

Corpus-Based Approach to Sociolinguistic Study of Offensive Words: Gender, Time and Register Differences

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ABSTRACT

The unpleasant expressions (offensiveness) always emotionally affect to the human psyches, and exists in all languages in less or strong degrees and directly or indirectly. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate over the changes of them by corporally-derived data and their registers, times and genders were the pilot targets. BNC and COCA Corpora were put for data collections while the list of previous insulting words was selected to reuse, especially the ones with highest frequencies. The results suggested 4 words damn, shit, fuck and dick had the highest degrees of uses but those from BNC were comparatively fewer than the rest. Moreover, the top four were emerged up to the different periods of times and contexts while men used them considerably more often than the women did.

INTRODUCTION

The world is moving nonstop and the languages which theoretically comprise a lot of internally virtual characteristics like communications, community identities, expressions of various emotions etc. Those are also developed with considerable remarks and persistence, among those aims, the strong emotional expressions of languages, alternatively so-called as offensiveness, currently have captured the sociolinguists' interests in the light that varieties of utterances or language expressions may be popularly used differently or pragmatically by groups of people from divergent ages or genders. The sound of righteousness or rudeness and offensiveness or inoffensiveness through speeches is one of the semantically pyramidal concerns for language users in the latest century.

There are many previous studies that have dealt with document-based or author-intuition based, while the authentic data-based ones are not so proliferate. More importantly, the methods of data collection completely depend on the questionnaires or interview styles which leave some limitations such as sample sizes and emotional interferences. Contrary, corpora, hit by modernized methods of research fields, have been created depending on the original forms of the speeches or languages in practical use in different places, times or contents etc. Moreover, the compositions of those corpora are still marked so immensely and differently.

So doubtful, what dismays is the manifestation that both participants (men and women) have equal scores in using swearings by some studies, whereas the previous sociolinguistic theories claim that men are more aggressive. These mentions may keep a small gap and give an encouragement for this new study. In order to unhide the wonder statically, this fresh study zoomed in at trialing the human's proclivity towards the offensiveness by compressing the boundaries for gender, time, and register differences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The matter of impoliteness in using language has been a concern for the 21th century communicational trends, which attracts the sociolinguists or the relevant researchers to do thorough investigations from the ground. Dawaele (2016) was one the sociolinguists who had conducted series of socio-pragmatical research addressed that swearing words would be sophisticatedly hard to perceive not only for the second language, but also native ones because there would be some particular parameters like sociologically personal backgrounds, linguistic factors and psychological issues (Caldwell Harris, 2015; Dewaele, 2004, 2013,2015, 2016; Harris,2004; Howardeta, 2013).

Generally, offensiveness and the impoliteness were the two harsh things be identified and had interrelationships (Haugh, 2015), but Bousfield (2008) worried that there should have had profound examinations between impoliteness and offensiveness. Culpeper (2011) also stated that impoliteness was essentially seen as the specific manners of individuals, while affecting determiners were analyzed among emotional response, degrees of intensity, anger, displeasure or annoyance caused by them.

Beyond, there are several types of offensive words or phrases having been used and always fluctuated with the reductions in religious norms and the rises in sexually-associated acts. Some scholars suggested that there were three themes of insulting characteristics as sexual receptivity, relative affluence and inappropriate degree of assimilations under the dominant cultures (Murray, 1979). Swearing words which came along with the today-relating -meaning ones are the reference of the current and past taboo studies like religious moralities, sexualities, genitals and sexual relevance, race discrimination, vulnerable groups, stupidities, undesirable behaviors, diseases (Montagu, 1967). On the other hand, swearing was changed very fast, especially in politic turmoils or in xenophobic situations and they were also high potentially offensive (Thelwall.M, 2008).

Swearing was a very tricky speech act (Dewaele, 2004). It was also like the speaking of taboo word for showing the emotional states of utterers purposefully (Jay 1999, 2000). From opposite view, definition of swearing was directed to strong emotional castes with line-for-line senses (Jay and Danks 1977 cited in Timothy, 2001). Swearing was not only for literal interpretation but for culture's, taboo's, attitude's and emotion's indications (Adamson and Trugill, 2007). Additionally, Beers Fagasten (2007) found the tops of them and wrote the degrees swearing up to the listener's interpretations. Then, he raised about profanity's association with gender or age difference with wonder (Beers Fagasten, 2012).

Similar but not the same, Timothy and Kristen (2008) postulated that the rudimentary purpose of swearwords were for anger remitting-outs or frustrated emotion and the impacts, seriously or mildly, had the involvements of cultures and langue. It was discovered the same but it was extended that such words usually appeared with patients of brains, broken backbones, and trauma-causing. Moreover, it was a source of powerful embarrassment if being used inappropriately with NSs. Such inappropriate utilizations may be cautious while being used with natives or non-natives. Diane (2014) stressed that, in order to satisfy the expectation of association suggested by the using the slurs, the hearers would attribute the speaker with an indeterminate range of negative assumptions from the cultural images.

Taboos were originally linked with cultural or religious customs and not allow people to do, use or talk due to their bad impacts. They were the utterance-restricted words within societal uses under the assumption that they absolutely could cause harms in some ways. They came to be noticeably labeled as "taboo" by aversively classic conditions since childhood when parents and other authoritative people blamed children for using them; otherwise, they would be punished (Jay, 2009b). He also penned that positive meanings in swearing could be found but the two-thirds were negative ones which could hurt others or partners; even though taboo words were used in certain contexts, they could and did cause harms to the involved people (Jay, 2009a).

Firm interrelationships between swearing and gender were revealed by many studies and women were assumed to hear bad words more than the men did. It was the sensitive augmentations. As proven, from the corporal data bank BNC within the period 1991-1993, male-relevant bad languages were seven times

while female-associated ones were zero even though among 25 tops, having been searched (Rayson, Leech, and Hodges 1997).

Swearing varies in force, for example as measured by the percentage of people that would receive offense. The levels of some offensive words seemed to decline with usage (Jay, 1992). They were interesting data of declination from highness to mildness (20th century and today). Perceived lusty in derived data, it was belonged to intinctions rather than a reasoned decision semantically. To be added, Wittgenstein's theory of rough dialects was quoted by Blair and it had akin results (Blair 2006). In some contexts, slang and swearing were not be able to differentiate pragmatically (Thelwall, 2008).

Offensive words appearing in forms as the swearwords commonly were observable in most contextual impoliteness. Some scholars who asserted that the understandings of using words had to be carefully used because they might produce severe affects; more specially, if they were not familiarized by languages' users, their eventually couldn't avoid the unexpected negative outcomes (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008) while the Kasper (1990) suggested that young children of natives and non-native speakers had to be aware of them profoundly and socio-pragmatically. Nonetheless, Jay and Janschewitz (2008) claimed that swearwords could have sound, malapert and nothing conveyances like a phrase 'fucking good' (Jay and Janschewitz, 2008; Diane, 2014). This would be a different layer to be observed.

More foci of the studies over offensive languages like swearing and its family have been much paid attentions. The exemplary studies of swearing arose in the study of Staley (1978), while the explorations the biases between sexes and genders cropped up in the research of Person and Stanley (Preston & Stanley, 1987); swearing from neurolinguistics and neurobehavioral standpoints (Van Lancker & Cummings, 1999), the art of gay insulting in anthropically linguistic dimensions (Murray, 1979), cursing and genders in Myspace (Thelwall, 2008), analysis of swearwords and offensiveness in sociolinguistics (Beers Fägersten, 2007); societal roles of communicative swearing (Beers Fägersten, 2012), the meaning and use of swearing (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008) etc. Finally, document-based approaches are much more documentary than corporal data-based methods.

METHODOLOGY

This present study was administered by using the domain existing corpus -BNC and COCA which are constituted with 100 and 520 million words respectively. These corpora were opted for this project depending to their fundamental functions as general data bank, considerable largeness and the representativeness of different varieties of English. At the outset of the whole processes, this current observation was completely relied on the list of purgatory words from the Beers Fagasteen's study in 2007.

The preliminary observation was conducted over the frequencies of the selected particular words in the purpose to reveal the most commonly used words from both BNC (British-based) and COCA (American-based). After getting the frequency of all of those, the next investigation was to extend the close

trial of words in the high top ten rate; meanwhile, the different registers were also taken into account with the interpretative senses. Besides, the fluctuated rates of utilities were as well the aim of this study which intentionally wanted to embody the moves of those insulting words depending on the changing times. The results were centered on the used corpora completely.

Another main objective of this study was to make comparison between the men's and women's tendencies to use such insulting words. The procedures to obtain the data for analysis were corpus-based which the target words were typed into the box and the collocation section was ticked and input with He or She and all left word spans (9) were selected while the right ones were ignored or not paid attention. Hopefully, the frequencies suggested from the corpus (here is used only COCA) would point out the extents of the users' inclination towards those insulting words.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Highly Frequent-Used Offensive Words

The operation by corporal processes was done over the 14 proposed words of the previous mention in methodological sections. Four out of them was observed and noticed that they had very high frequencies. They were damn, shit, dick and fuck. From BNC, these words were the four tops standing in order by frequencies but from COCA, two of them remained the same consequence as the what in BNC (Damn in first and fuck in fourth) while shit and dick were found in exchangeable stands (dick in the second and shit in the third). Moreover, the rest were also demonstrated in figure 1; the statistics with blue line were belonged to BNC and their places were orderly organized whereas the orange line was denoted as results from COCA and their orders were not the same ones in BNC.

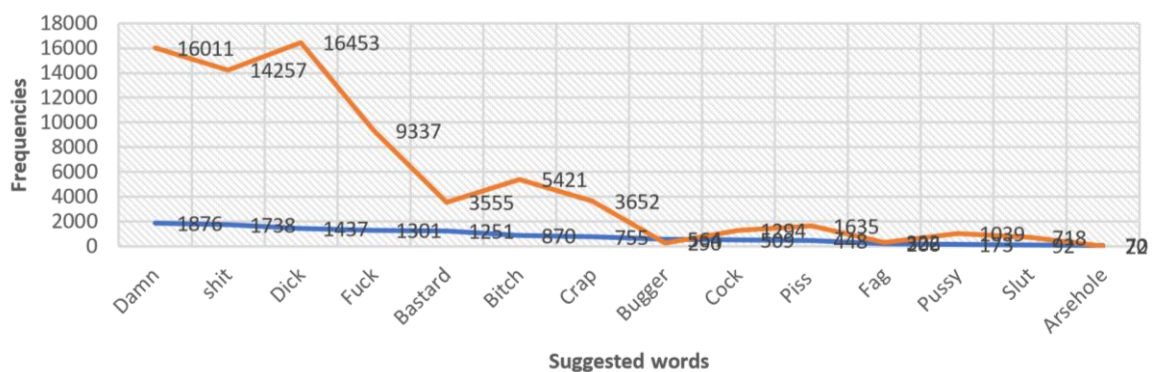


Figure 1. The Contributions from BNC and COCA

The words with more than one thousand rates taken from both corpora or either of them were labelled as the indicators for further trials and extensive examinations. Those were Damn, Shit, Dick, Fuck, Bastard, Bitch, Crap, Cock, Piss and Pussy. Anyway, 10 out of the listed fourteen lexicons selected from previous study to apply for this observation appeared less in use with the low frequencies like Arsehole, Slut, Fag and Bugger. Hence these words would not be for the proceeding investigation. On the other hand, this complies to the

second aim of the investigation, the top fours , for sure , are used to watch into and only COCA is put for examinations to clarify the most popularly used words pertaining to the registers and times, but more than them are reused for testifying the gender differences.

2. The Highly Frequent-Used Words by Registers from COCA

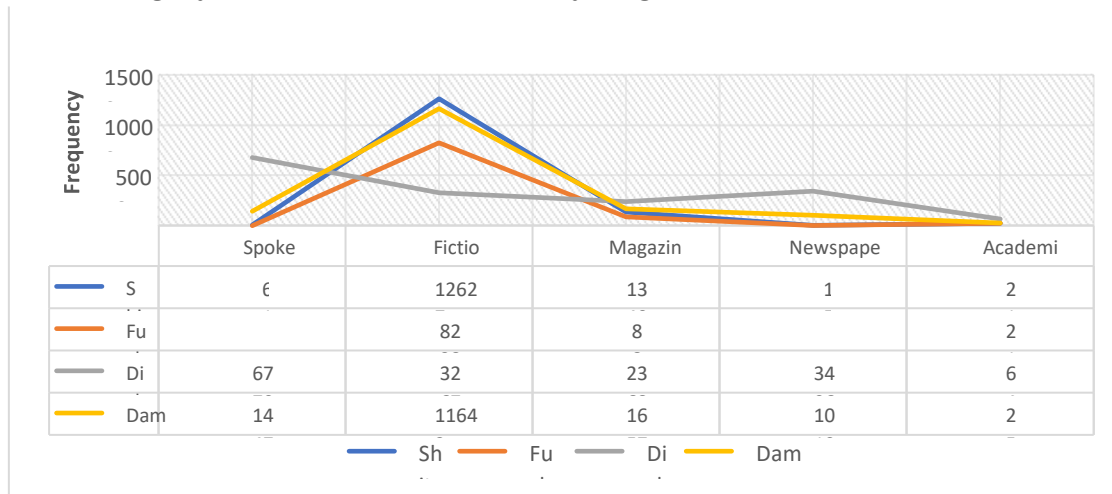


Figure 2. Register Contribution

Different numbers of uses by registers were derived from the corpus after coding and searching in data bank. Shit (12627 times) emerged the most in Fiction while its second place dropped to Magazine (1340 times). There was special remark that it was shown only 15 times in Newspaper which was the least one of its registers but the third and the fourth were Academic and Spoken consecutively (214 and 61). The second higher one after Shit was Damn (11643 times), meanwhile its second was Magazine too. These two tops came along together but the rest registers were different: the Spoken was the third, Newspaper was the fourth and the last was in Academic (see in Figure 2). The third summit of used words was Fuck whose orders by registers from the new discovery was sought the same as Shit but different in statistics or times.

3. The Highly Frequent-Used Words by Time Span from COCA

Synchronizing the offensive words fluctuates with the courses of time. It is very engrossing that **Damn** in Figure 3 revealed almost steady stance of people using it in both speaking and writing. Clearly proved, the frequencies since 1990 to 2015 were not much different, getting from 2 thousand to 3 thousand but what is the enthrallingly important to note is the year span from 2010-2015. This period indicated the increase in use of Damn than other times.

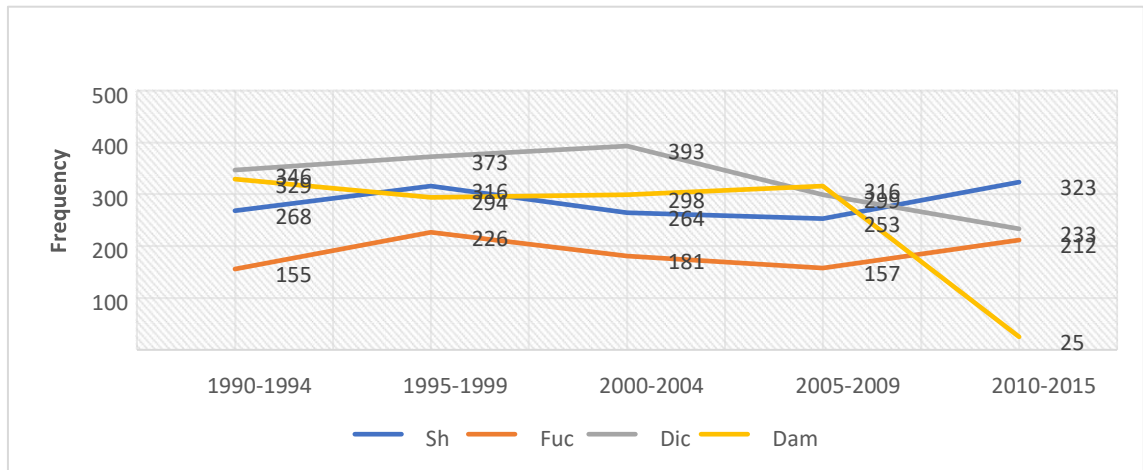


Figure 3. Time Spans

It is opposite to Dick, which got the peak in 2000-2004 and then gradually went down. What captures the impression is that it continued to decrease, which plainly unfolds that this word is not popularly used any more. Dick, Shit and Fuck were found their growth in frequencies in the last span of time (2010 -2015). That would be thought-provoking with the rise, except Damn. Its figure was only 251 times which felt down one - sixth.

4. The Highly Frequent-Used Words by Genders from COCA

The comparison between the uses of offensive words by men and women was operated in the study with the purposes to clarify the doubts of whether the men or women who used more abusive words. From the result of the investigation (figure 4). The blue line with number represented male tendency. It was undoubtedly illustrated the higher rates of recurrence of all the observed terms. These evidences derived from the same corpus COCA could provide a very dependable assumption that men would be likely to use insulting words much more than women would.

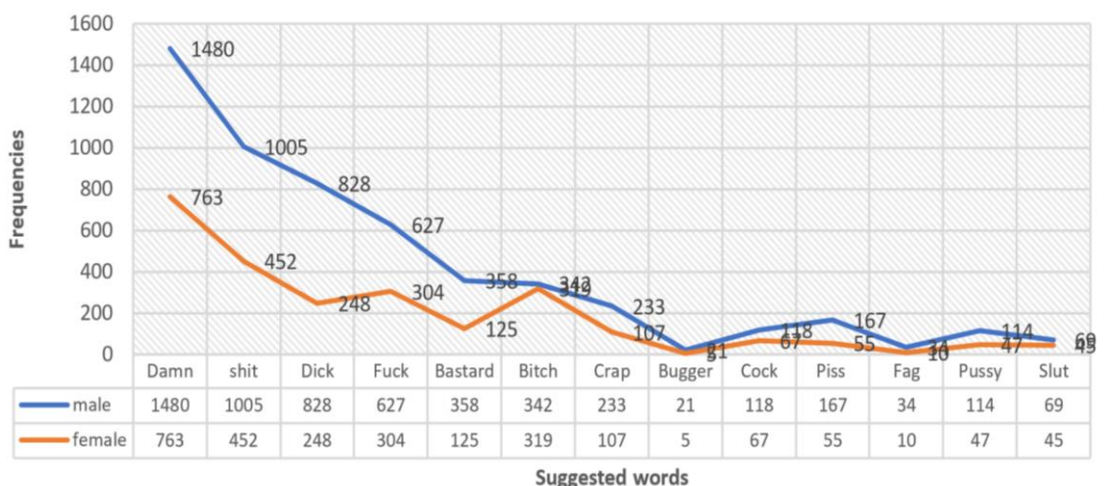


Figure 4. The Contributions of Genders

For instance, men had used nearly 1500 times, but women had done only 763 times. The men's number of use is about doubled if compared. Such a concludable result was both consistent and inconsistent with some previous studies with some reasons and intuition-based presumption.

After the first statistical look-into over the concerning words in order to find out the most and the top frequencies, the results were shown and their interpretations were done in result sections where all aspects rely on the figurative corpus-driven findings. So the following paragraphs will pay entire attentions on the discussions between this research results and the previous ones. Responding to the study's aims repetitively mentioned, the first focuses on the frequencies of proposed hurting words and the second is headed to the tentative changes by time, genders and registers of the 4 tops. This section will not be divided into sub-parts but the chronological arguments of each aim will be arranged. Moreover, some perceptions and perspectives will also be penned down depending on contemporary discoveries and previous ones from the past conducted research.

From the figure 1, found in the contribution of offensive words from BNC and COCA, 14 of the recommended words with strong emotional impacts were discovered with their high frequencies. Damn was found the most popularly used in both corpora but the counts of COCA was far higher than BNC (1876 vs 16011). From this, four of them were appeared unforeseeably so higher than others (Damn, Dick, Shit, Fuck). However, all frequencies of those words from BNC are regardably much fewer than from COCA. So, there are several assumptions can be made from this transparent finding that they may be from the different sizes of data bank compositions, the origins of data sources or the personalities of people in which the corpus data are constructed. Even though this result is from the corporal operation, it still comes along with the study of Fagastens (2007), which showed that damn, shit, fuck, dick, bastard, bitch and crap provided considerably peak figures and were likely to be frequently used following the word nigger that had the highest rate. Moreover, work of Dawaele (2016) also revealed familiar results. He concerned the perceptions of both NS and NNS on offensive words or swearwords which let him to draw a conclusion that ambiguous understandings of NNS may have given the wrong and unclear degrees of those words, while the NS were sure-footed.

The registers here are referred to some particular groups of languages users like fictional, spoken, academic proportions etc. (figure 2-4). The analogical reason why some words are not agreed to use in some special registers is likely that they are contemplated as very offensive, inappropriate or avoided being heard by the public. For example, from the corpus, Shit was found only 15 tolls in newspaper. Similarly, Fuck was, too, with very low frequency, one in Newspaper and 6 in Spoken. What is very mesmerizing is the fact that some of the recited were discovered with higher degrees in use in other registers like Academic in which the formal language is demanded to use. Meanwhile, a number of them suggested in Magazine is not very

fascinated because, in general, a magazine may consist several parts of articles, so one of those may talk about such expletives.

Additionally, the register that most of the terms appeared in is Fiction. This is because in some fictionalized stories the authors try to use the authentic words, phrases or expressions fit to the situations or story plots in order to hold the audience's interest but it is striking to see the time variables. Although some words were not appeared many in some registers, Dick and Damn, the two of the chosen words, indicated they are strong- words with people 's usages thanks to the higher frequencies. Differently from the others, Dick had a very high rate in Spoken, while similarly in Newspaper and Magazine but less in Academic. This is because that Spoken register might be collected from people of all descriptions. So, the informal conversations might be the target of data collection and some of interlocutors might use their languages naturally, especially to show the emotion lexicons to release out their stresses, annoyance or the like.

Staley (1978), who examined male and female uses of the expletives, specifically the proclivity and perception of the swearwords and their predictions of the utilities of the counter sexes, affirmed, owing to the results, men had used them very slightly higher than women had (mean scores 5.96 vs 5.64) or estimated equally. He also left a reason that it was probably because the power of both sexes having in the equivalent lines and the idea that men had used more because it was dependent on a theory that men was superior or seized more power than women. Thelwall (2008) provided similar corners of the engendered users. The result was robustly supportive to equity of exerting such words from UK MySpace data but it is not paralleled with present study. However, from US My- space, a self- created corpus, results granted a firm symmetrical proof to a biased using between men and women, which seconded the current project. Along with another shared point, COCA is one of the American corpora, which leads the result come to same zone. Preston and Stanley (1987), who conducted research on gender-directed insults, claimed that there was no significance or difference between both sexes in verbal attack in homogenous sex orientation, but strong degrees in opposite sex. However, this research seemed to give sign that both sexes of the college students had used those insulting words.

With this updated corporal data- based results, they additionally gave the contrasted positions of severe biases of using those words between the opposite genders. Illustratively, results appeared doubly different for some preceding words like in figure 4. It is plainly said that this present study can clarify the wonders and provide more discernments of their progressions by times. It gets along the theory that men are superior and intended to use abusive words more, but it is contrary to some previous research whose results claimed they did not have any significance. However, the last 8 words out of 13 have insignificances which uphold the previously document-based studies. In short, swear words are used less or much impacted by many factors. Because it is belonged to sociolinguistics, it would be changed nonstop.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Even though the counts of all emotionally influenced terms are different from one corpus to another (BNC and COCA), higher rates of some words still remain. The opted key terms, **Dick, Damn, Shit, Fuck, Bastard, Bitch, Crap** are earning very high frequencies while the rest of the studied terms have moderate uses. This indication inspires to draw the following conclusions

- Noticeably, only four words sit on the top with very high frequencies **Damn, Shit, Dick and Fuck**. They also are the ones which were used to observe again for their time-spans and registers but not genders
- The results denoted that in period of time from 2010- 2015, most words look surging up, which contradicted to people's educations in present. Nonetheless, **Dick** gradually declines in frequency.
- Consequently, 3 of the tops received their peaks in fiction while other registers stayed comparatively and symmetrically, except that **Dick** showed opposite.
- Besides the time and register, corporally numeral result for gender-based examination is also shocking. The COCA's statistical derivations of using those words by heterogeneous genders pointed out that the men's tendency was greater than women's for the first 6 words whilst some were shown insignificant. The result is symmetric with the Thelwall (2008)'s project.
- The explosives are easy to provoke angers or hostilities. So, to stay away from them, the users have to learn and digest about where, when and whom they are able to be used with. Moreover, the language users should think of them deeply and find the alternatives.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Even though this study used two varieties of English from different corpora, the sense of comparing the using abusiveness was not taken into account. So, the next investigation should include this problem in order to trace the abundance of offensiveness of the two kinds, as well as the men's and women's inclinations of that English. Another is that the latter study should consider the compositions of the used corpora, if possible, for more than two corpora will be used.

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