Society’s Perception On The Use Of Profanity Among Authority Figures

Profanity is simply defined as a blasphemous or obscene language (Oxford Dictionary). These words are considered offensive because they seemingly show no respect to religion and are utterly considered vulgar and disrespectful (Cambridge Dictionary). Profanity includes cursing and desiring evil on someone. DeWitt (2018) elaborated that those who curse become wicked and unethical people with no moral and spiritual values. In recent studies in the Terror Management Theory, it suggests that the use of profane language reflects man’s animal nature, a reminder of mortality. Furthermore, animal nature overwhelms a man, rendering him stupid, unloving, and lacks the reason of being. From a Catholic perspective, this is deemed to be an insult to the upbringing of the Church considering that their focus is to express that man is a creature higher than an animal. Therefore, no imperfections should be observed and the use of profane language is intolerable (Beck, 2009).

People who include profane words as part of their normal conversational structure are recognized as having a poor overall impression, intelligence, competency, and trustworthiness according to the study of DeFrank and Kahlbaugh (2019). Those who curse in mixed-gender dyads are referred to as less sociable. Furthermore, men who use profane words are viewed as more offensive.

Then again, analyzing the use of profanity in a community is still relevant. According to Bergen (2018) in his book, What the F: What Swearing Reveals About Our Language, Our Brains and Ourselves, profane words are used to express the strongest emotional, physiological, psychological, and social state of a person. It is primarily the expression of extreme emotions such as anger, fear, passion, and even provoked intense disagreement. He emphasized the strength of profanity by explaining its extensive differences among other languages. It is learned, encoded, and articulated in a different way. It is constantly changing. This reveals that profanity greatly influences the way we think, the way we shape our language, and even the way the world goes.

Adams (2016) also argues in his book, In Praise of Profanity, that profanity is a vital instrument in communication and can be considered a component of design. A psychological analysis of profanity as an emotional release, a medium of group camaraderie, and intimate relationships was presented in his book, with support of various literature that features evident use of profane words. The exclusion of cursing in studies involving language, being labeled as taboo, hinders the exploration of emotional and offensive characteristics of speech. Although profanity is obviously on a darker side of the matter, it is still an important discourse as it greatly influences how society works. In addition to this, the occurrence of profanity in the political discourse is relevant in determining how it influences the community.

Since language is an essential aspect of political engagement, its strategic use highly compensates with the acquisition of power. According to Coates and Wade (2007), the use of proper language among politicians reflects their mastery in the field, their intentions, and even manners. Politicians are engaged in public speaking and are expected to be formal and polite at all times. In a democratic context, they are chosen as representatives of the nation, therefore

the things they say and the way they say it reflects the people they represent. Key institutions such as law enforcement, military, criminal justice, and electoral also have the ability to establish common ideologies, objectives, and policies within a community. They have the ability to manage the information they desire to share with the community and publicize their perspectives as an essential part of the nation.

Politicians who curse are viewed with their flaws and imperfections, making them “normal” candidates. This is an unconscious enticement that pulls the focus of the masses towards the candidate, creating a more positive impression upon him/her. Cavazza and Guidetti (2014) explain that politicians who use profanity show a more informal language approach as they communicate with the masses. Thus, creating a friendly environment reinforces social connection and is strategically to make people feel like the candidates are closer to them. They also create a more lasting impression - either good or bad - on the community. Also, people use profanity to establish dominance, aggressiveness and urges. Jay (2009) claims that profanity is positively associated with extraversion (how sociable a person is) and hostility. Also, swearing as a taboo also contributes to the expressiveness of a person in a discourse considering the variety of emotions that can be readily communicated through profanity to achieve personal or societal goals. Although the public still views profanity as unconventional, citizens are still unconsciously being lured by the politicians who use vulgarity as a tool to impose strong messages to the community (Cavazza & Guidetti, 2014). The presence of swear words changes the way the listeners perceive the message. It creates a more enticing discourse because of the persuasiveness implied by the language intensity. Swearing becomes an avenue of escalating the acknowledgment of message effectiveness. It heightens the attention given by the listeners to the speakers.

In relation to this, the police force being the primary leaders of the order, peace, and decency maintenance in a local unit are essential to the social construct to promote harmonious citizen relations. The public has put their trust in them for the acquisition of their services to the community. Also, profanity in the police is viewed as a “tactical language” used to bring out responses from uncooperative suspects (Mather, 2015). Hence, it becomes helpful in investigations and establishing the dominance of police as law enforcers in a community.

In the Philippines, the use of profanity by the current president, Rodrigo Duterte, during the campaign period in 2016, enticed the citizens to vote for him because he appeared to be a straightforward person who speaks to the public with pure honesty. Furthermore, Filipinos are said to be tired of Traditional Politicians, also known as TRAPO (Remorosa, 2018). Hence, they sought an unconventional candidate at that time. Moreover, in the study conducted by Remorosa (2018), the political speeches of the president were examined according to their linguistic features and implications, as well as their use of profane words. The president’s use of pronouns, passive and active voice, and verb tenses are found effective in showing inclusiveness in the community. He appealed by presenting his ambitions for the country together with his political beliefs. He also uses colloquial language with a simple composition of sentences. His use of profanity to impose strong emotions also seemed to appeal to the Filipinos. Dacay (2018) also concluded in her study that President Duterte uses effective language in his speeches, which shows his values for equality, liberalism, love for the country, social responsibility, and service to the people. The use of profanity also intensified his speech delivery and connected him to more people.

However, profanity is negatively linked to consciousness, religious outlook, and sexual

apprehensions. The enticement procured by the use of profanity among authority figures is questioned by the Gadsden Times (2012) which claimed that the formality of the political discourse should be embodied by every candidate. Therefore, the level of formality in the political discourse should not be lowered for the sake of publicity. Self-control is an admirable quality for leaders and that is embodied by those who avoid cursing in public. Although it has luring effects, profanity in the words of political leaders and key institutions can lead to social unrest. It somehow leads to misrepresentation.

Patton, et al. (2017) have asserted that profanity use has been an issue among professionals as well. Studies have proven that professionals who incorporate obscure language in their sentences are negatively evaluated in their performances. In addition to this, Johnson and Lewis (2010) explained the uncommon use of profanity, considering its label as taboo, creates a negative emotional impact because it violates what society has perceived as acceptable and appropriate communication. Swearing informal occasions is a shock to the listeners and this is eventually evaluated as incompetency. In the police force, issues of extensive use of power have been a global concern that negatively affects police-civilian relations (Ariel, et al., 2014). Patton, et al. (2017) revealed that profanity among law enforcers greatly affects what should be a harmonious police-civilian relationship. During arrests, the use of profane words somehow reflects excessive use of power. Therefore, citizens view them to be more abusive wherein their initial response is to fight back with words or physical contact.

In most countries, the president is the highest authority figure. He/she is expected to lead a country to accomplish common goals and provide solutions to existing problems. As a public figure, it is part of their goal to communicate effectively their political, economic, and social stance through language. However, it is also determined that there is a positive and negative representation for the community. Although some liberal countries view President Duterte's profanity and upfront speaking as brilliant, it is undeniable that it still leaves a negative impression. As the highest official, his actions reflect the people who elected him.

Considering the wide array of influences of authority figures in a country, the way they act highly signifies the interaction of the members of the community. Profanity being enticing also means that people become easily influenced by such language usage. Not only is the use of profane words by immediate leaders and public figures being analyzed in a good or bad way, but their actions are also somehow tolerated and adapted by the community they serve as well. Being the immediate leaders, they become the basis of actions in the community. Since time immemorial, children have been taught to stay away from using profane words. According to Lynch (2014), children are psychologically vulnerable to their environment; therefore, the toxicity of a society can be easily transferred to a child's behavior and this includes the use of profanity by authority figures. Profanity has always been a threat to a child's civic, moral, and religious being. Moreover, children have easy access to technology even with those inappropriate for their age. Due to economic pressure, children are left alone by their parents to work. Vulnerability to be exposed to some deviant and unconventional content creeps in. Exposure to sensitive content leads to the use of profane language, premarital sex, objectification of women, drug and alcohol abuse, and gang involvement for children ages 4-19 years old in the study conducted by Chauke and Malatji (2018). This has been an issue that roots back to the upbringing of a child, profanity in the household, in media, and with peers. Ayuwat (2017) explained that a person's aggressiveness and engagement in physical abuse, verbal abuse, and bullying has been influenced by various media which involves their transition phase from childhood to adulthood. Such acts are therefore brought upon until adulthood. Profanity,

although complex, is still more incorporated into the corruption of someone’s well-being. The presence of profanity in the political setting is undeniably influential in the community and is evidently recognizable to every sector of society.