

# The "F Word" Among Bilingual Children in Their First Language

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## Abstract

A new phenomenon comes up early today that the F word or *fuck* has been becoming popular among children regardless of the setting. The study examines the children's perception towards the F word in two cities in East Java: Surabaya (a metropolitan city) and Jombang (a sub-urban city). To investigate F words' usage among fifty children eight – fourteen years old in these two places, a descriptive qualitative method was employed by conducting interviews and observation. The result shows six perceptions through the F word: impolite word, an angry expression, a friendly word, a joke, and an offensive word. The way in which they acquire the F word varies, as does the purpose and the function of the F word as a wave of anger, sarcasm, conformity, solidarity, and frustration.

**Keyword:** fuck, perception, acquired, function, children

## INTRODUCTION

*Fuck* abbreviates into the F word, one of the emphatic swearing words trendy in the western community. The origin of the F word was not exact. Still, it borrowed by low German, Flemish, Or Dutch in the fifteenth century to English (Sheidlower, n.d.) supported by Apley (1967, p. 4), said no exact etymology meaning about this word. *Fuck* is considered improper in any situation in communications within society. Politeness and appropriate language is an essential concept in society. It does not advise to swear in communication since it sounds terrible, unpleasant, and rude. Based on Jay (1999, p. 108) *fuck* is one of the offensive words that most use in America.

Interestingly enough, his work also confirms the old notion that males swear more than females. Jay's (1981, p. 63) study showed that the males pronounced *fuck* 379 times compared to the second-rated word *shit*, which children spoke just 224 times. *Fuck*, for females, ranked as the second most pronounced taboo word with 136 utterances behind *shit*, which children said 159 times.

While *fuck* is identical to the western community, Indonesian also has to swear words.

Still, it might be different in every region; in East Java Jancok and West Java, people use *Kehead*. However, the "F word" comes to Indonesia then being popular and adored by some people. It is not only used by adults but also children for various reasons to swear. This cross-culture phenomenon can lead to an interesting point that the "F word" is spoken by children and adolescents in Indonesia. It has become unnatural because Indonesian children are bound by language laws that make them say polite words. All languages are living or growing and changing all the time. The word *fuck* and others are restively new strains *motherfucker* are some obscene words that have been in use for centuries (Jay, 1981, p. 9). The use of swear words become famous as a language style to communicate among children for many reasons.

Most Indonesian citizens say they swear words to express their feelings. For instance, Sukanob-Nicolau (2016, 125) found six recognized emotions (pissed away, angry, surprised, irritated, shocked, and mad) that caused young learners to swear by others while talking. However, the use of *fuck* harms the user. Morality destroyed, according to Doherty, Berwick, & McGregor (2018, p. 158),

arguing the nature of classroom morality in Australia's Compulsory Education with the participant from the student in secondary classrooms in senior high school. The result shows that the purity of morality in the classroom was almost gone because of the swearing words. The similarity between the previous study and this study studies is the subject is teenagers.

Children and adolescents always curious want to try something new. According to Menyuk & Brisk (2005, p. 157), students typically turn 12 or 13 to 17 or 18 years old during these years. Many of these ages have accomplished the language acquisition task. These children have typically learned during their development, but certain aspects of the language have yet to be acquired due to the differences in their experience. The way children acquired *fuck* is questionable instead of *fuck* is a foreign language. Children's differences in their language skills may be because of individual differences in their skills. It may be because of differences in their language experience, the type of input they had. It can also be because of differences in education (Menyuk & Brisk, 2005, p. 143). These other words maybe those they learn in their various subject fields and acquire from many sources, namely reading, viewing films and televisions, and listening to music. The words they acquire may increase in length and abstractness (an increasing number of multi-syllabic words are acquired).

The purpose of children saying the F word also varieties; according to Jay (1981, p. 63), five functions are used to evaluated swear words; anger or frustration is combined because it is difficult to observe a mood solely based on language. The Descriptive-valuative classification uses to measure how speakers represented the camp's objects and events connotatively or denotatively—formal joke frames and comedy with taboo words places in the Joking category. Surprise reactions to the unexpected success, failure, or other activity were the fourth group. Last but not least, there was Sarcastic Irony or Insults.

Saying swear words such as *fuck* is possible for children; according to Howe (2012, p. 15), the range of age frequency used to say the "F word" is 0-14, which shows 8.91 percent, and 15-24 shows 15.89 percent. It shows that the increased number of groups that say the "F word" is affected by a particular speaker and is not characteristic of the age group, whereas, in the BAC, the speaker mainly was 13-17 years old 24.76 percent. Whereas means that the use of the "F word" is a common phenomenon in the Western.

The second study is done by Nicolau & Sukanto (2014, p. 72) about the male and female attitude towards swear words, a case study at Binus International School supported by Ljung (2011, p. 79) about swearing cross-cultural linguistic study. This journal discusses the words of swearing between male and female teenagers, especially to find out their frequently used terms of swearing and investigate whether they are bilingual or male or female who often use the word of swearing. The study found that students use both English and Indonesian swearing words; the word *fuck*, *anjing*, and *shit* is the most commonly used word of the student.

In a study done by Amrullah (2016, p. 11) English swear word in Indonesian Learners, the result shows four-word that most used by student universities are *fuck*, *bastard*, then *shit*, *god*. Other people in higher positions tend to swear more severely than people who do not have a higher position. It demonstrates that the social dimensions affect the occupation of swear words.

However, the previous study varies in terms of subject matter more from teens to adults in previous research, although this study concentrated on children and adolescents. Moreover, those previous studies are gender-focused. The "F word" often sounds weird to Indonesian people as a foreign language in Indonesia, but how can children know this word. This study offers some valuable details about the review of the retention of the "F word" used in children's first language. It refers to the way children have learned the "F word." The research focuses on children and young people aged 8-14

who typically spoke the "F word". Unlike the previous study, this study is focused only to *fuck* word. Children's perception through the F word is important because it is the way they think of it. This study will reveal the way children acquired the F word, also the function of the F word.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative method using an interview technique and observation technique. Fifty children subjects were involved: twenty-five of them are from Surabaya, which is a metropolitan city, and half of them from Jombang, the sub-urban city, to compare children responses. All informants were randomly selected—this study conducting by interview and observation. The first step is interviewing children in two places then observe the children's behavior. This study is the primary concern in children who say the F word.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**Children’s Perception toward the F Word**

This section contains the findings and discussion of a study on children who swear words in Surabaya and Jombang and their perception of *fuck*. Children with reasonable word interpretation and recognition skills will be taught how to deduce the meaning of new terms and the ideas and concepts they represent (Menyuk & Brisk, 2005, p. 158). There are five categorize of *fuck* perception through children in Surabaya and Jombang. Each child was asked how their perception of the F word. By asking “what do you know about *fuck* word?” and “what is your perception about that word” the researcher found that children perception through the *fuck* is similar to each other and classified in the *Table* below.

Table 1. Children Perception

	Surabaya	Jombang	Total
<b>Impolite</b>	7	12	19
<b>Angry</b>	6	5	11
<b>Expression</b>			
<b>Friendly</b>	3	0	3
<b>Jokes</b>	5	3	8
<b>Offensive Word</b>	4	5	9

**Impolite Word**

According to the children, the F word is impolite because it goes against Indonesian norms. Even though *fuck* is impolite, they keep saying it because they used to say that. Locher & Watts (2005, p. 15) argue that impolite cannot be described uniformly because impoliteness is dependent on the speaker-listener relationship, as described by children, even though they say it toward their friend, it is still impolite. Jombang student more agrees to say that *fuck* is impolite rather than Surabaya. The number of children in Surabaya said that it is polite if *fuck* say to a friend (same age group). Negative attitudes are related to unwanted status or identity, and positive attitudes relate to our desired and aspiring status and identity. Taboos are simply social sanctions imposed on behavior deemed distasteful or impolite in a particular social setting (Allan & Burrige, 2006, p. 238) related with Indonesian and Javanese in particular; this is regarded as the impolite word. In Indonesian culture, all bad words are inappropriate, and society would judge the speaker as a spoiled child.

**Angry Expression**

Children used to say “*fuck you*” or combine it with Javanese or Indonesian “*fuck raimu*” also “*kamu kok fuck gitu sih.*” Those words were spoken when they are angry. When people are angry, they will say things they would not usually say. It has become internalized in their minds and can be uttered on the spur of the moment (Amrullah, 2016, p. 3). They are spontaneously saying it when they are angry. In some cases, they get frustrated when playing with their friend and get lost. Both Surabaya and Jombang children have a similar perception of *fuck* as angry expressions.

**Friendliness**

Swear words serve various purposes in various social contexts, including friendliness and reliability among young people (Holmes, 2013, p. 434). As a friendly word *fuck* is say to a friend in the same age group. Children in Surabaya argued that *fuck* is equal with “bro,” in explanation, they say “Hi, *fuck*”, “*Fuck*, arepe nandi”, or “*Fuck* sumpa ga lucu, *fuck*” they comfortable with that word.

Furthermore, if their friend does not take offense, it is okay.

**Jokes**

The young respondents had a slightly different approach with adult people, as they were unreservedly arguing that the F word was incredibly well suited to jokes and humor. The young, in truth, did not take the words seriously (Hagen, 2013, p. 69). Long explanation from children that *fuck* is used as a joke in some situations. They said that *fuck* is similar to *jancok* with a perception that it suits with funny information. For instance, "hahaha *fuck*, lucu pol", "*jancok*, lucu *fuck*", also "funny as *fuck* bro". In that term, children usually say it in a funny situation with some sense of humor.

**Offensive Word**

In the past, the "F word" has already been classified as lewd, offensive, and profane, and this term has developed a large number of idioms, compounds, definitions, and tones (Hughes, 2010, p. 462). They use the term when they are insulted as well as when they are offended. When they are offended by their friends' words, they will say *fuck*, *motherfucker*, and they will also use *fuck* to insult others. For example, if they are upset because they lose the game, he will insult their friend by saying, "*fuck*, *bangsat ayo lek wani*." The study done by Johnson & Lewis (2010, p. 115) shows the result of applying a questionnaire to native speakers of different languages, indicating that swearing is regarded as offensive and disrespectful. The researcher found that children have discourteous and unkind behavior; they swear in any situation and sometimes rude to their friend. Surprisingly children in Jombang argued more than *fuck* is an offensive word than children in Surabaya.

**The Way Children Acquired the F word.**

The second question given to children is about "How can you know *fuck* word? How you acquired this word?" The children's responses are collected in Table 2.

Table 2. Sources of the F word

	Surabaya	Jombang	Total
Mass Media	9	12	21

Friends	5	7	12
Online	7	6	13
Games			
Family	3	0	3
Movie	1	0	1

The mass media become one of the primary means from which we obtain a large portion of our world information and much of our entertainment. The mass media are a potentially influential force in our culture because they have access to a large amount of knowledge. The mass media are a potentially powerful force in our culture because they have access to a large amount of information. This case is due in part to the media's ability to choose what constitutes news, which appears in newspapers and on television and radio, and, most significantly for linguists, how stories about people and events are told and the frameworks in which people appear and communicate (Conboy & White, 2004, p. 56).

According to Table 2, most children learn the F word from media such as YouTube, Tik Tok, and Instagram. It is not shocking, considering that today's children cannot be taken away from their smartphones, and they can operate devices at that age. Children in Surabaya and Jombang agreed that the media played a significant role in acquiring the F word. Social media such as Tik Tok, Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, and YouTube videos are among the media that influence children to swear (Friyanto & Ashadi, 2020, p. 408). YouTube is a video-sharing site that provides a range of videos and content designed specifically for children but not always watches that. If parents pay more attention to their children and protect them while using YouTube, they will prevent negative things from happening to them.

The most used social media are Youtube, Facebook, and Whatsapp that get more than 40% and followed by Instagram 38%, and Tik Tok 35%, all of which are most used by Indonesian children (Holilulloh & Youssef, 2020, p. 91). According to the children, they enjoyed watching adult content that included using the F word on occasion. The boys stated that they enjoy watching online game

competitions. They stream the game, but the streamer sometimes says stuff like *fuck*, *shit*, and *oh my god*, and they often read the comments that include the word *fuck*. It leads them to say it. Girls are more likely to watch Tik Tok and Instagram, and they watch whatever they want. For example, they watch children's shows and adult content and content from other countries, and they include text that contains the F word. The researcher found that children watch Tik Tok and Instagram relevant content. The relationship between using social media and swear words is social media as the place of using swear words (Triadi, 2017, p. 25). Tik Tok provides sounds that are unpleasant and improper for them. While Instagram treasures containing much information that is unfiltered for children. Tik Tok and Instagram are both built for adults.

Children can learn everything from the playground while play with their friends inside or outside the home (Holilulloh & Youssef, 2020). A playground is a spot where children used to go to have fun. Surabaya and Jombang have the same outcome in receiving the F word. *Fuck* is what they heard from other friends who used to play with them. They explain that they follow the trends, which is saying *fuck* is regular for them. Because some of their friends said it, they continue to say it next. Games have become popular in children, such as Free Fire, PUBG, and Mobile Legends. They got the F word in two separate ways: online and offline, related to the friend.

Nowadays, players can interact with one another through the game, either verbally or in writing. When a player enables the microphone, they can hear their friends. They admit that their friends often says things such as "*fuck anjing*" or "*fuck kalah*." That is in line with Munawir (2019, p. 341); children use abusive language because of their playmates' influence. It leads to them mocking their opponent by saying *fuck*. A new term prevalent in children is "Mabar", also known as "Main Bareng", which is a common word for

children; this activity is about going to a *Warung Kopi* (coffee bar) and playing games together. In this case, a playground that used to take place in the yard or park move to *Warung kopi*. Children used to say abusive language when playing and normalize it as a habit (Munawir, 2019, p. 340). In the coffee shop, they are playing together or *Mabar* with their group and then free to say every play parents' control.

Another aspect is the family, which plays a vital role in the development of children. According to Beers-Fägersten (2012, p. 134), the family term is the least swearing place. The term "family" was consistently interpreted as siblings. Those three Surabaya children primarily depend on their older sibling, either a brother or a sister. Their older sibling is mostly in senior high school, and they say it in the house sometimes, and the F word is often directed at them. If their brother is angry with them, they will spontaneously say *fuck*. Another instance is when their older sibling was playing a game, and they were enraged by their older sibling's use of the F word. Brother was the top contributor for the young learners to learn how to swear. Children are easily influenced by what they see and hear, especially in their home environment.

The last is the movie related to the previous children watching movies with their older siblings. According to the media, movies were listed as the most significant contributory factors (TV, books, YouTube, movies, and the internet are included) (Suganob-Nicolau, 2016, p. 128). Since they have heard and seen *fuck* a million times, they repeat it. They watched Western movies, similar to the Netflix series, in which the F word was often used. The series is made for 17+, but they keep watching it.

**The function of the F word**

The word 'function' refers to how swearing is used. The researcher found seven functions that children use.

Table 3. The function of the F Word

Function						Total
Anger	Jokes	Frustration	Conformity	Solidarity	Sarcasm	

21	10	8	5	3	3	50
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Table 4. Diverse Function of *Fuck*

	Negative Connotation	Positive Connotation
<b>Towards Person</b>	<p><b>Anger</b>                      What the <i>fuck</i></p> <p><b>Sarcasm</b>  <i>Fuck</i>, gila kamu? ( <i>Fuck</i>, are you crazy)</p>	<p><b>Conformity</b>                      Yeah, <i>fuck</i></p> <p><b>Solidarity</b>                      Hi <i>fuck</i>, nandi? (Hi <i>fuck</i>, where are you going?)</p>
<b>Towards Oneself</b>	<p><b>Frustration</b>  <i>Fuck</i>, nggak bisa! ( <i>Fuck</i>, why cannot)</p>	<p><b>Jokes</b>                      Haha, lucu <i>fuck</i> (Haha, funny <i>fuck</i>)</p>

Variations of the F word's function that children use to make sense since they have many perceptions of the F word. anger became the most significant indicator of all other functions, with children stating that "I say *fash* when I am mad, and I feel better." "I say it loudly to relieve my anxiety" another said. According to the findings, this is in agreement with Ljung (2011, p. 79) swearing can help people alleviate stress, frustration, and tension, according to the findings as children express their indignation by saying the F word. Children explain that frustration and the F word's function are their favorite thing when they lose; they felt angry and frustrated; they say the F word.

This function of jokes and solidarity has no negative connotations. Jay (1999, p. 93) argued that curse words cause a joking insult to injure the recipient a little more than no curse words, providing an emotional effect for jokes that affect audiences so that no curse words but it is not extending children. For joking, the children use *fuck* with their close friends who are well aware of their habit. "Sometimes I say *fuck* with my friend because we have good relationships as friendship," some children said. There is no negative feeling in the use of function in joking because it already becomes a habit (Friyanto & Ashadi, 2020, p. 411). Children usually play with grouping when they have good solidarity. It keeps them connected to each other even though use *fuck*, which is categorize as an offensive word. Conformity factor

makes them say *fuck* they show their feeling, which comforts with some situations. For instance, they come to a new place than say, "*fuck*, it is beautiful". This proves that children say *fuck* without expressing derogatory feelings or insulting their peers' pride. It is all for fun and shows a close friendship in otherwise sarcasm that has a negative connotation. It is hard to identify that the children being sarcastic to the other, but children precisely speak it. Sometimes they say it for insulting their friend because feeling uncomfortable.

#### CONCLUSION

The F word is a word that has a negative connotation and is usually said by adult people. Furthermore, there is some popular F word spoken by children and teenagers in Indonesia. It is brutal for children to understand fully, but they perceive the F word as a foreign language. There are five different ways that children perceive the F word: as an impolite word, as an angry expression, as a friendly word, as a joke, and as an offensive word. Children strive to make sense of what they hear and see before applying it to their everyday lives. There are several ways to learn the f term, which is via the media, which has three uses. YouTube, Tik Tok, and Instagram are some of the most popular social media platforms. Friends, video games, relatives, and movies come next. Children explain there are six purposes to say *fuck* with some

situations. Anger, sarcasm, conformity, solidarity, frustration, and jokes are the F word's function.

Furthermore, this study reveals that children use the F word more often. This study's results can then be used to guide parents to see how their children use language. As a result, teachers and parents should educate children about the negative consequences of swearing in society to communicate with others in positive language. Furthermore, family members (siblings, fathers, and mothers) should watch and filter what they say while children play around.

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