



Including SOTL in English Curriculum Enhances Fluency and Cultural Awareness

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Have you ever been in a spot where someone tossed out some strong words, and you were left scratching your head, wondering, "What on earth did that mean?" Now, picture this: you're in a new country, still figuring out the language, and suddenly, folks around you start using words that seem like a secret code. It's not just confusing; it's like trying to navigate a language maze with no map. I've been there, pretending to keep up with these colorful expressions, only to turn to Google later for a language rescue. But guess what? Many others, like me, find themselves in a similar pickle, wrestling not just with a new language but also the unexpected twists of swearing, even in their mother tongue.

Swearing isn't just about using attention-grabbing words; it's like a hidden language full of culture, emotions, and social indicators. When I experienced those situations, I wished I had learned SOTL (swearing, offensive, and taboo language) in school. Imagine recognizing those intense words and being able to use them fluently. Learning SOTL, especially for English learners, is important. Learning English, as a global language, involves connecting with individuals, grasping their customs, and navigating through the occasionally entertaining, occasionally challenging domain of swearing. Incorporating SOTL in the English learning curriculum enhances fluency, fosters connections, and equips learners to navigate strong and taboo words in diverse contexts.

First of all, the ability to use swear words is a mark of fluency for English Language Learners. Alex Orlando, a science journalist and associate editor, explores the positive aspects of profanity in his article "Swearing Like A Sailor May Not Be Such A Bad Thing", published on discovermagazine.com in 2022. According to Orlando, "People who are good at producing

language are good at producing swear words." This connection suggests that true language fluency involves not just using formal language but also being skilled at using strong and taboo words. The students aiming for real fluency need to go beyond regular expressions. Piercarlo Valdesolo, a psychologist focusing on the role of emotions in moral judgment and behavior, authored the article, "Is Swearing a Sign of a Limited Vocabulary?". Published by *Scientific American* on April 5, 2016, this article explores the misconceptions of profanity and intelligence and aiming to clarify the relationship between swearing and language skills. According to Valdesolo, the more taboo words participants could generate, the more verbally fluent they were in general. Including taboo language becomes essential for a complete understanding of language fluency. The ability to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas goes beyond being formal, and students can only reach true fluency by embracing all aspects of language, including swearing.

Understanding swearing becomes crucial for communicating with native speakers. Joshua Wedlock, an EFL (English as a foreign language) teacher, emphasized the importance of teaching taboo language to EFL/ESL students in his article "Teaching about Taboo Language in ESL/EFL Classes: A Starting Point". Wedlock aims to convince readers why SOTL language should be taught to EFL/ESL (English as a Second Language) students. According to Wedlock, "failing to equip our students with a better understanding of how [swearing] is used as a form of verbal abuse not only effectively limits their ability to understand potentially dangerous situations, but also robs them of their ability to verbally defend themselves against such attacks if they so wish, thus leaving them powerless in these precarious situations"(36). The teaching of taboo words equips individuals to navigate situations where such language may be inappropriate or even pose potential risks.

If SOTL is not incorporated into the school curriculum, there arises the issue of individuals not understanding how and when to appropriately use taboo words. Furthermore, the intricacies of such language may not be learned thoroughly if individuals solely rely on familial or friend-based instruction. Eileen Finn, an ESL instructor with a degree from Concordia University, explores the multifaceted aspects of language favoring the implementation of a curriculum centered around swearing for non-native speakers in her article "Swearing: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly." In her publication from 2017 in the *ORTESOL* journal, she voices her concern by highlighting, "With so much access and exposure to taboo language, students are bound to misuse these [taboo] words without proper instruction"(Finn 21). The misuse of language can be detrimental to individuals who may be unaware of the offensiveness that certain words hold in society. This underscores the importance of a structured educational approach.

The potential for the misuse of taboo language, including vulgarisms, underscores the necessity of incorporating structured educational approaches to ensure proper understanding and usage in societal contexts. In 'You Taught me Language; and my Profit on't/Is, I know how to Curse': Cursing and Swearing in Foreign Language Learning - authored by Geraldine Horan, a Senior Lecturer in language education, the text explores the significance of teaching swearing in foreign language classrooms, particularly within the context of English as a foreign language. Horan points out that "although it is important to address cursing and swearing as part of everyday spoken emotional utterances, even vulgarisms, one should not neglect the cultural and

literary value of taboo language” (Horan 290). It's crucial to emphasize the importance of using swearing in a manner that isn't vulgar or offensive. This approach ensures that the potential benefits of swearing are harnessed without compromising on decency or respect.

Swearing, often underestimated and labeled unnecessary, possesses a unique prowess in building authentic emotional connections and cultural understanding. When individuals share a moment of humor or frustration through swearing, they create a shared linguistic experience. This

shared experience becomes a bridge, connecting people emotionally and allowing them to relate to one another on a deeper level. Swearing, in this context, is not about being vulgar or offensive; rather, it becomes a means of expressing shared emotions, creating bonds, and strengthening interpersonal connections.

In the realm of language learning, understanding and using swearing appropriately can enhance cultural understanding and facilitate more authentic communication. It goes beyond formal language structures, offering learners a window into the emotional and cultural aspects of communication. Justin, the co-founder and CEO of RealLife English, a platform for learning English, talks about this in his article "The Power of Learning Swear Words in English." He argues that swearing is more than just a language exercise; it's a key to forming a stronger bond with the culture and its people. According to Justin, "in your native tongue, whether or not you choose to use [swear words], you have a much stronger emotional connection to these words, how [swearing] affects others, and when it's okay to use [these words]. In the language you are learning, however, even if you know what the words mean, you are often initially emotionally disconnected". Acknowledging the role of swearing in making connections emphasizes its importance not just as a linguistic quirk but as a powerful tool for building meaningful relationships.

It's important to recognize that, as social beings, we often express our own emotions or convey the emotions of others in daily interaction, and the categories of cursing and swearing above play an important role in emotional language. Therefore, it is safe to say that whether a language learner chooses to swear or even avoids swearing, he or she should at least be aware of the patterns, contexts, and repercussions of swearing (Horan 286). Understanding the emotional nuances of swear words contributes to a more comprehensive grasp of language and cultural dynamics in communication.

In conclusion, the introduction of SOTL into the language curriculum for English learners is an essential endeavor. Educators and curriculum developers are encouraged to reflect on innovative ways to incorporate swearing education into classroom settings, recognizing its potential benefits for language fluency, cultural connection, emotional expression, and the prevention of language misuse. By integrating SOTL into the curriculum, language learners can attain a deeper understanding of the intricacies of language, fostering authentic emotional connections and enhancing their ability to recognize and respond appropriately to strong and taboo words. Advocating for a comprehensive language education that includes SOTL becomes paramount, ensuring that learners not only navigate the language maze but also emerge with the skills to engage in authentic communication while respecting cultural nuances and emotional contexts.

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