, instructors further afford their students the ability to apply critical-thinking to L2 language usage and foster the students' understanding of emotional force and connotation

with the English swearwords they encounter, which could also be applied in the future to other informal aspects of language such as slang.

Having a basic sociocultural understanding of the swearwords and language encountered through various media forms is practical in avoiding misinterpretations and misunderstandings. While it is no teacher's wish for students to swear in the L2, it is important that the students' questions are answered and the words they ask about, even if taboo, are given equal attention when relevant as those that are not taboo. Even if avoided, students will still encounter swearwords and will be left to make up their own minds concerning usage. Their decision could result in the overuse of taboo words by L2 speakers, especially in conversations with native-speakers, causing an emotionally charged breaking down of communication with the interlocutor in which the L2 speaker is at a loss in understanding how such a situation came about.

Pragmatics, sociocultural competence, global competence, and intercultural communicative competence are closely related and are nourished in the L2 through discussion that encourages students to contemplate greater meaning and conceptual ties to society. Whether it be simple nuances in phrasing or word choice, more exposure to authentic materials from the target-culture with more integrated critical analysis of both historical and modern United States society and culture paired with modern sources would bolster critical-thinking skills as applied to the English language and assist L2 learners in their outside-of-the-classroom encounters with English language media, especially particular media coming from the United States.

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Appendix

Appendix A

British English Swearword Corpus

British English swearwords fall into five categories as devised by the British Board of Film Classification. These with their corresponding swearwords are as follows: very mild – *bird, bloody, crap, damn, god, hell, hussy, idiot, pig, pillock, sod, son-of-a-bitch, tart*, mild – *arse, balls, bitch, bugger, Christ, cow, dickhead, git, Jesus, Jew, moron, pissed off, screw, shit, slag, slut, sod, tit, tits, tosser*, moderate – *arsehole, bastard, bollocks, gay, nigger, piss, paki, poofter, prick, shag, spastic, twat, wanker, whore*, strong – *fuck*, very strong – *cunt, motherfucker* (Williamsson, 2009). The Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) outlines the following words as being allowed in advertising; *bloody, shag, slag, piss, pee*, and *balls*, as well as subtle word play in the form of innuendos. *Fuck* and *cunt* are not permitted in marketing communications (Linshi, 2014).

Appendix B

U.S.-American English Swearword Corpus

Jack Grieve, a professor of forensic linguistics at Aston University in England, has studied the geography of U.S.-American swearing by analyzing Twitter as a corpus for taboo-words. Taken from his personal research blog, many have been enthused by the results he has found and graphed, with hundreds of articles meant for every day readers taking the results and discussing them. For instance, the word *fuckboy* was one of the fastest rising words in general on U.S.-American Twitter in 2014 (Gilbert-Lurie, 2018). The words analyzed from Twitter and assessed in his mapping study include the following: *fuck, shit, bitch, asshole, cunt, faggot, motherfucker, gosh, damn, and darn* (Grieve, 2015). Grieve has begun developing a corpus for Twitter, which largely includes colloquialisms that find their way from written to spoken speech, and then finally into memes where they continue to be shared. Through this procedure, Twitter can be considered one of the many catalysts for taboo word usage and development. Another online resource recounts a poll done in 2006 by the Associated Press concerning profanity usage and its correlated place of usage, and folds in findings and discussion from Benjamin K. Bergen's 2016 book *What the F: What Swearing Reveals About Our Language, Our Brains, and Ourselves* (Varriano, 2017). The words assessed by U.S.-English speakers and discussed in relation to their frequency and emotional-force are as follows with the most offensive to least offensive written respectively: *nigger, cunt, fag, cocksucker, chink, motherfucker, buttfuck, bitch, retard, dyke, whore, pussy, slut, homo, fuck, shithead, lesbo, asshole, prick, queer, skank, spic, kike, cock, gook, twat, bastard, loser, goddamn, dick, hooker, nutsack, rimjob, moron, sodomize, dumb, gay, blowjob, clit, tits, shit*. In contrast, Bergen assessed British-English speakers on the majority of the same words and got a different result, with words changing places on the scale

and having either more or less emotional-force behind them. The words ranging in their perceived severity for British English are as follows, with the most severe words topping the list and those considered largely to not be swearing at the end: *cunt, motherfucker, fuck, wanker, nigger, bastard, prick, whore, paki, bollocks, arshole, spastic, shag, twat, piss off, slag, shit, dickhead, pissed off, Jew, arse, balls, bugger, Jesus Christ, sodding, crap, god, and bloody* (Varriano, 2017). Due to the fact that many German students learning British-English in their school systems but may consume larger amounts of American produced media, there may be a disconnect with cultural sensitivity in relation to the above words in L2 speakers of English that are caught between the two English-speaking cultures. It could be that the taboo-words shared between both Great Britain and America are more used by German speakers than those that are not shared, like *bloody*, for example. This means that words like *fuck* or *nigger* may be more likely introduced into ESL speakers' discourse than those words like *shag* or *rimjob*, that occur less frequently between the two.

Appendix C

Brief German Swearword Corpus

German has a tendency to rely heavily on scatological terminology for swearwords, meaning that many of the words used mostly deal with excrement in terms of obscenity, such as in *Mist*, *Kacke*, *Scheiße* and the like (“Scatological,” n.d.; Nübling & Vogel, 2004). These words are not only said just as expletives themselves but are recycled and reused in a variety of contexts. The root words can be morphologically altered to form verbs and become part of idiomatic phrases that remain vulgar in nature, i.e., *scheiß drauf*, *beschissen sein*, *Schiss haben*, or they can be combined with other words to create adjectives, i.e., *scheißsteuer*, *scheißegal*, *scheißkalt* (Nübling & Vogel, 2014). Each dialect of German seems to maintain its own set of vulgarities, rooted in the power structures of their particular region rather than in the whole of Germany. In cases in which swearing in dialect is preferred over swearing in *Hochdeutsch* it could be that swearing in dialect is more taboo and seen to stray from the standard or norm of *Hochdeutsch*. Therefore, they are more likely to be emotionally-loaded for those speakers in comparisons to less taboo versions. Horan (2011) cites multiple accounts of Bavarian swearwords from Aman (1972) that pertain to religion; these being *Herrgott*, *Sakrament*, and *Kruzifix*, which Aman claims can often be combined within one long, explicative utterance such as *Herrgottsakramentkruzifix*. This showcases the pedestal upon which religion was historically placed in the state of Bavaria. Though it is difficult to determine the most frequent swearwords among German dialects within various speech communities, the most common swearwords as a whole for the German language in the standard *Hochdeutsch* are considered to be as follows: *Scheiße* (and various phrases and words containing the word), *Mist*, *Kacke*, *Schwein*, *Drecksau*, *Arschloch* or various idiomatic phrases containing the word *Arsch*, *verdammt*, *verflucht*, *um*

Gottes willen, um Himmels willen, verflixt, Weichei, Wichser, Hure, Schlampe, Schlappschwanz, and so on (Nübling & Vogel, 2014). This corpus, however, is incomplete and it is hard to decipher standards from regionalisms within German swearing. Many other words do exist, but how frequent they actually are among German speakers is not certain.

Appendix D

Brief English-German Swearword Corpus

The German language has grown to incorporate a number of anglicisms in the form of swearwords. More often not, these swearwords have a more nuanced meaning than the ones from which they are etymologically derived. This oftentimes causes grammatical structures to shift and not be maintained between those in the corresponding languages – here, a transition from English to German or from German to English. In some cases, there may not even be an English equivalent for a particular vulgar phrase though the swearword used is derived from English. An example of this is cited by Horan (2011), in which the German expression of *so ein fuck*, literally meaning *such a fuck*, is analyzed. The phrase itself cannot be translated well into English, as there is no English equivalent for this particular phrase that has the same meaning of *fuck*. Here, there is discrepancy between the ways in which German and English use the word *fuck* nominally. The following swearwords and vulgarities have been fully integrated into the German language as per the loanword assimilation process in which they have received gender markings: *der/das Shit*, *der Bullshit*, *der Bastard*, *der Nigger*, and the “Anglicism of the year in 2012,” *der Shitstorm* – all of which are found in *Duden* (Irvine, 2013). According to the dictionary, the majority of these words are not considered to be extremely frequent in their use and though the word *fuck* appears in various forms such as in *abgefickt*, the word itself has not yet made it into the dictionary. The German language does have its own translated equivalent for *fuck*, in the word *fick*, although its meaning is not as versatile as that of its English counterpart and pertains mostly to the actual act of having intercourse. Aside from this, many English and German swearwords share commonalities in that they are both derived from the same Germanic or

Latinate source. This is apparent in words like *damn* and *verdammt*, and phrases like *piss off* and *verpiss dich*.

Appendix E



Dear Participant,

This letter is a request for you to take part in a research project on assessing the difference between taboo-words in first and second languages, as well as their emotional-force. The project looks specifically at German and English. This project is being conducted by Sarah Dawn Cooper, B.A. in the World Languages, Literatures and Linguistics Department at WVU with the supervision of Dr. Cynthia Chalupa, an associate professor in the Department of World Languages, Literatures and Linguistics for German, for a Master's degree in TESOL.

Your participation in this project is greatly appreciated and it will take approximately 5-10 minutes to fill out the questionnaire.

Your involvement in this project will be kept as confidential as legally possible. All data will be reported in the aggregate. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate. I will not ask any information that should lead back to your identity as a participant. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer and you may discontinue at any time. West Virginia University's Institutional Review Board's acknowledgement of this project is on file.

I hope that you will participate in this research project, as it could be beneficial in understanding the impact of emotional-force of taboo words in German-English bilinguals. Should you have any questions about this letter or the research project, please feel free to contact Sarah Dawn Cooper at (304) 591-5535 or by e-mail at swcooper@mail.wvu.edu.

Thank you for your time and help with this project.

Sincerely,

Sarah Dawn Cooper

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Appendix F



Sehr geehrte Teilnehmer,

Vielen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme bei dieser Forschungsstudie, die den Unterschied zwischen Schimpfwörtern in Erst- und Zweitsprachen als auch ihre emotionale Stärke bemisst. Das Projekt befasst sich explizit mit den Sprachen Deutsch und Englisch. Durchgeführt wird die Untersuchung von Sarah Dawn Cooper, derzeit Master Studentin im Fach „World Languages, Literatures and Linguistics“ an der West Virginia University unter Betreuung von Dr. Cynthia Chalupa, Dozentin des oben genannten Lehrstuhls für deutsche Sprache und dient als Voraussetzung für einen Master in TESOL (Teaching English as a Second Language).

Um teilnehmen zu können, müssen Sie Deutsch als Muttersprache gelernt haben, sowie die englische Sprache beherrschen. Der Fragebogen ist auf Englisch. Ich möchte ausdrücklich darauf hinweisen, dass die Beantwortung einzelner Teile des Fragebogens den Umgang mit Schimpfwörtern erfordert, welche von einigen Teilnehmern als durchaus beleidigend aufgefasst werden könnten.

Die Bearbeitungszeit des Fragebogens beträgt ungefähr 5-10 Minuten.

Die von Ihnen bereitgestellten Informationen werden selbstverständlich vertraulich behandelt. Die Daten werden im Aggregatzustand, also nicht personalisiert gespeichert. Um teilnehmen zu können, müssen Sie mindestens 18 Jahre alt sein. Ich werde nicht nach Informationen fragen, die zu der Identifizierung Ihrer Person führen könnten. Ihre Teilnahme ist völlig freiwillig. Sie dürfen Fragen überspringen, die Sie nicht beantworten möchten und Sie dürfen zu jeder Zeit die Beantwortung des Fragebogens abbrechen. Die vorliegende Studie wird vom Institutional Review Board anerkannt. Diese Dokumentation ist in den Akten der Universität hinterlegt.

Durch Ihre Teilnahme tragen Sie zur Verständigung von deutsch- und englischsprachigen Bilingualisten bei, da Erkenntnisse über den emotionalen Einfluss von Schimpfwörtern erhoben werden. Darüber hinaus werden Ihre Antworten dazu beitragen, die Fälle, in denen Deutsche sich für ein englisches Schimpfwort anstelle eines deutschen entscheiden, zu begreifen, was wiederum einen Einblick in die dazugehörigen emotionalen Hintergründe der Entscheidung gewährt.

Sollten Sie Fragen haben, die sich auf diesen Brief oder das Untersuchungsprojekt als solches beziehen, wenden Sie sich bitte an Frau Cooper, zu erreichen per E-Mail: swcooper@mix.wvu.edu

Vielen Dank für Ihre Zeit und Hilfe bei diesem Projekt.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,

Sarah Dawn Cooper

West Virginia University
Department of World Languages, Literatures and Linguistics
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Appendix G

Survey Post Accompanying the Cover Letter

Hallo, zusammen! Als Teil meiner Masterarbeit untersuche ich die Verwendung von englischen Schimpfwörtern von Deutschen und habe dazu einen Fragebogen erstellt. Ich würde mich sehr freuen, wenn ihr teilnehmt und den an eure Freunde weiterschickt! Wichtig für mich ist bei den Schimpfwörtern die emotionale Stärke der genutzten Wörter. Um teilnehmen zu können, solltet ihr Deutsch als Muttersprache sprechen und die englische Sprache beherrschen.

Die Bearbeitungszeit beträgt ungefähr 5-10 Minuten und den Fragebogen, der auf Englisch ist, könnt ihr hier aufrufen:

https://wvu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_e9RXSprplzoS7TD

Weitere Informationen zu der Studie findet ihr im Anhang.

Appendix H

Survey

1. Do you consider German to be your first language? Yes / No

2. In what kind of setting(s) did you learn English?

- a. Secondary school (ex. Gymnasium)
- b. Technical college (ex. Fachhochschule)
- c. University
- d. Internship
- e. Travel or work in an English-speaking country
- f. Study-abroad program
- g. Self-taught (online or through books)
- h. Grew up in an English-speaking country
- i. Other: _____

3. How many years have you been speaking English? (1 = 0-3 years, 2 = 4-6 years, 3 = 7-9 years, 4 = 10-13 years, 5 = 14+ years)

1 2 3 4 5

4. What description best fits the English teachers you have had in the past?

- a. a native-speaker of German
- b. a native-speaker of American English
- c. a native-speaker of British English
- d. other: _____

5. What is your current English language level in accordance with the Common European Framework (CEFR)?

CEFR: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions>

A1 A2 B1 B2 C1 C2

6. How often do you swear in German?

(1 = never, 2 = every few months, 3 = once a month, 4 = weekly, 5 = every day)

1 2 3 4 5

7. Which three German swearwords do you use the most frequently?

8. How familiar are you with English swearwords? (1 = not at all familiar, 2 = somewhat familiar, 3 = familiar, 4 = very familiar, 5 = extremely familiar)

1 2 3 4 5

9. In what context do you encounter English language swearwords?

- a. 9GAG
- b. Instagram
- c. Facebook
- d. Music
- e. Movies
- f. Twitter
- g. YouTube
- h. Other: _____

10. Do you use English swearwords while using:

- a. English
- b. German
- c. Both

11. How often do you use English swearwords when speaking?

(1 = never, 2 = every few months, 3 = once a month, 4 = weekly, 5 = every day)

1 2 3 4 5

12. How often do you use English swearwords when writing?

(1 = never, 2 = every few months, 3 = once a month, 4 = weekly, 5 = every day)

1 2 3 4 5

13. With whom do you use English swearwords?

- a. English-speaking friends
- b. German friends
- c. Friends from other countries
- d. Colleagues
- e. Coworkers
- f. other: _____

14. When would you use an English swearword instead of a German swearword? Why?

15. On a scale of 1 to 5, how negative is the following word? (1 = not at all negative, 2 = somewhat negative, 3 = negative, 4 = very negative, 5 = extremely negative)

Bastard 1 2 3 4 5

16. On a scale of 1 to 5, how negative is the following word? (1 = not at all negative, 2 = somewhat negative, 3 = negative, 4 = very negative, 5 = extremely negative)

Bitch 1 2 3 4 5

17. On a scale of 1 to 5, how negative is the following word? (1 = not at all negative, 2 = somewhat negative, 3 = negative, 4 = very negative, 5 = extremely negative)

Damn 1 2 3 4 5

18. On a scale of 1 to 5, how negative is the following word? (1 = not at all negative, 2 = somewhat negative, 3 = negative, 4 = very negative, 5 = extremely negative)

Dick 1 2 3 4 5

19. On a scale of 1 to 5, how negative is the following word? (1 = not at all negative, 2 = somewhat negative, 3 = negative, 4 = very negative, 5 = extremely negative)

Faggot 1 2 3 4 5

20. On a scale of 1 to 5, how negative is the following word? (1 = not at all negative, 2 = somewhat negative, 3 = negative, 4 = very negative, 5 = extremely negative)

Fuck 1 2 3 4 5

21. On a scale of 1 to 5, how negative is the following word? (1 = not at all negative, 2 = somewhat negative, 3 = negative, 4 = very negative, 5 = extremely negative)

Nigger 1 2 3 4 5

22. On a scale of 1 to 5, how negative is the following word? (1 = not at all negative, 2 = somewhat negative, 3 = negative, 4 = very negative, 5 = extremely negative)

Pussy 1 2 3 4 5

23. On a scale of 1 to 5, how negative is the following word? (1 = not at all negative, 2 = somewhat negative, 3 = negative, 4 = very negative, 5 = extremely negative)

Shit 1 2 3 4 5

24. On a scale of 1 to 5, how negative is the following word? (1 = not at all negative, 2 = somewhat negative, 3 = negative, 4 = very negative, 5 = extremely negative)

Whore 1 2 3 4 5

Appendix I

Question 7 Responses as Organized by Swearword Frequency

Q7: Which three German swearwords do you use the most frequently?

Very Frequent	<i>Scheiße, verdammt, Mist, Kacke/kack, so 'ne Kacke, fick dich, Idiot, Spast, Arschloch, Hurensohn, behindert, Arsch, Dreck, Wichser/Wixxer, ficken/verfickt</i>
Moderately Frequent	<i>Trottel, Fotze, leck mich (am Arsch), Hure, zefix/Kruzeifix/kreuzkruzifix, beschissen, gottverdamnt, Depp, Shit, Penner, pisse/Pisser, Phritte, Bitch, (dumme) Sau, verflucht, Bastard, verpiss dich, beschissen, bescheuert, fuck</i>
Less Frequent	<i>Mongo, phrittig, Oida, Kanacke, Placke, Nutte, Hurahagl, Au Hurr, Sachrent, verreck, was zum Fick, Oarsch/Orsch, Rindsbimbel, Muhagel, Buxe, Hängt, Haunkind, Spacki, Spaten, Scheibenkleister, Trottel deppata, Spacken, verfickter Scheiß, Dumibrätze, Otto, Wurzelsepp, Schlingel, Himmesaprament, Bierjunge, Schwuchtel, Hodenkobold, Blödmannsgehilfe, Vollhonk, Vollidiot, Affe, Laidrich, kreizbirnbaamundhollerstaudn, Nigga, Verdorie, Klumpert, bekloppt, Hundsfott, Borkenkäferausdünstungsarschloch, Opfer, Pisser, heilige Scheiße Schweineficker, Schweinefotze, Hund, Ficker, vermaledeit, Schrott, Titten, Hitler, Scheißjuden, Heast, Koffer, Huso, digga, Alter, Schwul, Honk, Drecks-Ding, fürn Arsch, Pisskacke, um Gottes Willen, Pimmelgesicht, mein Gott, Schlampe, Haunrotz, Fotzenscheiße, Fetzenschädel, Blödmann, Herrgott, Heilige Dreifaltigkeit, Schwanz, verdamnte Axt, Blödsinn, Jude, Scheißdreck, Heilundzack/Heilundsack, Drecksack, Kotze, Blutsakrament, wanker, Abraummensch, Fickpisse, Kackfass, Hurenkind, Lelleck, Schmierlappen, Mistgestalt, gay, faggot, damn, doof, Drecksau</i>

Appendix J

Sample of Responses for Qualitative Description of Swearword Usage

Q14: When would you use an English swearword instead of a German swearword? Why?

<i>Fuck</i> (statt vermutlich Verdammt oder Ähnliches) hat sich einfach in den alltäglichen Gebrauch eingebürgert. <i>Dick</i> hat kein umfassendes Äquivalent. <i>God damnit</i> geht lockerer von der Hand.
Es spricht sich besser, ist kürzer. z.B. <i>Shit, fuck</i> , etc. Gewohnheit...
For example, the word <i>fuck</i> . Usually when something bad happens, e.g., I remember that I forgot my keys immediately after shutting the door. Why? There is not a single German word that has so many facets like <i>fuck</i> . At the same time the word conveys frustration, anger, self-doubt etc.
It sounds less vulgar than a german swearword. It's part of pop-culture.
You feel more distanced from the swearword itself.
Most of the time. I only use one very "soft" German swearword as in <i>Das war ein ziemlicher scheiß</i> but I use everything from <i>fuck</i> to <i>cunt</i> in English and I use <i>fuck</i> and <i>what the fuck</i> in German as well. German swearing sounds too harsh.
z.B. in Bezug auf bestimmte memes, damit Freunden die Verbindung klar wird.
Wenn es meiner Meinung besser in die aktuelle Lage passt.
Basically, the two words I'm using are <i>fuck</i> and <i>damn</i> . <i>Fuck</i> is very present in German and most younger people (including me) use it daily, because it fits nicely in most sentences and is short. <i>Damn</i> is only used by me as a reaction to dank memes.
Probably 80% of the times I'm swearing, I'm swearing in English. It somehow feels more natural to me and I also like the sound of the English language more than the sound of German. Also, I feel like I can express my emotions, positive or negative, better in English.
Pretty much at random - maybe more English swearwords when I've watched an American film or read a text written in English.
It doesn't happen for specific reasons - but <i>fuck</i> is very common, and it doesn't sound as harsh as anything similar in German.
Ich verwende englische Schimpfwörter, wenn es zur jeweiligen Situation passt und diese treffend beschreibt. Englische Begriffen passen meist besser als deutsche Begriffe.
Intuitively. Probably most often when my brain is currently "tuned" to English, e.g., having just watched a video in English.

I use the word <i>fuck</i> in situations where <i>Scheiße</i> would be appropriate to use in German.
I just swear in English sometimes. It's the influence of movies, I guess.
I mostly say <i>fuck/fucking</i> because it rolls from the tongue easily. Also, I like to say <i>pussy</i> if someone behaves like one.
If I have just heard/read something in English. Sometimes I do it because it seems less direct than in your own language. You keep a certain distance. Some swearwords don't exist in German like <i>f*ck</i> .
I use an English swearword instead of a German one when I feel like there is not German word to express what I'm thinking, or it just sounds better in the sentence than a German equivalent.
We don't have <i>fuck</i> in German and there is no real substitute, so I use that multiple times a day whenever some stupid shit goes down. It's fast and easy and can be used in negative and positive outbursts of emotions. I also love the word <i>shit</i> because it's shorter than <i>Scheisse</i> and I like the sound of the word. I think I've been using English cuss words ever since I was in boarding school in Yorkshire. I don't really remember what I used before. <i>Bitch</i> is another term I love using because it can be positive and negative. I call all people <i>bitch</i> not just women. Whenever I use it, it helps me relieve stress and negative energy.
They seem to fit better in some situations, e.g., talking about American Comedy.
Because there is a bigger variety. English swearing is more expressive and satisfying. Hence overall more fun.
Schimpfwörter gehören in meinem Freundeskreis einfach dazu. Und da wir alle Geisteswissenschaftler*innen (v.a. Anglisten) und durch die Popkultur (v.a. RuPaul's Drag Race) beeinflusst sind, ist es häufig auf Englisch.
Actually I don't. German has enough swearwords itself.
I use them in every-day talk with my friends because somehow they sound less harsh to me... Even though they certainly aren't.
When speaking in English I often use the word <i>shit</i> when explaining something, e.g. "I need to go [buy] some milk, eggs and shit," and when I speak German I use the word <i>fuck</i> because the german <i>Ficken</i> is simply too long for a quick shout out.
When it sounds more funny or not that raunchy.
<i>Fucking</i>instead of <i>verdammte</i> Because it is some kind of habit, which [I'm trying] to get away [from doing].
I use <i>fuck</i> as an exclamation of pain or surprise instead of German swears. I use <i>fucking hell</i> when complaining. Sometimes <i>bitch</i> is used when cursing about women, but very seldom.

Nigger is used with peers that I respect in a way you would use *dude* or *look at that guy*, copying American rap-culture.

Fuck als Ausdruck, wenn etwas nicht geklappt hat (z.B. beim Sport). Dies tue ich schon reflexartig seit ich circa 14 Jahre alt bin. Ansonsten Trendwörter oder Wörter, die ich zur Zeit amüsant finde als Ausdrücke zum Spaß, wenn man Freunden abends etwas unternimmt oder Videospiele spielt. Online entwickeln sich immer Wörter und Abkürzungen durch bekannte Persönlichkeiten, Memes oder anderem. Beispiel: *Thot* oder *Kys* (relativ moderne Schimpfwörter).

Fuck. Das Wort hat sich in den letzten Jahrzehnten durch die englische Popkultur in den deutschen Sprachgebrauch integriert. Es ist ein alltägliches Wort.

When I'm surprised by something weird or unexpected by something, I usually express my confusion with the good old English *the fuck*? I tend to use German swearwords when I want to express any kind of hatred towards a thing. I guess, it's because English swearwords tend to be shorter and more peaceful - and so more socially acceptable. The German swearwords however feel more hateful and are longer, which makes them more useful, when swearing for more than twenty seconds about a broken thing or an idiot.

Fuck/fuckin' in certain German variations such as *abgefuckt*. Sometimes it just sounds better/more familiar. *Fuck* is somehow a German swearword as well. We all use it.

Conversation with fellow students, friends from university. English is more common in our community when it comes to terms of swearing.

Mittlerweile ist das Wort *Fuck* etablierter und geht rascher über die Lippen, als die deutsche Übersetzung.

Never thought about this. Depends on the situation and level of pain.

Bitch instead of Schlampe. Fuck for bad news.

Bullshit - Wenn jemand scheiße labert, alternative zu *Du redest scheiße*. *Fuck* - Ausruf wenn etwas doofes passiert, alternative zu *ficken*. *Shit* - ähnlich wie *fuck*. *Shithead* - Beleidigung.

Watching a lot of English videos on YouTube and Twitch, these words become second nature. When I swear I use the words, which come to mind first, so often times it's an English one.

Because it's funnier and I like speaking English words.

I use the English words about 90% of the time, because *damn* is a lot shorter than *verdammt*, and there is no German word that is that [universally] usable like *fuck*.