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Valeriia Lakusta

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Ways of Expressing Verbal Aggression in Egyptian Arabic

Valeriia Lakusta

- 1 Nowadays the research on aggression is being carried out in various human sciences: psychology, sociology, philosophy, cultural studies, and linguistics. As the aggression is considered to be a psychological phenomenon first of all and in linguistics, the study of aggression as verbal communication phenomenon has started recently. No one can deny the fact that obscene words exist in every language due to the need of self-expression, but in its under taboo.
- 2 It is quite difficult to establish a universally valid definition of offensive language. Due to the absence of clear distinctions of definitions of the notions, in my paper, I equate the notion of verbal aggression to the notion of invective. So in general an invective is a verbal demonstration of aggressive attitude to an opponent or a situation with the use words or expressions that are inappropriate to be used publicly or in an everyday normal conversation. Based on the collected data from the social media websites, four types of verbal aggression were marked out during the research: zoomorphic invectives, sexually related invectives, invectives of mental and behavioral characteristics, interjectional invectives.
- 3 Zoomorphic invective is a lexeme (a name of an animal), that evolved from a figurative representation of an animal, used to name a person with negative traits associated with a particular animal. This type of abuse words is presented by quite a small amount of examples in EA comparing to the other types. Due to the fact that most of the invectives were developing in a language of peasants, zoomorphic invectives are presented in most cases by domestic animals, which is confirmed by the EA too. The animal hayway by itself has an abusive shade of meaning if we say it with an aggressive tone.
- 4 The key zoomorphic invective is *kelb* “dog”. Due to the common opinion in Islam, a dog is *naġis* “dirty” animal. So this word can be used as a separate way to describe a person, but in general, it’s being used in complex constructions:
 - (1) *ibn kelb* “son of a dog”

- (2) *ya bni sittīn kilāb* “son of 60 dogs”
 (3) *yā ahū-l-’ahba kilāb ibn kelb* “brother of a slut, son of the dogs”

5 Zoomorphic invectives can also describe inanimate beings:

- (4) *dī šerika bint kelb* “bad company”
 (5) *mišwār ibn kelb* “long way”
 (6) *ṭa’mu ibn kelb* “awful food”

6 Thus the invective “dog” also refers to the thematic group “behavior” and is used to describe a dishonest man with dirty chores, or used as a part of phrase with *ibn*, *bint* lexemes for reinforcement of negative characteristics of the subject. Among other widespread zoomorphic abuse words there are:

- (6) *ḥanzīr* “pig”
 (7) *’ird* “monkey”
 (8) *dub* “bear” silly person
 (9) *ba’ra* “cow” fat person
 (10) *tays* “bull” human without morals
 (11) *timsāḥ* “crocodile” nymphomaniac man
 (12) *labwa* “lioness” nymphomaniac woman
 (13) *gāmūs wi lābis badla* “cow wearing a suit”
 (14) *baḡidu ḥanzīr ātfūūūh* “he is a pig!”

7 Thus, each zoomorphic invective lexeme can be used as a non-invective word, on the other hand, a neutral word in certain contexts can be offensive.

1. Sexually related invectives

8 One of the most important features of Arab invective is a combination of sexuality, that addresses to everyday life and to the characteristics of people (Zawrotna 2014: 322). There is no doubt that sexual abuse words are the strongest in terms of emotionality. Magdalena Zawrotna has marked out three types of sexual abuse words in EA: abuse words for the description of the sexual behavior of woman; words connected with the sexual; expression *kuss ’umm-ak* (due to the differences in classification, I refer the last type to the class of interjectional invective).

9 The image of female relatives (mother and sister) is strongly implemented into Arabic swearing tradition and this phenomenon has a strong cultural background, as woman is the symbol of morality and the reputation of relatives depends on her behavior.

10 The most common way of insulting someone is to cast doubts on the chastity of one’s family. It should be pointed out, that unlike some languages of the Islamic world, like Kazakh or Caucasian languages, where sexual abuse words are aimed at a father; EA is rich at swearwords, which include such units as “mother” and “sister. This linguistic behavior makes the first group of sexually related invectives, among them:

- (15) *ibn el-wiṣḥa* “son of the dirty woman”
 (16) *awlādu ḥarām* “kids of fornication”
 (17) *bint šarmūṭa, āhira* “daughter of a whore”

11 Besides, the lexeme *umm* “mother” contextually has an aggressive shade of meaning, when used in expressions like (18) *enta māl ’umm-ak enta* “not your business” or “what is wrong with you?!”.

12 It is important to note that the image of mother is often used in European swear culture too (English: son of a bitch; Polish: *sukinsyn*; French: *filz de pute*), but it is worth

noting that the word “mother” in these expressions loses its connection to a real mother of a real person, while in Arabic speaker addresses to a mother of the opponent.

13 In fact, the image of the father in the Arabic swear culture is not common, so any insults regarding family relationships of any kind are aimed mostly at the woman.

14 The phrases (19) *'umm-ak kelba* (bitch) or (20) *'umm-ak labwa* (lioness) are pointing to a large amount of the sexual partners.

15 One of the most abusive profanities for a man is being called a gay (in all its variations) or (21) *'ars* “faggot”. In fact, during my research, the last lexeme was the most frequent in Twitter (about 60% of collected tweets contained it).

(22) *ma'leš ašl 'anda-nā zurūf b-yaḥkumnā 'ars* “Not a problem, we are ruled by a fucking pimp”.

16 Expressions that show the sexual dysfunction or a small size of penis as well are considered to have a high level of offensiveness due to the fact that in terms of psychology the genitals are the symbol of the identity of a man. A comparison to a woman is also abusive for a man.

(23) *yalla zibb-ak ma-b-yiw'af-š* “your penis does not grow up” (Zawrotna 2014: 324)

17 Expressions that indicate a homosexual orientation of the opponent is highly insulting. There are two main abuse lexemes for naming homosexuals in EA: (24) *Ḥawal*, (25) *'il'*.

18 Ahmed Amine in his book “Dictionary of Egyptian traditions and customs” claims that in the Middle Ages in Egypt lexeme *Ḥawal* (“slave” in Standard Arabic) was used to name men who were wearing women's clothes and danced belly dances, therefore now in modern language this word describes a man with a female type of behavior in sex act (Amine 213: 215).

19 During this research, I've found, that most of the examples with this word are used with a meaning “faggot”, which is the second appropriate translation of the word.

(26) *yā Sīsī yā Ḥawal* “Sisi is such a faggot”

(27) *di ibn šarmūṭa Ḥawal wa ḥāyḍaya'anā asanādī* “he is such a son of a bitch and faggot”

20 Another sexual invective for a man is *'il'*, used for describing a heterosexual acting like a gay.

(28) *di 'ayel Ḥawal ibn šarmūṭa* “he is a gay, son of a bitch”

21 Ahmed Amine suggests, that probably the word *'il'* comes from the word *'alaq* “leech” or another version that it comes from word *'ilǧ* “nonbeliever” (Amine 2013: 268).

22 Codeswitching is also common as a way to reduce the level of aggressiveness, so it's possible to hear English variant (29) *al-ǧay*.

23 The second group of sexual invectives is the expressions that combine a verb with the semantics of sex act that points to sexual intercourse. Usually, the expression points at sex act between the speaker and the mother or sister of the opponent.

24 Word *nāka* in its original form has been existing in Arabic for hundreds of years, this lexeme can be found in every Classical dictionary of Arabic Fusha. Even Arabic philologist Al-Asmai (740-828) wrote in his poem:

Wa niktū al-riḡala wa naktu al-nisā'... wa niktū albanāta ... “I had sex with men, women, girls...”

25 Gabriel Rosenbaum in his work “The use of slang and swear words in Egyptian Arabic” writes about several Egyptian authors (like Saad Alkhadem and his novel “al-Tayun”)

that criticizes Nasser's regime in Egypt, is loaded with coarse words (Rosenbaum 2004: 198). The following is an example taken from the novels:

(30) *'āyizīn kamān yanīkū fī-l-blad bibalāš* "they also want to have sex for free"

(31) *Nīk ar-rāgil ya miš tnik kalām-u* "fuck man, but do not fuck his words"

26 The example (31) is a coarse proverb that means "you should respect man's words"

27 The verb *nāka* was also used as the main refrain in the poem "Kuss ummiyat" by the famous Egyptian poet Nagib Suroor:

ya nīk ya nīk ya layl...ya nīk ya nīk ya 'ayn instead of a traditional for Arabic poetry refrain *ya layl ya layl ya 'ayn* (Suroor).

28 Also, the verb *naka* is being integrated as a passive participle into the examples for expression of anger:

(32) *'yiša bint mitnāka wa šuġl ibn mitnāka* "a fucking life, a fucking job"

2. Invectives of mental and behavioral characteristics

29 The compilation of the semantic and thematic classification of invectives allows us to identify the value system and the hierarchy of human vices condemned by Egyptian society. Analysis of the semantics allows us to distinguish the following lexical-semantic groups:

1. negative features of a character (in particular, mendacity, talkativeness, stubbornness)

2. laziness

3. Stupidity

4. appearance

(33) *aḥṭal*, (34) *'abīṭ* "fool", (35) *ġazma* "shoe",

(36) *muḥḥ-u ġazma* "he is stupid as a shoe (literally: his brain is a shoe)"

(37) *ya bni ġazma* "son of a shoe"

(38) *ya bni sittin ġazma* "son of 60 shoes"

30 According to an article popular in the Internet, word *'abīṭ* comes from Coptic language and consists of two lexemes: *ā* "person" and *bīṭ* "donkey". But due to the absence of a scientific source, this information can not be considered as reliable.

(39) *rūḥ umm-ak*, (40) *ḥilit umm-ak* "weak-willed person"

(41) *ḥīḥa* "milkstop"

(42) *šuft-u Samīr aḥū-hu b-yaṇḍarīb wa ma-'amal-š ḥāḡa*, *Samīr di wād ḥīḥa* "Samir's brother bits him, but he says nothing, he is a susy"

(43) *lūḥ* "heartless, insensible", literally: a piece of wood.

3. Interjectional Invective

31 Interjectional invective is the use of tabooed vocabulary to express one's attitude not to a person, but to the situation. Interjectional invectives are also called aggressive imperatives and they contain the orders to do or not to do something. Ukrainian linguist Lesia Stavytska gives the following types of aggressive imperatives that we can also implement to EA background (Stavytska 2008: 47):

32 1. Religion-oriented expressions where the speaker asks God to deal with the opponent:

(44) *allah lā ya'aṭīk al-'āfiya* "may Allah take your health"

(45) *allah yal'an-ak* "may Allah curse you"

- (46) *yil'an 'abū 'umm-ak* “may [Allah] curse your grandfather”
 (47) *yā'ti-k ḍarba fī 'alb-ek* “may [Allah] give you a heart attack”
 (48) *yaḥrab bēt-ak* “may [Allah] destroy your house”
 (49) *yā'ta'a 'umr-ak* “may [Allah] shorten your life”
- 33 The existence of this type of invectives can be explained by the fact that Arabic curses are associated with solemn, ceremonial or domestic vows. While pronouncing the invective, the speaker calls to God to witness and he asks Allah – a symbol of supreme power, to punish the opponent.
- 34 2. Orders to disappear in all its variations:
 (50) *imšī barra*, (51) *barra*, (52) *'ittakil 'alā allah*, (53) *rūḥ fī sittīn 'alf dāhiyya* “go to 60 thousand hells”, (54) *yallā barra yā ibn 'aḥba* “get out of here, son of a bitch”.
- 35 3. Vulgar expressions that contain (usually) sexually related verbs in imperative form.
 (55) *muṣ zibb-i* “suck my dick”
 (56) *'ilḥas ṭiz-ī* “kiss my ass”
 (57) *kul ḥarā* “eat shit”
 (58) *nayyik nafs-ak* “go fuck yourself”
- 36 Speaking about the features of Arabic swear words, it is necessary to take into account the patriarchal traditions, where the male role is dominant and active, thus the swearing is more often built from the male perspective. One must admit, that the role of women is understated, and as a consequence, the image of a woman plays a big role in swearing culture.
- 37 Expression *kuss umm-ak* is based on the violation of a taboo of two types: on the one hand, the inviolability of the sanctity of the mother, and the other - the taboo of sexuality (Zawtotna 2014: 327).
- 38 *Kuss umm* is a targeted personalized expression that does not have an English equivalent and depending on the context may be translated as a verb, adjective or a noun.
 (59) *kuss umm aš-šuḡl* “fucking work”
 (60) *kuss umm aš-šahādāt* “fucking documents”
 (61) *yā kuss umm-ak* “motherfucker”
 (62) *kuss umm aḍaḥk bišrāḥa* “shit, this is very funny”
 (63) *kuss umm ḥāyātī 'an kuss umm el-ḡāmi'a bint el-wisḥa* “fuck my life and fuck university, daughter of a prostitute”
- 39 The lexeme (64) *aḥḥā* in Arabic slang has two different meanings: the first is equal to “shit” in English and used to express the feeling of anger, and the second is equal to “wow” and used to express the feeling of astonishment. But this word is considered by most of the people in Egyptian society as offensive, even if it expresses surprise. The etymology of this interjection is being associated with a sound of woman orgasm, that's why it is considered to be very vulgar.
 (65) *wa 'ay ta'li' 'an el-waḍ' el-ḥālī bidūn aḥḥā* “Is there a comment on the present situation without aḥḥā?”
 (66) *b-yatṣāūru sīlfi ma'a alḥādīta yā aḥī aḥḥā fīn ḍamīr-kum* “They are taking a selfie in front of the accident, dude, shit, where is your conscience?”
 (67) *yā ḡed'ān aḥḥā muš kedā habī el-'uḡniya* “Wow, guys, I loved this song so much!”

4. Conclusion

- 40 The study of verbal aggression cannot go aside from studying the context of the use of expression and interpersonal relationships. A lot depends also on the intonation that cannot be reproduced by the text. Also, the study of this topic is complicated by the difficulty of finding an open-minded native speaker able to discuss tabooed topics.
- 41 Nevertheless, there is an urgent need to study this rich layer of vocabulary, that reflects the culture. This study investigated the pragmatic categories of offensive language used on Twitter and YouTube and the expressive functions embedded in the use of offensive language, and as a result, the research proved, that the female images plays one of the key roles in EA swearing model, as it was mentioned in earlier M. Zawrotna's paper (Zawrotna 2014: 328). As for the male-oriented swear words, it's common to blame the man for homosexual relationships and question the chastity of the women of his family.

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ABSTRACTS

The paper is focused on the phenomenon of abuse words in Egyptian dialect of Arabic (EA). Being tabooed not only in media but in everyday life, different types of obscene words are still being widely used by native speakers. A particular attention is paid to the typologization of invectives in Egyptian Arabic. This paper examines the expressive functions of offensive language. The data is based on a corpus of 114 tweets collected from the Twitter website and 98 YouTube comments from Egyptian users writing in colloquial Arabic.

In general, swearing as a language phenomenon can tell about some national traits associated with a particular nation. They can be caused by various factors, which makes it an interesting field for research.

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Keywords: verbal aggression, invective, obscene language, insult, Egyptian Arabic

AUTHOR

VALERIIA LAKUSTA

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

leralaku@gmail.com

Ukraine, Kyiv, 02090 Khorolska st, 1a, app.143