Swearing

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In this chapter, we provide an account of antipodean swearing patterns, drawing on examples from existing written and spoken data banks. As part of this investigation, we consider general questions to do with swearing: what it is, why speakers do it and how swearing patterns have changed over the years. We identify four overlapping functions of swearing: the expletive, abusive, social and stylistic functions. We also consider the shift in social attitudes toward swearing and the repercussions of this for the law. Swearing has always been characterized as an earmark of Australian and New Zealand English. We conclude that it remains an important feature of these varieties, but question just how uniquely antipodean it is.

1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on a particularly rich area of creativity engaged in by ordinary Australian and New Zealand English speakers in the use of swearing and insult – so-called "bad" language, as described in, for example, Allan (1992a; b); Allan and Burridge (1991; 2006); Andersson and Trudgill (1990); Dabke (1977); Taylor (1976). Australians, in particular, have always regarded their colloquial idiom as being a significant part of their cultural identity. The standard language is more global in nature and many Australian English speakers see their colloquialisms, nicknames, diminutives, swearing, and insults to be important indicators of their Australianness and expressions of cherished ideals such as friendliness, nonchalance, mateship, egalitarianism, and anti-authoritarianism (Lalor & Rendle-Short 2007; Seal 1999; Stollznow 2004; Wierzbicka 1992). Australian attachment to the vernacular can be traced back to the earliest settlements of English speakers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The language of convicts and free settlers alike was largely derived from the slang and dialect vocabularies of Britain. The "vulgar" language of London and the industrial Midlands, the cant of convicts, the slang of seamen, whalers, and gold-diggers contributed significantly to the linguistic melting pot in those early years. As Edward Wakefield wrote in his *Letter to Sydney* in 1829:

> Bearing in mind that our lowest class brought with it a peculiar language, and is constantly supplied with fresh corruption, you will understand why pure English is not, and is not likely to become, the language of the colony. (Ramson 1966: 47).

At that time colonial colloquialisms were an important way of fitting in and avoiding the label "stranger" or "new chum" in Australia (Gunn 1970: 51). This holds also for New Zealand. Turner (1966: 114) describes how a character in Alexander Bathgate's novel *Waitaruna* (Bathgate 1881) justifies his use of such colloquialisms: "No use letting every one know you are a new chum". The cant of the underworld (so-called "flash language") flourished in those early days and, as the various corpora of modern AusE and NZE attest, colloquialisms and "bad" language have remained an important part of the antipodean idiom.

The examples in this chapter are drawn from a wide range of sources including the internet, creative writing, spontaneous public speech, and private conversation. The usual linguistic corpora (especially those consisting of written texts, such as ACE[1] and WWC) are not always fruitful when it comes to yielding examples of foul language. However some examples come from corpus samples of fiction, and rather more from informal speech within ICE-AUS, ICE-NZ and WSC, as well as ART, the talkback radio corpus drawn from commercial radio stations and the Australia-wide ABC. We take other examples from the English-language social networking website Myspace.com (Bugeja pc 2008[2]), using data from AusE speakers.

2. What is swearing?

> Who ever stubbed his toe in the dark and cried out, "Oh, faeces!"? (Adams 1985: 45)

Swearing is the strongly emotive use of taboo terms in insults, epithets, and expletives. In Modern English, only certain terms can function as swearwords. For instance, learned words for sexual organs and effluvia generally do not (e.g. **You faeces*! **Urine off*!) and nor do certain mild obscenities and nursery terms (e.g., **You willie*! **Wee-wee on you!*).

The original meaning of the verb *swear* based on entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) was "to take an oath; make a solemn declaration, statement, affirmation, promise or undertaking; often in the eyes of God or in relation to some sacred object so that the swearer is, by implication, put in grave danger if found to be lying",

1. This and the other corpora listed were accessed via ⟨http://www.ling.mq.edu.au/shlrc/resources.htm⟩. All URLs referred to in this chapter were accessed in June 2008. To make reading easier, the examples we quote from corpora do not stick rigidly to their transcription conventions – which in any case vary from corpus to corpus.

2. Brendan Bugeja MS. "Teenagers, Myspace and language".

e.g., *I swear by Almighty God to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So help me God*. The noun *oath* "an act of swearing" is the nominal counterpart of the verb *swear*. These meanings still obtain alongside those derived from it of *profane swearing* and *profane oaths*. At first these would have been statements made with profane reference to the deity; they have been around at least since the Middle Ages and probably much longer.[3] The extension of profanity from irreligious language to incorporate obscene language took swearing and (to a lesser extent) oaths with it. The dysphemistic (offensive) senses of *swear* and *oath* became dominant in unmarked contexts; a result aided by the fact that situations favourable to the attestation (*I swear by Almighty God …*) are infrequent compared to the number conducive to profane swearing and profane oaths. Profane swearing, like slang, is restricted to colloquial styles (which is not to say it never occurs in formal situations, see (7) below). It includes religion-based profanity and blasphemy (i.e., irreligious language), as well as a wealth of obscenities taken from the pool of "dirty words". To *swear at someone or something* is to insult and deprecate the object of abuse.

Used when a higher style is expected, taboo terms – whether as insults, epithets, expletives or even descriptives – are likely to cause offence. They may also be specifically used to offend, but in both cases they reflect discredit on the speaker. It is not only the style of usage, but also the relative status of the interlocutors that affects the perceptions of profane swearing. Relative status derives from two sources: the relative power of the interlocutors, and the social distance between them. The relative power is defined by social factors which obtain in the situation of utterance: e.g., the relative power of a physician and a policeman is not given for every occasion, it depends on where they encounter one another: imagine how it will differ depending whether the policeman is requiring a medical consultation at the doctor's office, or the doctor has been stopped for alleged dangerous driving. Social distance between interlocutors is determined by such parameters as their comparative ages, genders, and socio-cultural backgrounds. Swearing at someone of lower status is possible without loss of status; though it is generally assumed to demean the person swearing and can in principle be legally actionable. Swearing at someone of higher status is more likely to lead the target to take umbrage and pursue sanctions against the low status offender.

The dysphemistic connotations of swearing have led to its being associated with *cursing* "imprecating malevolent fate". Although curses can hardly be literally profane, the term *Curses!* has certainly been used lightly as a disguised expletive (a euphemistic

3. There is a reference to them in the 'First Grammatical Treatise' written in Icelandic around 1135, cf. Haugen (1972).

dysphemism[4]) for several centuries.[5] Hence we find in Matthew 26: 74 "Then began he [St Peter] to curse and to swear". Interestingly, the colloquial form of *curse*, *cuss*,[6] is often used in *cussing and swearing*. The term *cuss word* is found from the nineteenth century as synonymous with *swear word*.

3. Why do we swear?

Children of both sexes use swearwords from as young as one year old and the practice continues into old age – even when other critical linguistic abilities have been lost. People with certain kinds of dementia and/or aphasia can curse profusely, producing what sound like exclamatory interjections as an emotional reaction. However, when called upon to repeat the performance, they are unable to do so because they have lost the capacity to construct ordinary language. The fact that dirty words, abusive words, and slurs pour forth in these particular mental disorders is only possible because they are stored separately (or at least accessed differently) from other language.[7]

As we will see later, the language used varies across time; it also varies between genders. According to Timothy Jay, American English speaking males swear about

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4. We refer to orthophemisms (straight-talking), dysphemisms (offensive language), and euphemisms (sweet-talking). Orthophemisms and euphemisms are words or phrases used as an alternative to a dispreferred expression. They avoid possible loss of face by the speaker and also the hearer or some third party. An orthophemism is typically more formal and more direct (or literal) than the corresponding euphemism. A euphemism is a word or phrase used as an alternative to a dispreferred expression. It avoids possible loss of face: either the speaker's own positive face or, through giving offence, the negative face of the hearer or some third party. A euphemism is typically more colloquial and figurative (or indirect) than the corresponding orthophemism. A dysphemism is a word or phrase with connotations that are offensive either about the denotatum and/or to people addressed or overhearing the utterance. As examples of these different X-phemisms compare orthophemism *faeces,* euphemism *poo*, dysphemism *shit*.

5. For example: Seagoon: "Wait. (Raspberry) Curses, the spirit has gone. It must have been only 70% proof." (Spike Milligan script "The Internal Mountain" for a Goon Show first broadcast March 29, 1954).

6. *Cuss~curse* is just one pair of many synonymous doublets in which the colloquial variant has a short lax vowel and the standard form a long tense vowel. Others are: *ass~arse bin~been bubby~baby bust~burst crick~creek critter~creature gal~girl hoss~horse hussy~housewife puss~purse sassy~saucy tit~teat.*

7. Jay (2000) offers a comprehensive account of the mental disorders associated with coprolalia and other coprophenomena.

three times more frequently than females and they use "stronger" obscenities, e.g., among 8–12 year olds "males used words such as *shit, fuck* and *damn*, while females used words such as *god* or euphemisms *darn it* and *shucks*" (Jay 1992: 60–70). Among adults "[b]oth male and female speakers are more likely to swear in the company of same sex companions" (Jay 1992: 123). Other studies such as Stapleton (2003), Murray (1995), Johnson (1991) support Jay's findings. Indeed, numerous surveys and studies leave no doubt that in nearly all societies, if not all, males swear more and use more obscene language than females – Australia and New Zealand are no exception. When Alcock (1999) surveyed 242 Australian university students from the Melbourne area, she found that male speakers reported refraining from swearing in the company of females, while females appeared more reticent about swearing in front of authority figures and family than before male friends and peers. However, times do change and what "nice" girls say today, and what they used to say or not say, is very different. A study by Bayard and Krishnayya (2001) of New Zealand University students' use of expletives found a general tendency for males to swear slightly more frequently than females, but it also reported that there was very little difference in the strength of expletives used by women and men. We need more research on the swearing patterns of female versus male speakers in the twenty-first century, and especially in the New Zealand and Australian context where there has been very little work to date on actual or even reported usage.

We can identify at least four functions for swearing which often overlap: the expletive function, abuse and insult, expression of social solidarity, and stylistic choice – the marking of attitude to what is said. We take them in turn.

3.1 The expletive function

Old Lady: I shouldn't cry if I were you, little man.
Little Boy: Must do sumping; I bean't old enough to swear.
(*Punch* cartoon April 2, 1913)

Most cussing is an emotive reaction to frustration, something unexpected (and usually, but not necessarily, undesirable), or in anger. This is the expletive function of swearing – the use of a swear word to let off steam: imagine hitting yourself with hammer or being cut off in traffic. Expletives are kinds of exclamatory interjection, and, like other interjections, they have an expressive function; cf. *Wow!*, *Ouch!*, *Oh dear!*, *Gosh!*, *Shit!*

(1) Welfare, my **arsehole**. [ACE F10:1953]

(2) "Clouding over my **arse**," says Ruth. [WWC K20:055]

(3) Oh **bugger** I should've got the lunch bucket. [WSC DPC306:0430]

(4) Well, **bollocks** to that. [ACE N01:114]

(5) It's my bloody birthday **goddamn** it. [ART ABCnat7]

(6) Oh **damn** it's you see I turned I thought I turned that one on. [ICE-AUS S1A-058:306]

(7) I ran off because it's something like you know eeh eeh eeh eh eh eeh eeh eeh eh suddenly this string just went Boom I don't know bang and I just went **Fuck** and ran off the stage. [ICE-AUS S1A-019:143]

(8) I said **FUCK** we've only got half a bloody house. [WSC DPC066:1275]

(9) Oh **shit** I'm getting lost. [ICE-NZ S1A-033:85]

(10) **Shit** has that tiger picture gone mouldy just from sitting there? [ICE-NZ S1A-056:84]

Unlike typical expressives such as greetings or apologies, interjections (including expletives) such as these are not normally addressed to the hearer. At best hearers are treated like ratified participants, and at worst as overhearers (bystanders) and therefore not, strictly speaking, addressees. Instances of expletives, and other interjections uttered without an audience, are expressions of auto-catharsis, a release of extreme emotional energy.[8] Even where they are used with an audience of ratified participants or bystanders, they are concomitantly displays of auto-catharsis: i.e., the illocutionary intention is to display a particular attitude or degree of feeling to oneself and anyone who happens to be in earshot.

Since taboo terms make good dysphemisms, they also make good expletives. Hence, many taboo terms share this particular function. Furthermore, the very fact that a term is taboo may improve its value as auto-cathartic: the breaking of the taboo is, ipso facto, an emotional release (cf. Allan & Burridge 2006: Ch. 10). As Allen Read once described it (in his characteristically flamboyant fashion):

> The ordinary reaction to a display of filth and vulgarity should be a neutral one or else disgust; but the reaction to certain words connected with excrement and sex is neither of these, but a titillating thrill of scandalized perturbation. (Read 1977: 9)

This is what provides the auto-catharsis that a speaker wants in order to cope with the situation that provoked the expletive. This very strong motivation no doubt accounts for the consistent historical failure of legislation and penalties against swearing. "Cursing intensifies emotional expressions in a manner that inoffensive words cannot achieve" (Jay 1992: 68; Jay 2000: 91, 137); we have more to say about this in Section 3.4.

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8. Pinker (2007) Ch. 7, offers an account of the neural mechanisms involved in cathartic swearing.

It should be said that auto-catharsis through swearing is regarded as a conventional way of violating a taboo: a convention that is not socially approved of, but one that is grudgingly excused by society. In both public and private, an individual's self-control will determine the choice of vocabulary used. Where a situation provokes dysphemism, a speaker can choose between using a full-blown swearword such as *Fuck!* or one of the many euphemistic disguises such as *Oh fiddle-faddle!*. The latter can be regarded as a euphemistic dysphemism. Here the locution (the form of words) is at variance with the reference and illocutionary point of the utterance (i.e., what the speaker is doing in making the utterance). The expressive exclamation *Shit!* typically expresses anger, frustration, or anguish, and is ordinarily a dysphemism. Its remodeled forms *Sugar!*, *Shoot!*, *Shivers!* or *Shucks!* are euphemisms – they are nothing but linguistic fig leaves for a thought that can be castigated as dysphemistic. As the following examples show, euphemism is not confined to expletives but occurs in other types of swearing as well.

(11) Oh **shucks** Tony could've made a gourmet. [ICE-AUS S1A-090:190]

(12) Oh **sugar**. We've burnt it. [ICE-AUS S1A-058:284]

(13) "Get **stuffed**," answered Witcharde. [ACE L07:1281]

(14) Yeah When I think drugs I just think you know **stuffed** up mind body everything, you know. [ICE-AUS S1A-053:159]

(15) This this advert **sucks**. [WSC DPC030:0170]

(16) you know I was going **gosh** don't you remember anybody [WSC DPC219:1455]

(17) These **screwed** up men then **screw** up women. [ICE-NZ W1A-002:135]

(18) which I'm having to redo cos one of [the] disks was **screwed**. [WSC DGZ079:0015]

These are prime examples of the censoring of language for the purpose of taboo avoidance (for *stuffed* and *screwed* understand *fucked*). A person may feel the inner urge to swear but at the same time not wish to appear overly coarse in their behaviour. Society recognizes the dilemma and provides an out – a conventionalised euphemistic dysphemism like *Oh shucks!* or *Oh sugar!* Such euphemistic dysphemisms exist to cause less face-loss or offence than an out-and-out dysphemism (although they will not always succeed in doing so).

Conversely there are locutions that are dysphemistic while the illocutionary point is euphemistic and these we label dysphemistic euphemisms. Where the situation provoking an emotional outburst is pleasing and there is no call for dysphemism, it is less likely that a taboo term will be used. However, there are also situations under which euphemistic uses of taboo terms are appropriate; for example, the well known 1999 West Australian Lotteries advertisement where the lottery winner uttered *Bullshit!*

upon hearing the good news. Similarly, in (19) the use of the offensive expression *Shit!* is at odds with the positive emotions that lurk behind it. Similar things can be said about (20–22) (which reveal the more social function of swearing that we discuss in Section 3.3).

(19) **SHIT** that's great. [WSC DPC331:1545]

(20) DAVEEE; crazy hockey **cunt**. Love him (Bugeja pc 2008)

(21) wookey is a gem love that **cunt** (Bugeja pc 2008)

(22) [laughs] you're a gross **cunt** [laughs] [WSC DPC251:0980]

3.2 Swearing as abuse or insult

The language of swearing can also have an abusive function. This includes curses, name-calling, any sort of derogatory comment directed towards others to insult or wound them. Speakers may also resort to swearwords to talk about the things that frustrate and annoy them, things that they disapprove of and wish to disparage, humiliate and degrade. Presumably there is no need to try to account for why people (deliberately) use insults like *You are a stupid little shit!* or dysphemistic epithets like *It's a pain in the arse*: it is because they do not like who they are addressing, or who or what they are talking about. To insult someone verbally is to abuse them by assailing them with contemptuous, perhaps insolent, language that may include an element of bragging. It is often directly addressed to the target as in *You arsehole, you're a fucking tight-assed cunt! Get fucked!*.

(23) show-off city **bitch** who thinks the sun shines out of her **arse**. [ICE-NZ W2F-017:40]

(24) "Well **bloody** get your **arses** in here. I'm not getting up." [WWC K49:151]

(25) the people on night fills are **arseholes** [WSC DPC311:0320]

(26) but he's a **ARSEHOLE** man. [WSC DPF076:0750]

(27) nice tight poncey jeans. I hope they cut your **balls** off. [WWC G48:095]

(28) one word to say to you Mollie **BOLLOCKS** [WSC DGB024:0800]

(29) yes it is a **bugger** [WSC DPF021:0320]

(30) going to get you **kidfucker**! We're gonna cut your **balls** off [ICE-NZ W1B-004:110]

(31) Like at the top there's all these **cocksuckers** all these rich you know selfish greedy power-hungry peoples and like they don't do anything for anyone except you know help their buddies. [ICE-AUS S1A-090:249]

(32) **Fuck** you NAME [ICE-AUS S1A-083:107]

(33) I can't believe this **shit** They're promoting this **fucking** ideal [look] [ICE-AUS S1A-026:45]

(34) little **shits** dressed me up as a **fucking** angel [WSC DPC162:2150]

(35) oh yeah the audience thought it was really **shit** and he you know … [WSC DPC118:1230]

(36) Outa Out of my way, **sucker**. [ICE-NZ W2B-012:31)

Example (27) shows how difficult it can be to draw clear lines between swearing and abuse. There is no doubt that this is abusive, but is it swearing? The expression *balls* is slang for a bawdy body part, but it is a fairly mild taboo term and not uncontroversially a swearword in this context. As an expletive expressing disbelief, *Balls!* is a clear instance of swearing because of the emotional outburst. Yet (27) is insulting language and is also aggressive. It would certainly be viewed by most people as "bad" language; we'll count it as swearing and leave it to the reader to agree or disagree.

The language of abuse is normally intended to wound the addressee or bring a third party into disrepute, or both. Typically, insults pick on a person's physical appearance and mental ability, character, behaviour, beliefs, and familial and social relations to degrade. Thus insults are sourced in the target's supposed ugliness, skin colour and/or complexion, over or undersize (too small, too short, too tall, too fat, too thin), perceived physical defects (squint, big nose, sagging breasts, deformed limb), slovenliness, dirtiness, smelliness, tartiness, stupidity, untruthfulness, unreliability, unpunctuality, incompetence, incontinence, greediness, meanness, sexual laxness or perversion, sexual persuasion, violence towards others (even self), ideological or religious persuasion, social or economic status, and social ineptitude. And additionally, supposed inadequacies on any of the grounds just listed among the target's family, friends and acquaintances.

Verbal insults can occur in all styles of language and may or may not contain swearwords; *you dag!* can be an expression of abuse, but it is not swearing. Abusive swearing can involve epithets derived from tabooed bodily organs (e.g., *asshole, prick*), bodily effluvia (e.g., *shit*), and sexual behaviours (e.g., *whore, fucker, poofter, arse-licker, dipshit, cock-sucker, wanker*). Maledictions often utilize images of sexual violation e.g., *I was stuffed; We got fucked/screwed; What a ball buster/breaker; He was just jerking us off*.

A dysphemistic epithet like *Short-arse!* picks on real physical characteristics that are treated as though they are abnormalities. Epithets like these merge into racist dysphemisms, and dysphemistic epithets based on behaviours that the speaker disapproves of, such as homosexuality. There are many imprecations and epithets invoking mental subnormality or derangement: *Dickhead! Fuckwit! Fuckhead! Shithead!*. These are doubly-dysphemistic in that they not only ascribe mental derangement, but do so using a dysphemistic locution which unscrambles as "your wits are (your head is)

fucked (deranged)". *Shithead!* has much the same meaning as *Shit for brains!* where the figure is made explicit.

3.3 The social function of swearing

Swearing can act as an in-group solidarity marker within a shared colloquial style – especially when directed against out-groupers. Social swearing was the most usual type of swearing in the corpora examined here. In the following handful of examples, we have provided more context so as to better reveal the intentions of the speakers.

(37) My my parents dressed me up in as an angel once and they said they had this big poster on my on my chest saying my looks belie me or something belie means I'm not really what I look w like I look sort of thing and I I mean I was only about ten I didn't know what the **fuck** I was wearing on my own chest you know I was going yeah funny eh and everyone was laughing I thought it was just funny you know and then then I found out later what it meant I'll never forget them little **shits** dressed me up as a **fucking** angel [laughs]. [WSC DPC162:2120-2150]

(38) S1: pray to baby Jesus open up your heart let god's love come pouring in let god's love shine down on you like it has me and Miss Suzanne over here.
S2: oh **fuck off**. [ICE-NZ S1A-006:85-6]

(39) Yeah and I didn't even know I was and I feel like I feel like I did real **shit** work you know I feel like I let everyone down again. [ICE-AUS S1A-022:251]

(40) like NAME walked off to the loo or something and come back and put mousse all over my head and we ended up in this big fight with like all this powder and **shit** all over the house and we're running around the place n doing laps of the flat so everyone's sort of looking out at us … [ICE-AUS S1A-045:103]

(41) Synge's got a sense of humour though; before he hot-footed it down the drive he hot wired the Porsche with a high tension lead from the engine to the petrol tank. It fair blew the **arse** off the flashy car. [WWC K80:157]

(42) Marketing strategies [for this uni project] are going to be interesting. Are you just choosing prostitution to be a smart **arse**? [WSC DPC164:1130]

Helen E. Ross (1960) examined swearing among a group of five male and three female British zoologists in the Norwegian Arctic during continuous daylight. Although the research was conducted some 50 years ago, it corresponds to what we believe to be the case today and in the antipodes. Ross writes:

> As the work entailed considerable interruption or loss of sleep, most members had good cause for becoming irritable and swearing. […]

> Each individual had his own vocabulary and habitual level of swearing and tended to keep to the same rank order in the group however much the total swearing level rose or fell.
>
> The words used were blasphemous rather than obscene, as is to be expected among the middle classes. Unlike the working classes, however, their use of obscene words was deliberate rather than habitual, and they took delight in using them in their correct biological sense. The heavier swearers used the more violent language.
>
> […] The amount of swearing increased noticeably when people were relaxed and happy, though it also increased under slight stress, it decreased when they were really annoyed or tired. In fact there seemed to be two types of swearing: "social" swearing and "annoyance" swearing. Social swearing was intended to be friendly and a sign of being "one of the gang"; it depended upon an audience for its effect, while annoyance swearing was a reaction to stress regardless of audience. Social swearing was by far the commoner. […] Under conditions of serious stress, there was silence. (Ross 1960: 480f)

Ashley Montagu (1968: 87–9) cites these findings by Ross and adds:

> [The expedition leader commented i]t was his own impression that under extreme stress fewer words are used, but that most them are swear words.
>
> Among Dr Ross' interesting findings was the fact that absence of an appreciative audience or the presence of nonswearers inhibited social swearing.
>
> …[Furthermore] those who swear are likely to suffer less from stress than those who do not swear. (*Ibid.*)

This reinforces the common observation that those who condemn swearing are "uptight". Ross (1960: 481) also confirms that social swearing typically diminishes if there are non-swearers present. Shared swearing patterns indicate a membership to the group. Like the "incorrect" language of non-standard grammar, taboo words fall outside what is good and proper, and they therefore help to define the gang. Thus we should extend this category to cover expressions of mateship and endearment like *fuckster*, and the epithet "cute little shit" in *Have you seen Edna's baby boy? He's a cute little shit isn't he?,* or "silly bugger" in *Joe's a silly bugger, he should never have married that woman.* As in other native varieties of English, this usage is routine in Australian and New Zealand and speakers often report that the more affectionate they feel towards someone, the more abusive the language can be towards that person. The conversational corpora examined here certainly bear this out. Examples like (20)–(22) and (43) are commonplace.

(43) **fuck** you're exaggerating **bitch** [laughs]. [WSC DPC163:2240]

Many younger speakers when in the company of good mates engage in what can only be described as a kind of ritual insult. Here are some examples from Australia.

(44) [Two urban working class teenage Australian Aboriginal females]
A: Gimme the smoke if you want it lit Eggbert.
B: Here shit-for-brains. [passes the cigarette]
A: Geez you're a fuckin' sook. I swear to God.
B: Shut up fucker ... (Allen 1987: 63)

(45) A: If I had a pussy like yours I'd take it to the cat's home and have it put down ...
B: If I had brains like yours I'd ask for a refund ...
A: Well, if I had tits like yours I'd sell them off for basket balls ... (Allen 1987: 62)

(46) [Two urban working class teenage Australian Aboriginal males]
A: Have you got a match?
B: Yeah, your prick and a jelly bean (Allen 1987: 66)

Ritual abuse of this nature is a competitive game, a kind of teasing. It utilizes the same categories as the kind of insults to outgroupers (or people cast as outgroupers) that we have just discussed. Yet it is not an attack on an enemy or someone who is an outsider despised or disparaged, but an expression of group solidarity. This clearly comes out in a *celebrity roast* "unmerciful mockery of a celebrity in his or her presence". As a display of upmanship, these displays use insults based on people's (supposed) sexual practices, age, appearance (body and clothes), smell, and domestic arrangements. Exactly these categories are also found in true insults, intended to wound, humiliate, and belittle. Thus true insults are subject to taboo and censoring.

As already mentioned, taboo terms make good offensive epithets and expletives for the same reason that they make good insults. At least one occasional reason for using taboo terms is to savour the hearer's adverse reaction. A related reason is for the speaker to flaunt his or her disrespect for social convention (this is presumably one motivation for writers of graffiti); though in the verbal stoushes of ritual abuse this inverts to a respect for the social convention of the game.

Over the years, the art of the ritual insult has gone by different names. The term *flyting* has been around since Anglo-Saxon times, and continued into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Late nineteenth century American cowboys engaged in *cussing contests*, where a saddle would be awarded to the most abusive participant. *The dozens* is the term used of the same behaviour among African-Americans today. The dozens is also called *bagging, capping, chopping, cracking, cutting, dissing, hiking, joning, joaning, joining, ranking, ribbing, serving, signifying, slipping, sounding*, *snapping*. Essentially *flyting, the dozens* and the like are (at best) a confrontation of wit, insight and upmanship in which people try to outdo each other in the richness of their rhetorical scorn by taunting another person with insults about them or their family in front of an audience.

If we make the solidarity function of ritual insult the criterion that distinguishes it from true insult, then we have to class what is sometimes called friendly banter as

ritual insult. It is marked by the use of normally abusive address forms or epithets which are uttered without animosity, which can be reciprocated without animus, and which typically indicate a bond of friendship.

(47) First youth: Hullo congenital idiot!
Second youth: Hullo, you priceless old ass
Damsel: I'd no idea you two knew each other so well!
(*Punch* cartoon quoted in Stern 1965: 323)

Here is a recent example from a chat room interchange (logged August 29, 2002, nationality of participants is unknown; for the uninitiated, "lol" = 'laughing out loud', ":-)" = 'smile', "j/k" = 'just kidding').

(48) ⟨mark⟩ didnt your motherboard come with any papers
⟨Darkman-X⟩ iz that that book that says A7V333 on it?
⟨[RaW]⟩ yes
⟨Darkman-X⟩ lol the one that i'm using to prop up my comp table?
⟨[RaW]⟩ probably
⟨Darkman-X⟩ whoops
⟨Darkman-X⟩ :-)
⟨Darkman-X⟩ j/k
⟨JoHn⟩ lol
⟨[RaW]⟩ yur supposed to use your school books for that dummy

As mentioned earlier, there is a psychological gain in letting off steam and expressing extreme emotion when expletives, forbidden words, automatically come tumbling out. It is not surprising therefore to find that many societies have public acts of ceremonial misbehaviour to function as a social safety valve. Flyting, playing the dozens, and other kinds of competitive ritual insulting appear to manifest this function. When players bait and tease each other, trying to outdo with insults, this represents a conventionalized breaking of taboo, a way to let off steam without harming themselves or others.

3.4 Stylistic functions of swearing

One aspect of the stylistic function is to use bad language to spice up what is being said: to make it more vivid and memorable than if orthophemism (straight-talking) had been used. An example is Paul Keating's alleged description of Australia as "the arse end of the world".[9] Another, not unrelated aspect, is to display an attitude of emotional intensity towards what is being said or referred to in the utterance as in (49).

(49) Welfare, my **arsehole**. [ACE F10:1953]

9. Alleged by Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1990.

Here are some examples of spicing up what is said.

(50) While his partner and twin brother Norman had given up trying to make it on his own and sworn never again to have anything to do with sheep ("groundlice" as he scathingly called them), "as long as his **arse** pointed south," Battler took his sheep onto the stockroutes for three hard years, and never lost faith in the return of the wool market. [ACE R09:1734]

(51) Don't phone me yet as I am having both my ears transplanted to my nuts so I can listen to you talk through your **arse**. [ACE S05:873]

(52) freeze your **balls** off in winter [ACE P13:2358]

(53) She put her hand on his **cock**. [ACE P13:2516]

(54) How in the **HELL** do they think they can change it by sitting on their **arses** doing nothing? [WSC DGI148:0305]

(55) Oh there was yeah those people over there
were still raging when i got back
n f s
n f s?
n f s
um oh true
[…]
I was on a totally different planet … actually
[laughs] trying to work out what n f s meant
yes [laughs]
[indecipherable]
n f s
is this what the dog's called
no
oh
no **fucking shit** [laughs]
I thought he was asking me. No no **fucking** sex? [laughs]
[groans] [WSC DPC162:0855]

(56) Bad luck boys – you blew your **arse**s this time. [ICE-NZ W2F-017:134]

(57) he also decided to get ripped to the **tits** [ICE-NZ W1B-004:116]

(58) Yeah we're hooking up with them in Adelaide we'll swab the decks finger each other in the **arses** y'know all that sorta **shit**. [ART ABCnat7]

(59) So I mean if England can do it [security checks] in less than six months and we're supposed to be under the umbrella of the uh British so to speak with the uh queen and such shouldn't we be running that way instead of doing the old uh head up Bush's **arse** thing and y'know doing it their way, so … [ART ABCnat8]

(60) On the wall of his office was a framed Elbert Hubbard homily, If You Work For A Man, For Heaven's Sake Be Loyal To Him, blasphemously known to the apprentices as the **bumsuckers'** oath . [ACE S07:1186]

(61) [The shop] was called "Beauty Spot". That's a **suckful** name. [ICE-NZ S1A-002:106]

(62) You've been **screwing** someone else. [WWC K41:216]

Example (62) is a pained accusation in which "screwing" is less forceful and more ladylike than *fucking* but displays more emotional intensity than *sleeping with*.

No discussion of antipodean swearing would be complete without some consideration of the so-called "great Australian adjective". Although barely a taboo word or a swearword in AusE and NZE, *bloody* still raises eyebrows in other parts of the English-speaking world. In February 2006, Tourism Australia launched an international tourism campaign with a television advertisement showing images of everyday day Australians set against a backdrop of famous landmarks concluding with the ockerish Australian invitation *So where the bloody hell are you?*[10] The advertisement was censored in North America and even managed to get itself banned from British TV. However, the then Minister for Tourism, Fran Bailey, persisted with the advertising campaign: "This is a great Australian adjective. It's plain speaking and friendly. It is our vernacular". The 2006 ban on the advert in the UK was not in keeping with a country responsible for the designer label *FCUK* and comedies like "Absolutely Fabulous" (http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/abfab/) and "Little Britain" (http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/littlebritain/). For British authorities to be squeamish about *bloody hell* was also not in keeping with their own research into attitudes to offensive language. Millwood-Hargrave (2000) was a joint study carried out by the Advertising Standard Authority, the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Broadcasting Standards Commission, and the Independent Television Commission; 1500 participants were asked to respond to the perceived "strength" of 28 swearwords: a mere 3% found *bloody* to be offensive.

The description "great Australian adjective" goes back to the mid 1800s. Alexander Marjoribanks (1847) wrote: "The word *bloody* is a favourite oath in that country. One man will tell you that he married a bloody young wife, another, a bloody old one, and a bushranger will call out, 'Stop, or I'll blow your bloody brains out' " (pp. 57f). The word made a deep impression on Mr Marjoribanks who also noted that a bullock driver he encountered had used the word *bloody* 27 times in 15 minutes. So astounded was Mr Marjoribanks, that he went on to further calculate that within a 150 year period that same bullock-driver would use *bloody* 18 200 000 times. A few

10. It can be viewed at ⟨http://www.wherethebloodyhellareyou.com/⟩.

years later the Sydney *Bulletin* referred to *bloody* as "the Australian adjective" and the name has stuck.

It is worth pointing out that the swearword *bloody* is not truly an adjective. Compare *the bloody skies* (ART) with *the blue skies*. While *bloody* appears to have the attributive function of an adjective that precedes the noun it modifies, it cannot normally have a complementary predicative function. We can alternate between *the blue skies* and *the skies are blue* but *the skies are bloody* is not a paraphrase for *the bloody skies*. (There are occasions when *It is just bloody* can be heard, but the predicative use is rare.) While most adjectives can be modified by intensifiers like *very* (e.g., *the very blue skies*), modifying *bloody* in *the very bloody skies* invokes the literal meaning (which then does make "bloody" an adjective).

In fact, *bloody* functions like an intensifier when it co-occurs with evaluative adjectives, as in *She's a bloody good root*; the same is true for *blasted, bleeding, sodding, fucking* as well as standard intensifiers like *very, awfully, exceedingly,* etc. Concatenated with nouns, adjectives, participles and verbs, *bloody* emphasizes the emotive, often urgent attachment to the speaker's speech act, as in the invented examples (63–69). In brackets we've supplied a typical interpretation of the emotive force that might be provided by these intensifying expletives. Later we give examples from the corpus.

(63) It's a bloody/fucking crocodile! [warning]

(64) It's a bloody/fucking picture! [nothing to make a fuss about]

(65) You've bloody/fucking broken it! [lamentation]

(66) But I'm going on bloody/fucking holiday! [exasperation at question asked]

(67) You're driving too bloody/fucking fast! [condemnation]

(68) This train is bloody/fucking late/slow. [complaint, exasperation]

(69) It's turned bloody/fucking red! [surprise]

As the corpus evidence confirms, the word *bloody* is still common in the antipodes. In the conversational data of the ICE-AUS it occurs 46 times in 22 933 sentences (20 per 10 000), in the ART corpus there are 13 occurrences of *bloody* in 20 375 sentences (6 per 10 000), and in the ICE-NZ corpus 43 times in 60 175 sentences (7 per 10 000). For comparison in COLT, the Corpus of London Teenage Language, there are 291 instances of *bloody* in 107 429 sentences (27 per 10 000). Which just goes to show that Australians (and New Zealanders) lag well behind Londoners (though the populations are not completely comparable).

Some annotated examples of *bloody* from the corpora. As example (70) illustrates, intensifying expletives such as *bloody* do not always convey an attitude of exasperation, disapproval, or whatever, but may simply be a marker of excitement or exuberance that serve to colour or spice up what is being said.

(70) Did you hear about the new Irish Airways they just had they were allowed to come into into Australia for the first time. Anyway they were flying into Perth n the conning tower there was a lotta cloud over the **bloody** skies n everything. N the conning tower called up he said Irish Airways Irish Airways he said you can't land yet we'll have to get you to circle round the airport so he says can you give me your height n position please. So the little Irish **bloody** pilot gets up n he says I'm five foot two n I'm sitting up the **bloody** front. [ART COMne2]

(71) Oh yeah Essie Essie's There's no point in Eddie taking her out because she's **bloody** too stuffed you know. She's an old duck. She doesn't want to **bloody** stuff around town all day. […] Yeah she went down there and **bloody** went all over the place. [ICE-AUS S1A-009:18]

(72) Yeah but when we eat a **bloody** meal ya **bloody** can hardly move when you've finished it. [ICE-AUS S1A-009:80]

(73) we're gonna **bloody** start doing that **bloody** extension to the house. [ICE-NZ S1A-052:65]

(74) She leaped at the opportunity, as she always did in such places, to go and have the total beauty treatment – face massage, manicure, pedicure, everything-**bloody**-cure! [ACE N01:58]

(75) Well uh I'd be straight down there I tell you right now. I I I'd be the first one down there. And I tell you I've b I've been around the mill a few b few few times I've got a young wife she's only thirty-four and as I said I'm sixty-**bloody**-four n n n no I mean I've brought up I got three other daughters. They've never had they've never got pregnant thank Christ n w they were brought up in the sixties n seventies and I taught them right from **bloody** wrong from the start and at least each and every one of them have had their children and got married and I'm really really proud of them and these little boys of mine are gunna be the same way around mate. [ART COMne2]

Bloody has a fine pedigree. There are two colliding origins – both respectable (see Allan and Burridge 1991: 130–1). One is basically the idea of blood. Quite simply, descriptions like *bloody battle* and *bloody murder* would have extended to other expressions and the colourful associations of bloodshed and murder would have made *bloody* a very suitable intensifying word. You might compare other graphic intensifiers like *awfully* and *horribly* that have similar violent origins. A second source involved the so-called *bloods*, the young aristocratic louts of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. At that time descriptions like *drunk as a blood* (i.e., *drunk as a* lord) meant that an expression like *bloody behaviour* would have had double significance – objectionable behaviour, something you might expect of a young blood, with the added force of the intensifier *bloody*.

It is also quite apparent that early on in its life *bloody* was not considered a bad word at all. In 1714 Jonathan Swift in a letter to a woman friend described the weather

as "bloody hot". And in later letters he talked about being "bloody sick", and the weather being "bloody cold" (Montague 1968: 245). The Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral (Dublin) seems to have been using *bloody* with the same freedom that gentlemen and ladies of good breeding would have used terms like *frightfully, vastly* or *dashed*. It could not have been an impolite term at that time.

And yet, two hundred years later, *bloody* had become such "a horrid word" that it was necessary to render it in print with asterisks. Eliza Doolittle's scandalous outburst in Act III of *Pygmalion* ("Walk! Not bloody likely", Shaw 1946: 78) provoked such an outrage that the press in 1914 could do no more than just hint at it. It became "the Unprintable Swearword", "the Word", "Shaw's Bold Bad Word". So why this fall from grace? There are at least two reasons. One is undoubtedly the bogus etymologies that derived the expression either from *By our lady,* an oath calling on the assistance of the Virgin Mary, or from *[God's] blood*. There is no evidence for either of these histories; what is more, *bloody* is not an independent expletive like these two expressions, but rather an intensifier. Yet, for some people there were blasphemous and profane implications and that was enough to condemn the word. Secondly, and probably more importantly, its lurid associations meant it was much used by the criminal classes. Captain Grose in his *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1795) describes it as "a favourite word used by thieves in swearing". He gives the example *bloody rascal*. This connection with the underworld explains its currency in the colonial slang of Australia and New Zealand.

4. Swearwords as discourse particles

There are people who use expletives and taboo epithets so frequently that one cannot persuade oneself they are auto-cathartic. Writing of the use of *fuck* by British soldiers in World War I, Brophy and Partridge had this to say:

> So common indeed [was *fuck*] in its adjectival form that after a short time the ear refused to acknowledge it and took in only the noun to which it was attached. ... Far from being an intensive to express strong emotion it became a merely conventional excrescence. By adding *-ing* and *-ingwell*, an adjective and adverb were formed and thrown into every sentence. It became so common that an effective way for the soldier to express emotion was to omit this word. Thus if a sergeant said, "Get your -ing rifles!" it was understood as a matter of routine. But if he said, "Get your rifles!" there was an immediate implication of emergency and danger. (Brophy & Partridge 1931: 16f.)

Where a taboo term such as *fuck* is bleached of its taboo quality, it loses all its standard force. The following example from AusE appears in the court case *Police v Butler*

(2003). The incident occurred outside the defendant's house at around 11.30 at night; he was intoxicated and is addressing the police and neighbours:

> "What the **fuck** are youse doing here. My **fuckin'** son had to get me out of bed. I can't believe youse are here. What the **fuck** are youse doing here?"
>
> "I **fuckin'** know what this is about. It's about that **fuckin'** gas bottle. They can get **fucked**, I'm not paying them **fucking** nothing. They can get me our **fuckin'** bottle back" [to the police about the neighbours]
>
> "We never had any **fuckin'** trouble till youse **fuckin'** moved here. Youse have **fuckin'** caused this trouble and called the **fuckin'** police on me" [to the neighbours]. (Police v Butler [2003] NSWLC 2 before Heilpern J, June 14, 2002)

Lashings of obscenities have also become an earmark of celebrated chef and restaurateur Gordon Ramsay, so much so that his television cooking series is called "The F-Word" (see ⟨http://www.channel4.com/food/on-tv/f-word⟩). Ramsay uses obscenities as discourse particles – where other people might use *like, well, I mean*, *you know*, and the like. This is not to suggest that such bleached swearwords are empty. Like other discourse particles, these expressions convey subtle nuances of meaning and can have complex effects on utterances. Wierzbicka (2002) describes the various meanings of *bloody* in AusE and shows how they provide important clues to Australian attitudes and values. Yet one must presume that under such circumstances the auto-cathartic value of both the expletives and the corresponding epithets is reduced, and that either alternative expressions will be invented or some other form of catharsis will be sought. We are put in mind of Shakespeare's aphorism:

> If all the year were playing holidays
> To sport would be as tedious as to work. (*Henry IV Pt.1* I.ii.192)

Indeed, there is evidence that swearing will diminish under very stressful circumstances, as suggested in the quote from Brophy and Partridge (1931) and the earlier ones from Ross (1960) and Montagu (1968).

5. The evolution of swearing patterns – what is offensive changes over time

> [I]f you were driving in your car, somebody cuts you up in your car, if they shout and call you a f-ing idiot, or a bloody idiot or whatever, fair enough. If they start putting your racial background into that, it's unacceptable. (Interview in Millwood-Hargrave 2000: 20)

The processing of the emotional components of language, such as swearwords, belongs to the limbic system. This is an older deeper part of the mammalian midbrain (about the size of a walnut) that adds emotional spice to the surrounding cerebral cortex – the part of the brain that is responsible for verbal reasoning, calculation, analytical

thinking, and rational thought. As yet, there are no laboratory or neuro-imaging studies that have conclusively identified the exact neuroanatomical sites where tabooed expressions are stored or that have evaluated specifically the neurological processing of obscenities, but the evidence seems overwhelming: taboo language is rooted deeply in human neural anatomy; it is hard-wired into the limbic systems of our brains (see Allan & Burridge 2006 Ch. 10). What motivates the actual expression is the sociocultural setting.

That which is taboo in a society will furnish the language with its swearwords and, because taboo is dynamic, there will always be shifts of idiom employing terms of opprobrium. The history of foul language in English has seen the sweeping transition from the religious to the secular in its patterns of swearing. Outside of Islam, blasphemous and religiously profane language is no longer considered offensive by a majority of speakers and has given way to more physically and sexually based modes of expression. In part, this reflects a natural bleaching process; it is a fact of lexical life that words wear out over time and nowhere is this more evident than in slang terms and swearwords. But this change also indicates a shift in the perception of what is taboo, concomitant with and perhaps triggered by the waning power of the Church and growing secularisation of English-speaking societies. Consider the once shocking nature of the expressions that underlie remodeled curiosities such as *drat* and *rats,* both shortened forms of *May God rot you* (your body, bones, and soul). Even in their full forms these would be mild curses today, but they were heinous at a time when most people believed in the fires of hell and eternal damnation. The 1600s saw the first organized form of linguistic censorship, specifically laws against profanity on the stage. The fine was a whopping ten pounds that could have bankrupted a theatre company of that time.[11] It is small wonder that irreverent language went into heavy disguise giving rise to the so-called "minced" or "dismembered" oaths such as *Zounds/zoons* "God's wounds"; *gadzooks* "God's hooks" (meaning "God's fingers" or "God's bones"); *slidikins* "God's little eyelids".

The same weakening is now evident in the physically and sexually based swearwords. Sex and bodily functions no longer provide the potent swearwords they once did. Our experience in Australia is that since the 1990s such words are frequently encountered in the public arena and there now seems to be wide acceptance of it. The designer label *FCUK* (French Connection, UK) appears prominently on billboards everywhere. When in a radio interview (April 1999), the then Premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett, used the insult *pricks* to describe a group of people who had flouted the restrictions that had been imposed during the gas crisis of that year, there was barely a ripple. In June 1999, the Australia Institute's executive director, Dr Clive Hamilton, was heard using *fuck* during an interview on the ABC's well-respected current affairs

11. See Hughes (1991) for a full historical account.

program *Four Corners*. This was the third occurrence of the word on a *Four Corners* program that year. Around the same time appeared a highly successful TV advertisement using *bugger* to sell the new Toyota Hilux utility truck (⟨http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Sn9L94YrNk⟩). This advertisement has now something of a cult following, especially in New Zealand. In Australia, the advertisement had followed hot on the heels of the West Australian Lotteries advertisement in which a winner says *Bullshit!* on being told he has won. On 19 July 2007, after renewed controversy over then Prime Minister's John Howard's alleged broken promise to hand over the Liberal leadership position to his Deputy Peter Costello, the Minister of Health and Ageing Tony Abbott said in an ABC Lateline interview "Not to put too fine a point on it, shit happens ... we just have to cope" (⟨http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5acfubEyZs⟩). Newspapers, which would once have resorted to coy abbreviations when reporting such events, often used the full words without warning. In February 1991 the Press Council of Australia in Adjudication No 479 defended the inclusion of four-letter expletives in an interview with actor Bryan Brown, published in the Arts Section of the *Weekend Australian* (4 August 1990). Mr JD Purvey wanted an apology for the use of "vile obscene language". Part of the determination reads:

> News Ltd responded at some length to Mr Purvey's objections, saying in essence that the use of expletives had gained wide acceptance and such profanities were no longer confined to the factory floor or dockside. It supported its argument with a Telegraph-Mirror article quoting a university language expert as saying that four-letter profanities were now widely used by both men and women. The Council believes, in this case, that the use of the word in full was justified. (Cited in Police v Butler 2003: 4)

In this regard, it is interesting that Roy Eccleston's recent article on swearing in the *Weekend Australian Magazine* (June 7–8, 2008, ⟨http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23819802-5012694,00.html⟩) used only abbreviations such as *f..k, c..t, the f-word* and *the c-word*. Clearly, there are still some people who are uncomfortable hearing these two particular swearwords. According to recent research conducted by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (2008), around 5% of the viewers surveyed gave bad language as something of concern. A Senate Committee was set up by the Liberal Senator Cory Bernardi to investigate the frequency and use of coarse and foul language in programs (http://www.refused-classification.com/Reviews.htm). It is reported that the Senate will reject the notion that some profanities should be decreed unacceptable because community standards evolve, and to codify them would be exceptionally difficult. And "according to an ACMA survey, only 3% of parents stopped children from watching programs because of bad language last year [2007], compared with 34% in 1995" (*The Age* Melbourne) June 19, 2008, ⟨http://www.theage.com.au/national/ramsays-not-going-to-fffade-away-20080618-2swm.html⟩.

The corpora examined in preparing this chapter show an abundance of examples of *bugger, bloody, fuck, fuck off, fucking*, and also *cunt*. Free-to-air television now frequently includes words such as *fuck, fuck off, fucking*, as well as *cunt*. "Foul language" regularly turns up in movies rated PG (parental guidance), and is no longer confined to MA (mature audiences) or R (restricted) rated movies. Clearly the censors who make the classifications do not find language such as we have been discussing a problem. In reality TV programs such as *Big Brother*, sitcoms like *Sex in the City*, and dramas such as *The Sopranos* these words are now commonplace. In Australia, the swearing and sex clearly had no damaging effect on the ratings Channel Nine received for its (2008) television drama series *Underbelly* based on the real events of the 1995–2004 gangland war in Melbourne (⟨http://www.underbellytv.com⟩). In Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth where it was shown (the Supreme Court suppressed it in Victoria), episode one of the series drew an average national audience of 1.32 million people. It was the most popular show of the night in these four mainland capitals and the third most-watched show on Australian screens overall. Moreover, this show screened at 8.30 pm, despite Australia's official 9.00 pm TV watershed, before which it is supposedly not permissible to show television programmes which have "adult content". In New Zealand the show started at 9.30 pm and although it was axed after only three episodes, it was reinstated due to a public outcry in its favour.

The social acceptance of swearing explains why obscene language charges in Australia and New Zealand are now typically dismissed, with courts ruling that words such as *fuck, shit,* and *cunt* are no longer "offensive". Earlier we quoted some of the defendant's words in the case *Police v Butler* (2003). Although the speaker was summonsed for using offensive language, the case was dismissed. Clearly the defendant did use language that might reasonably be described as "offensive" – so why is it not offensive in law (at least in the State of New South Wales, Australia)? The presiding magistrate, Heilpern J, referred to another case where a defendant was summonsed for saying to police trying to restrain him during a brawl, *Get fucked you cunts, I'm just trying to help my mates*. That case was heard by Yeldham J, who wrote:

> I determined by a consideration as best I could of community standards today and decisions on this kind of legislation over the last twenty years, that the words were not intrinsically "offensive" in the requisite legal sense of that word.

In *Police v. Butler*, Heilpern J referred to several additional cases and also to the extreme prevalence of words like *fuck* and *cunt* within the community, and their frequency on free-to-air television and in other media.

> Channel 9 has recently broadcast a show (Sex in the City) that includes the words "fuck off" and "fucking" as well as "cunt". The word was used on "The Panel" and

> the station only received two complaints. Recently, the *Sydney Morning Herald* revealed that "fuck" was used in the television program "The Sopranos" seventy-one times in one single episode (SMH April 29, 2000, 3s). Big Brother residents evidently cannot live without the word in every episode.

Heilpern J concluded that:

> This is a classic example of conduct which offends against the standards of good taste or good manners which is a breach of the rules of courtesy and runs contrary to accepted social rules – to use the words of Justice Kerr. It was ill-advised, rude, and improper conduct. Some people may be offended by such words, but I am not satisfied beyond a reasonable doubt that it is offensive within the meaning of the section. There is doubt in my mind that a reasonably tolerant and understanding and contemporary person in his or her reactions would be wounded or angered or outraged. Such a person would be more likely to view it as a regrettable but not uncommon part of living near people who drink to excess. I have no doubt that people would have been disturbed as a result of being awoken or distracted by the yelling and carry on, whatever the language used. I ask myself this question – what difference would it make to the reasonably tolerant person if swear words were used or not. I answer that there would be little difference indeed.

What is interesting about this legal decision and similar judgements is that they reflect the changes in social attitudes: taboos on various kinds of profanity have been relaxed. They have been replaced by racial and ethnic slurs, so that the new swear-words these days include expressions such as *faggot, dike, queer, dago, kike, kaffir, nigger, mick, wog, boong, abo* and so on. These reflect the new taboos in English-speaking societies. Since the 1980s, speakers have shown a growing apprehensiveness of how to talk to and about those perceived to be disadvantaged or oppressed. There has been a gradual establishment of legally recognised sanctions against what we have described as *-IST language* (Allan & Burridge 1991; 2006). These new taboos make sexist, racist, ageist, religionist, etc. language not only contextually dysphemistic, but also legally so. The *-IST* taboos have surpassed in significance irreligious profanity, blasphemy and sexual obscenity, against which laws have been relaxed. In the sporting arena, for example, players are occasionally sin-binned but never charged for foul language on the field, that is, unless the complaint involves race discrimination and vilification. In 1995 an Australian Rules football player Damian Monkhurst was disciplined for calling Aboriginal player, Michael Long, a "black cunt" or "black bastard" during a game. It was the racial abuse that triggered the furore and the incident gave rise to the AFL's "Rule 30: A Rule to Combat Racial and Religious Vilification" – a new code of conduct to apply both on and off the sporting oval: see ⟨http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AJHR/2000/18.html⟩. *-IST* language can be so provocative as to be found offensive in law.

6. Swearing is ever changing, but here to stay

> The whole history of swearing bears unequivocal testimony to the fact that legislation and punishments against swearing have only had the effect of driving it under the cloaca of those more noisome regions, where it has flourished and luxuriated with the ruddiness of the poppy's petals and blackness of the poppy's heart. It has never been successfully repressed. (Montagu 1968: 25)

Over the centuries, attempts to stamp out swearing have met with little to no success. Censorship and repression, whether they amount to full-blown sanctions or merely social niceties, seem only ever to provide a more fertile breeding ground for "dirty" words to thrive. One only has to look at the oxymoronic behaviour of the Victorian middle classes. When sex ceased to be talked about openly the sex trade and pornography flourished underground. During the Renaissance the very first organised form of linguistic censorship in England coincided with a flourishing of linguistic subterfuge in the form of the minced or dismembering oaths mentioned earlier such as *zounds* or *sfoot*.[12] Today we see the same mix of exuberance and restraint. Jonathon Green's (1996) collection of abuse terms reveals a flourishing lexicon of bigotry. His collection of largely racial slurs highlights waves of new arrivals furnishing a brand new litany of abuse. In grim irony, Green points out (p. 13) that the United States of America, the land of immigrants and aliens, tops his list of abusers; American coinages make up the largest proportion of dysphemistic language in his book. Work by Kevin Dunn, James Forrest and colleagues at the University of New South Wales shows that there is deep rooted racism in Australia against Muslims, Indigenous Australians, Jews, and people of Asian background (see e.g., Dunn 2003; Dunn, Forrest, Burnley et al. 2004). Unfortunately we do not at this time have sustained linguistic evidence of racist slurs arising from these attitudes and must leave it for another occasion. But it is worth mentioning the relative scarcity of -IST abuse terms such as *faggot, dike, queer, dago, kike, kaffir, nigger, mick, wog, boong, abo* in the spoken language corpora examined here – one example of *nigger*, one of *queer*, two of *faggot* and two of *abo*.

Finally, as the corpora reveal, swearing remains an important feature of the antipodean varieties of English. But just how uniquely Australian and New Zealander are the swearing patterns that we have described here? We need comparisons with the slang, swearing and terms of insult used in other varieties of English, especially BrE and AmE. Prima facie there is much that is common to the northern hemisphere and antipodean expressions used. It remains to be seen whether Australians and

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12. Hughes (1991) Ch. 5, describes the ingenious circumvention that such repression encourages. Ch. 7 also offers a splendid account of the schizoid behaviour of the Victorians – a rich exuberance of swearing went hand in hand with the decorum and censorship of the time.

New Zealanders really do live up to their popular image of having an unusually rich and creative "bad" language.

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