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Assessing the Admissibility of Arabic Swearwords in Sudanese Linguistic Culture

ABSTRACT. In terms of ethnic and cultural identity, Sudan is frequently grouped together with other Arab countries. Yet, Sudan is a highly distinctive civilization, with cultural values and traditions that often diverge significantly from those of the general Arab world. This makes studies based on Sudanese linguistic culture particularly worthwhile. The paper addresses the problems associated with determining levels of offensiveness (based on the Arabic within the Sudanese linguistic culture). As the direct determination of word offensiveness remains a challenging task, this study aims to assess the potential for some Arabic lexemes by determining their admissibility for males and females in a particular dialect. To achieve this objective, a survey was conducted among native speakers of Sudanese Arabic. The initial selection of 15 swear words was then subjected to an examination to determine their admissibility for different communicators in three communicative situations. The findings of the study demonstrated that in Sudanese Arabic linguoculture, there is a significant difference in the perceptions of acceptability of the same word by men and women, and this discrepancy has the potential to serve as a conflictogenic factor. In addition to the significance of invective research, the study indicated that a larger scale of research would necessitate the utilization of more effective methods.

KEYWORDS: invective, swearwords, offensiveness, admissibility, Arabic, Sudanese, taboo

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Оценка допустимости арабских инвектив в суданской лингвокультуре

АННОТАЦИЯ. В этнокультурном отношении Судан часто относят в одну категорию с другими арабскими странами, однако в действительности он представляет собой достаточно самобытную цивилизацию, культурные ценности и обычаи которой порой значительно не совпадают с общеарабскими, что придает изучению лингвокультуры Судана особое значение. В статье рассматривается проблематика, связанная с определением степени оскорбительности инвективных лексем (на материале арабского языка в рамках суданской лингвокультуры). Данная проблема особенно актуальна для арабского языка, поскольку его инвективные единицы, несмотря на их широкое использование в живой речи, остаются практически неизученными, что сочетается с высокой степенью региональной вариативности разговорного арабского языка и существованием традиционной гендерной дифференциации в арабских обществах. Ввиду сложности определения постоянного уровня оскорбительности слова в настоящей работе предпринята попытка оценить инвективный потенциал некоторых арабских лексем через установление их допустимости в речи. Для достижения данной цели проведен опрос носителей суданского диалекта арабского языка, в ходе которого сначала были отобраны 15 бранных слов, а затем дана оценка их допустимости для различных коммуникантов в условиях трех коммуникативных ситуаций. Результаты исследования показали, что в суданской арабской лингвокультуре представление мужчин и женщин о допустимости одного и того же слова может значительно отличаться, причем иногда такое несовпадение способно послужить конфликтогенным фактором. Вместе с тем полученный опыт показал, что исследование в расширенных масштабах потребует использования более эффективных методов.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: инвектива, ругательства, оскорбительность, допустимость, арабский язык, Судан, табу

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INTRODUCTION

The assessment of offensiveness represents a recognized problem within the field of linguistics. The primary challenge associated with this assessment is that the perceived offensiveness of an utterance can vary significantly depending on the context in which it is used. A considerable number of studies have focused on the detection and definition of the degree of offensiveness of social media posts and comments (Waseem, Hovy 2016; Davidson et al. 2017; Hada et al. 2021) by approaching such content as material with appropriate context. Typically, such research relies on anonymous annotations and a computational model that benefits from the use of a large corpus. This enables the calculation of typical results, which may be beneficial for social media algorithms but may also appear to be overly general for genuine communication. Furthermore, these studies frequently address the issue of so-called hate speech and related categories that are not clearly delineated (Founta et al. 2018; Hada et al. 2021).

An alternative approach to the study of offensive language is to examine swear words as the basic units that convey an offensive meaning (Allen, Burridge 2006; Hughes 2006; McEnery 2006; Ljung 2011). Such an approach is also employed by media regulators to evaluate the suitability of language in broadcasting (What not to swear… 2009; Attitudes to potentially… 2016). In terms of assessing the invective power, this method primarily involves distinguishing between words that are and are not permitted for public use, i. e., identifying their taboo status. While this approach is relatively straightforward, it does have its own inherent limitations. The primary concern is the selection of the appropriate criterion for determining taboo status (Pallades 2022).

The categorization of a word as either taboo or non-taboo appears to be of critical importance in legal contexts, where the mere utterance of obscene words is frequently regarded as illegal (Feinberg 1983). However, in the case of protecting honor and dignity, a binary approach may not be sufficient, necessitating a more detailed scale (Golev 1999; Kuznetsov et al. 2006).

Dealing with this issue, some researchers propose relying on lexicographic sources for the determination of offensiveness, which includes taking into account the presence or absence of a word in dictionaries of general vocabulary, along with "stylistic labels 'obscene', 'vulgar', 'offensive', 'slang' in dictionaries of substandard vocabulary" and "affiliation of the word in the literal sense to sexual or excretory vocabulary" (Izotova et al. 2016: 96–97). However, this approach does not provide the necessary specificity for a comprehensive assessment of invectiveness, as dictionary labels are too vague and approximate and do not give an idea of the degree of rudeness, moreover, their use is often determined solely by the will of the dictionary compiler. This, together with the fact that the philological dictionary is not intended to perform a legal function, was pointed out by N. D. Golev, who also suggested another solution to the problem, namely the development of an invectiveness scale, which

could include such categories as "neutral — rude — offensive" (Golev 1999: 43). However, such a rigid classification of words contravenes the very nature of lexemes as semantic containers, which determines their capacity to convey disparate meanings and thus elicit varying degrees of offensiveness in different discourses. This reinforces the necessity to consider context. Moreover, some scholars highlight the distinction between offensiveness and pejorative power, the latter of which is closely linked to the speaker's intention (Liu 2021).

This problem of assessing offensiveness is particularly evident in Arabic. There are few studies devoted to swearing and taboo in Arabic, and some of them address taboo in very broad terms that may include such uncertain taboo categories as "unpleasant matters" (Al-Khatib 1995: 447) or define "words that refer to political figures or the political system" as "unmentionable" (Qanbar 2011: 92). Others list all forbidden topics in Arabic without distinguishing between unwelcome and offensive words (Salih 2013), or deal specifically with swear words without distinguishing between taboo and tolerable units[1]. In one of the most recent studies, Salih and Raoof point out that Iraqi Arabic speakers swear extensively (Salih, Raoof 2022), but the authors assess the quantity rather than the quality (i. e. offensiveness) of lexemes, and moreover, the scope of the study is very limited, making their conclusions questionable. At the same time, when studying the peculiarities of the linguistic behavior of Arabophones, it must always be taken into account that their belonging to a particular national/regional linguistic culture is a crucial parameter, since differences in the assessment of the acceptable/unacceptable can vary considerably between speakers of different Arabic dialects.

It is also important to acknowledge that there are notable differences in linguistic style between men and women. Researchers of Western societies have highlighted this phenomenon, pointing to the indirectness, uncertainty and vagueness as defining characteristics of women's linguistic behavior (Lakoff 1973; Bailey, Timm 1976; Holmes 1985; 2013). Furthermore, women have been found to exhibit conservatism and a tendency to avoid direct confrontation (Klerk 1991; Eckert, McConnell-Ginet 2003; Hall et al. 2021). Studies of gender differentiation in the speech of native Arabic speakers have revealed that women tend to utilize more normative language (Al-Wer 2014; Almathkuri 2021), evade direct disagreement and, in general, engage in more cooperative speech behavior than men (Al-Harahsheh 2014). Nevertheless, Arab women do not entirely eschew the use of profanity and may even employ it in public (Abdel-Raheem 2022). This underscores the continued relevance of investigating attitudes towards the offensiveness of swear words among male and female Arabic speakers.

Thus, it can be argued that offensiveness is a complex phenomenon, dependent on discourse on the one hand and an integral feature of specific

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[1] Al-Manšāwī ʻA. *Qāmūs Aš-šatāʾim Al-miṣriyya* [Dictionary of Egyptian Swearing]. Cairo: Muʾassasat Ibdāʻ Lit-tarğama wa An-našr wa At-tawzīʻ Publ., 2017, 359 p. (In Arabic).

vocabulary on the other. This makes it difficult to assess. Nevertheless, it seems possible and reasonable to determine not the offensiveness itself, but the potential of the emotional impact of invectives on communicants by assessing the tolerance of society towards them, since a high level of offensiveness obviously affects word acceptability by reducing it. Furthermore, we posit that this latter characteristic is less context-dependent, as it is determined more by the form of a word than by the meaning it carries in particular circumstances. Consequently, an assessment of word acceptability seems a more feasible approach.

METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

The initial step was to compile a list of Arabic lexical units that were to be evaluated for their invective potential. Arabic invectives are mostly employed in oral discourse and are notably absent from written texts. Consequently, the interviewing of native speakers was employed as a method for the selection of words for subsequent evaluation. The survey was conducted with 16 Sudanese individuals, comprising both male and female participants. The sample included eight men and eight women with a higher education background, aged between 18 and 40.

The first challenge encountered during the survey was the reluctance of the respondents to provide candid responses to questions pertaining to the use of profanity and particularly obscene vocabulary. Some native speakers were unwilling to participate in the survey, citing religious objections and embarrassment. This illustrates the influence of traditional taboos in Sudanese society. However, those who agreed to be interviewed demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of common Arabic swear words and were also able to provide examples of local lexemes related to the Sudanese idiom.

Participants were asked to name the maximum number of swear words, then the results were summarized and the most frequently repeated units were selected. They became نيك *nīk* ‘fuck’, كس *kuss* ‘cunt’, زب *zubb* ‘dick’, طيز *ṭīz* ‘arse’, لوطي *lūṭiyy* ‘faggot’, شرموطة *šarmūṭa* ‘whore’, منيوك *manyūk* ‘fucked, faggot’, خراء *ḫarā’* ‘shit’, قحبة *qaḥba* ‘whore’, قواد *qawwād* ‘pimp’, حمار *ḥimār* ‘donkey’, كلب *kalb* ‘dog’, أحمق *’aḥmaq* ‘idiot’. Two Sudanese lexical units were added to the survey in order to determine the difference in the invective impact of common Arabic and region-specific words: قنيطة *gnīṭa* ‘arse’ and كديانة *kudyāna* ‘faggot’.

The most straightforward method for evaluating the acceptability of a given situation would be to complete a form with a graded scale (e. g. ranging from one to ten) as has been done in numerous similar studies (Dewaele 2004; Jay, Janschewitz 2008; Legroski 2018). A best-worst scaling method (Louviere et al. 2015), which is considered to be more reliable at a fine-grained level (Kiritchenko, Mohammad 2017), can also be employed. However, it is our contention that when confronted with the necessity of analyzing their

own linguistic behavior, particularly in a context as specific as that of verbal aggression, respondents (especially Sudanese) are not always able to evaluate it impartially. This can have a significant impact on the results, introducing a degree of ambiguity that may affect the reliability of the findings. This resulted in the use of binary questions with the most limited choice (yes or no answer) to simplify the respondents' decision in each case, with this simplification compensated for by increasing the number of situations in which the word was considered.

In order to obtain the characteristics of the selected invectives, the respondents were asked three questions for each word:

1. In communication with whom is it appropriate/permissible for you to use this word?

2. You are talking to a person in the presence of a third party not involved in the conversation. In whose presence is it appropriate to use this word?

3. For whom do you find it appropriate/permissible to use this word in a conversation with you?

The respondents thus characterized the use of swearwords in different communicative situations: in the first and second cases, they acted as speakers, assessing the possible risks of using swearwords and predicting the reaction of other communicators; in the third case, their role was to assess their own feelings from the position of an addressee.

In other words, the respondents did not evaluate the abstract permissibility of using a word, but they made a choice similar to the one they make every day — to use or not a particular word in a particular communicative situation, which in this study was defined by the questions and the profile of the participants in the conversation. In order to specify the latter, the respondents filled in a table in which the communicators were represented by four main categories, which were further specified by additional characteristics. The main categories included the division of communicants by gender and by friend/stranger status, a total of four categories:

1. Friend (male);
2. Friend (female);
3. Stranger (male);
4. Stranger (female).

Furthermore, respondents were required to indicate the age (less than 14, 14–50, over 50), education (no education, secondary education, higher education) and social class (poor, middle class, rich) of the possible listener/speaker in order to obtain a more precise profile of an acceptable interlocutor.

Thus, there were three questions and 36 fields (4 main categories each with 9 characteristics) to be filled in for each invective unit to find out with whom it is permissible to use this unit. In each box, the respondent could put a '+' sign if it was acceptable to use an insult with such a hearer/speaker, and a '–' sign if it was unacceptable.

MEASURES AND RESULTS

In order to interpret the results obtained during the survey, an acceptability rating has been developed, which is figured for each word. It is calculated by summing up all the 'pluses' received by the lexical unit across three questions, categorized and aggregated. Subsequently, the total number of 'pluses' received by the word is divided by the maximum number of 'pluses' possible. The final result is given as a percentage. Consequently, the rating of a given word may range from 0 to 100 %.

The maximum possible score of 100 % is taken as *absolute permissibility*, which means that a word that has received such a score is considered acceptable in use without any restrictions. A word that has not received a single 'plus' is considered *absolutely unacceptable*. Obviously, extreme values are needed primarily to set the boundaries, since it is difficult to talk seriously about the *absolute permissibility* of any word, and vice versa. Eventually, the admissibility rating solves the problem of determining the offensive potential of a lexical unit, its ability to affect the emotional sphere of the communicators. The higher the admissibility, the weaker the taboo and the lower the invective power of a word.

The results of the survey largely align with the anticipated outcomes. The words أحمق *'aḥmaq* 'idiot', حمار *ḥimār* 'donkey', كلب *kalb* 'dog' received the highest ratings (73.12, 71.24 and 68.8 % respectively), meaning that they can be used with a relatively wide range of communicators. Despite the lower tendency to swear among women, the lexeme أحمق *'aḥmaq* 'idiot' received a significantly higher acceptance rating among female respondents (the acceptance of أحمق *'aḥmaq* 'idiot' among women is 79 %, among men — 68 %), while كلب *kalb* 'dog' is considered less acceptable by them than by male participants (66.6 versus 71 %), and حمار *ḥimār* 'donkey' is equally acceptable to both genders — 71 %.

Upon examination of these words, the following pattern emerges:

generally, swearing is less acceptable in conversations with strangers, regardless communicant's role as speaker/hearer;

women's behavior aligns with the general picture, as they use swear words more often with friends of the same sex and slightly less often with male friends;

men pay more attention to the gender of the interlocutor, and while it is also more acceptable for them to use swearwords with friends of the same gender, and unknown women are the least suitable company for swearing, men feel freer to swear when talking to a male stranger than to a female friend.

It is also noteworthy that, irrespective of gender and the status of the relationship between the speakers, these words are most acceptable to those in the 14–50 age bracket. This also applies to the behavior of the respondents as speakers and listeners. In other words, Sudanese speakers are not unduly

reticent to utilize these lexemes in discourse with interlocutors of a similar age (all respondents belong to the 14–50 age group), while simultaneously demonstrating tolerance of words from this cohort. The situation for young people (under 14) is somewhat different. While respondents are only slightly more restrictive in using the above-mentioned, relatively socially acceptable swear words when communicating with children, they are much less willing to hear them from children. In contrast, for older people, the situation is reversed: respondents are the most restrictive when it comes to swearing, while they are usually more accepting of swearing from people over 50 than from children.

The word خراء *ẖarā'* 'shit' ranks fourth in terms of acceptability in our study, with an overall rating of 54.98 %. This lexeme (like أحمق *'aḥmaq* 'idiot') has a higher rating for female respondents — 57 % compared to 53 % for men. The distribution by main group is characterized by relative uniformity, the pattern of attitudes towards admissibility described above. However, it is worth noting that women, regardless of their gender, are significantly more embarrassed to use this lexeme when talking to older people, as the female admissibility rating for using the word in conversation with people over 50 is around 19 %.

The word قحبة *qaḥba* 'whore' also has a relatively close admissibility rating for men and women — 10 and 8 % respectively. The lexeme is perceived as one of the rudest: for men, it has the lowest rating of all the invectives examined; at the same time, for women, its result is average in terms of admissibility. The pattern for male communicators is markedly heterogeneous, with acceptability varying from 21 % when communicating with male friends to complete unacceptability (0 %) when the interlocutor is an unknown woman. In contrast, women's perception of this swear word is more uniform, ranging from 13 % acceptability when communicating with friends to 6 % when communicating with strangers. Furthermore, they also demonstrate zero tolerance for the word when strangers use it themselves (Table 1).

Table 1

ADMISSIBILITY RATING FOR THE WORDS أحمق *'AḤMAQ* 'IDIOT', حمار *ḤIMĀR* 'DONKEY', كلب *KALB* 'DOG', خراء *ẖARĀ'* 'SHIT' AND قحبة *QAḤBA* 'WHORE' DEPENDING ON INTERLOCUTOR CATEGORY

	Men's assessment, %				**Women's assessment, %**			
	Male Friends	**Female Friends**	**Male Strangers**	**Female Strangers**	**Male Friends**	**Female Friends**	**Male Strangers**	**Female Strangers**
أحمق *'aḥmaq* 'idiot'	78.24	66.20	68.06	58.80	89.35	89.35	63.43	72.22
حمار *ḥimār* 'donkey'	83.80	69.91	71.30	59.26	81.02	82.87	58.80	62.96

End of Table 1

	Men's assessment, %				Women's assessment, %			
	Male Friends	**Female Friends**	**Male Strangers**	**Female Strangers**	**Male Friends**	**Female Friends**	**Male Strangers**	**Female Strangers**
كلب *kalb* 'dog'	83.80	68.98	75.46	56.02	81.48	84.72	48.15	52.31
خراء *ḫarā'* 'shit'	67.13	52.31	51.39	42.59	68.06	73.61	40.28	44.44
قحبة *qaḥba* 'whore'	20.83	7.87	10.65	0.46	8.80	12.96	5.56	6.02

The other invectives analyzed exhibited a significantly more heterogeneous admissibility rating, with notable gender-based differences.

The word لوطي *lūṭiyy* 'faggot' received a relatively high rating (38 %) among male respondents. In communication with same-sex interlocutors, men do not seriously limit themselves when using the lexeme لوطي *lūṭiyy* 'faggot' — the acceptability rating for friends is 68.5 %, for strangers 46 %. When the other person is a woman, men feel much more constrained — acceptability is 26 % for female acquaintances, 11 % for strangers. In the case of women, however, لوطي *lūṭiyy* 'faggot' is a serious taboo (7.5 %), and they try to avoid using it altogether when speaking to interlocutors, making an exception only for men they know. As witnesses (situation 2), women also admit their friends and strangers. Yet, in the presence of unknown men, the admissibility of the lexeme is zero. Women are also intolerant of hearing لوطي *lūṭiyy* 'faggot' from strangers, regardless of their gender, while they are relatively tolerant of the word from acquaintances, mostly men — 18 % for male friends versus 12.5 % for female ones.

The lexemes كس *kuss* 'cunt' and شرموطة *šarmūṭa* 'whore' received an acceptability rating of 22 %. Despite a noticeable difference in acceptability for men and women, the gap is not that significant (the acceptability of كس *kuss* 'cunt' — 27 % for men, 17 % for women, for شرموطة *šarmūṭa* 'whore' — 27 and 16 % respectively). The words are perceived with relative tolerance by both sexes. In the case of كس *kuss* 'cunt', the pattern of permissibility is standard — men are more likely to use this invective in communication with acquaintances of the same sex (52 %), they use it less freely with male strangers (32 %), and their willingness to hear it from strangers is lower than their willingness to use it themselves (28 % for the third situation versus 35 % for the first and second). In the case of a known woman as the interlocutor, men consider the word كس *kuss* 'cunt' less acceptable (21 %), using it with female strangers is taboo (1 %). For women, the use of this swear word seems relatively appropriate only with

female friends (rating of 40 %), about half as much as with male friends (18 %). It appears to be easier for women to hear the word than to pronounce it themselves (the average rating for the first and second situations is 15 %, for the third — 22 %). In conversation with strangers of both sexes, women find the word كس *kuss* 'cunt' completely unacceptable (rating less than 1 %).

With a similar overall rating, the word شرموطة *šarmūṭa* 'whore' displays a somewhat unconventional pattern of acceptability among males. The lexeme is employed with considerable tolerance when males are conversing with acquaintances of the same gender (44 %), while strangers are more likely to confuse them than familiar women (24 and 28 % respectively). It is noteworthy that the word receives a high rating in the first situation when the recipient is an unknown woman — 26 %. In the presence of female strangers as witnesses to the conversation, men are much more reluctant (7 % rating) and are not at all inclined to hear this invective from them (0 % rating). For women, the lexeme شرموطة *šarmūṭa* 'whore' is indisputably and entirely unacceptable only in communication with unknown men (0 %), if the man is a friend, the acceptability rises to 13 %, and it is easier for women to hear the swearword than to pronounce it themselves (rating for the third situation 21 versus 10 % for the first and second). In conversations with female friends, the admissibility of the lexeme reaches 43 %. Notably, however, that in both cases (male and female friends) it is more difficult for women to pronounce the word than to hear it. With unfamiliar interlocutors of the same gender, women use the word شرموطة *šarmūṭa* 'whore' more freely (15 % rating), but they treat it with zero tolerance when it is spoken by the interlocutor (0 % rating).

The admissibility rating of the word نيك *nīk* 'fuck' is twice as high for men as for women (23 and 11 % respectively). This invective has the most common pattern of acceptability, i. e. men are not embarrassed to use it with friends of the same sex (55 % rating), they are relatively tolerant of it in conversation with strangers. However, men consider it extremely inappropriate to use the lexeme with women (7 % in the first situation with female friends, less than 1 % in all other cases), whereas they are more willing to hear it from women (in the third situation, the rating is 21 % for a friend, 12.5 % for strangers).

For females, the word نيك *nīk* 'fuck' is only permissible in communication with familiar interlocutors, with the exception of when same-sex strangers witness the conversation (the rating for strangers in the second situation is 12.5 %, in other situations for all strangers the rating is 0 %). Women themselves use this swearword very carefully (the rating for male friends is 10 %, for female friends — 16 %), but they are much more tolerant of it when they are the recipient (the rating in the third situation is 24 % — for male acquaintances, 40 % — for female acquaintances).

The divergence between the male and female ratings of the acceptability of the lexeme طيز *ṭīz* 'arse' for is even more pronounced than in the previous case. The male rating is 25 %, while the female rating is only 7 %. Male

respondents use the word relatively freely when communicating with their friends (rating of 55 %). They are also tolerant of it in conversations with unfamiliar men (26 %) and familiar women (21 %), whereas in the first case it is easier for respondents to use طيز *ṭīz* ‘arse’ themselves (the average rating for the first and second situations is 32 versus 14 % for the third situation), while in the second case it is easier for them to hear it than to pronounce it themselves (28 versus 17 %). When communicating with unknown women, this lexeme is judged by men to be completely unacceptable, regardless of the situation (0 % rating) (Table 2).

Table 2

ADMISSIBILITY RATING FOR THE WORDS لوطي *LŪṬIYY* ‘FAGGOT’, كس *KUSS* ‘CUNT’, شرموطة *ŠARMŪṬA* ‘WHORE’, نيك *NĪK* ‘FUCK’ AND طيز *ṬĪZ* ‘ARSE’ DEPENDING ON THE INTERLOCUTOR CATEGORY

	Men’s assessment, %				**Women’s assessment, %**			
	Male Friends	**Female Friends**	**Male Strangers**	**Female Strangers**	**Male Friends**	**Female Friends**	**Male Strangers**	**Female Strangers**
لوطي *lūṭiyy* ‘faggot’	68.52	26.85	46.30	10.65	15.28	9.72	0.46	4.63
كس *kuss* ‘cunt’	52.31	21.30	32.41	1.39	17.59	40.28	0.93	8.33
شرموطة *šarmūṭa* ‘whore’	43.98	28.24	23.61	11.11	13.43	42.59	0.00	9.72
نيك *nīk* ‘fuck’	54.63	9.72	21.76	4.63	14.35	24.07	0.00	4.17
طيز *ṭīz* ‘arse’	54.63	20.83	25.93	0.00	4.17	21.30	0.00	4.17

Women consider the use of the word طيز *ṭīz* ‘arse’ absolutely unacceptable when communicating with men, regardless of their friend/stranger status. Female respondents allow the lexeme to be used in conversation by male interlocutors to a very limited extent, and only when the latter are acquaintances (the rating in the third situation is 12.5 %). Women only dare to use it in a dialogue with a friend of the same sex (10 %) and in the presence of women they know or do not know (19 and 12.5 % respectively). It is considered most appropriate when a friend uses the word herself (35 % rating).

The rating of the swear words زب *zubb* ‘dick’, منيوك *manyūk* ‘fucked, faggot’, قواد *qawwād* ‘pimp’, قنيطة *gnīṭa* ‘arse’ and كديانة *kudyāna* ‘faggot’ is extremely uneven and strongly dependent on the gender of the respondent. These

lexemes are perceived as extremely rude by women, so much so that women do not consider it appropriate to utter any of them themselves — only قنيطة *gnīṭa* 'arse' scored higher than zero in the first situation (1 %), while its score in the second situation (the same 1 %) is only slightly lower than that of زب *zubb* 'dick' (3 %) and منيوك *manyūk* 'fucked, faggot' (6 %). These invectives show very low but uniform acceptability only in the third situation, and only when the speakers are friends of both sexes (just over 10 %). The use of these words by strangers is considered completely unacceptable by women (Table 3).

Table 3

ADMISSIBILITY RATING FOR THE WORDS زب *ZUBB* 'DICK', منيوك *MANYŪK* 'FUCKED, FAGGOT', قواد *QAWWĀD* 'PIMP', قنيطة *GNĪṬA* 'ARSE' AND كديانة *KUDYĀNA* 'FAGGOT' DEPENDING ON THE INTERLOCUTOR CATEGORY

	Men's assessment, %				Women's assessment, %			
	Male Friends	Female Friends	Male Strangers	Female Strangers	Male Friends	Female Friends	Male Strangers	Female Strangers
زب *zubb* 'dick'	50.00	22.22	22.69	0.00	3.70	8.33	0.00	0.00
منيوك *manyūk* 'fucked, faggot'	53.70	6.94	23.15	0.00	3.70	7.87	0.00	4.17
قواد *qawwād* 'pimp'	32.41	5.56	19.44	0.00	4.17	4.17	0.00	0.00
قنيطة *gnīṭa* 'arse'	50.00	14.81	24.07	0.00	4.17	9.26	0.46	0.46
كديانة *kudyāna* 'faggot'	46.76	14.35	27.31	5.56	3.70	3.70	0.00	0.00

Men are much more tolerant of these insults. The pattern of acceptability is practically no different from the standard one, i. e., respondents exhibit little reservations about using these lexemes when communicating with friends of the same sex (about 50 %), it is less acceptable, but still rather acceptable, when using them with strangers (about 20–25 %). In conversation with the opposite sex, men are much more constrained — with strangers these invectives are totally unacceptable (only for كديانة *kudyāna* 'faggot' the rating is above zero and is 6 %). With female friends, men feel more relaxed, so the words زب *zubb* 'dick', قنيطة *gnīṭa* 'arse' and كديانة *kudyāna* 'faggot' scored 22, 15 and 14 % respectively. In general, it is easier for men to pronounce the invectives in situations where female acquaintances are witnesses to the conversation (31 %

for زب *zubb* ‘dick’, 15 % for قنيطة *gnīṭa* ‘arse’, 22 % for كديانة *kudyāna* ‘faggot’), while it is less acceptable to hear these swear words from them (19, 18, 11 % respectively) and even less acceptable for men to use these lexemes with their female friends in the first situation (17, 11, 10 % respectively).

The words قواد *qawwād* ‘pimp’ and منيوك *manyūk* ‘fucked, faggot’ in communication with women are characterized by zero (in the case of strangers) or almost zero (in the case of friends) acceptability. At the same time, while practically none of the men are willing to use منيوك *manyūk* ‘fucked, faggot’ with female friends (0 % rating in the first situation, 1 % — in the second situation), if a woman utters this word herself, it is treated quite tolerantly (rating in the third situation 19 %). As for the word قواد *qawwād* ‘pimp’, men are only slightly more embarrassed to say it themselves (1 % in the first situation, 7 % in the second) than to hear it from women they know (8 % in the third situation). One potential reason for the observed decline in the appropriateness of using these lexemes when communicating with women is that the object of nomination for the words قواد *qawwād* ‘pimp’ and منيوك *manyūk* ‘fucked, faggot’ is a male person, which renders them irrelevant when speaking to a woman. Notably, the lexeme قواد *qawwād* ‘pimp’ exhibits one of the lowest acceptability rates in male-to-male communication with 32 % acceptability for acquaintances and 19 % for strangers (lower only for the word قحبة *qaḥba* ‘whore’, which denotes a female person).

DISCUSSION

The study found that it is important to consider that the acceptability of a particular swear word may be perceived differently by different genders. It is erroneous to assume that if men consider it appropriate to use a certain word in a conversation with a female friend, this automatically implies that women consider it appropriate to hear this word from a male friend. Similarly, the converse is also true.

To illustrate, men assess the acceptability of using the lexemes كس *kuss* ‘cunt’, زب *zubb* ‘dick’, طيز *ṭīz* ‘arse’, لوطي *lūṭiyy* ‘faggot’, شرموطة *šarmūṭa* ‘whore’ when communicating with female friends in 29, 17, 18, 22 and 29 % respectively, whereas women consider it acceptable for a male acquaintance to use these words only by 22 % (the difference with men’s assessment is –7 %), 11 % (–6 % difference), 12.5 % (–5.5 % difference), 18 % (–4 % difference) and 21 % (–8 % difference).

Similarly, women are also susceptible to making errors in their assessment. They rate as high the appropriateness of using the invectives خراء *ḫarā’* ‘shit’, حمار *ḥimār* ‘donkey’, كلب *kalb* ‘dog’, أحمق *’aḥmaq* ‘idiot’ in a dialogue with male friends (58, 76, 82 and 86 % respectively). Men do not agree with this assessment, as they consider the admissibility of using these words by female friends to be significantly lower: 46 % (difference –12 %), 62.5 % (difference –13.5 %), 55 % (difference –27 %) and 58 % (difference –28 %).

While both men and women demonstrate a high level of caution when interacting with strangers of the opposite gender, men still tend to underestimate the offensiveness of the words لوطي *lūṭiyy* 'faggot' and شرموطة *šarmūṭa* 'whore' (acceptability rating 19 and 26 % respectively), while women consider it unacceptable when male strangers use these lexemes (1 and 0 % respectively). Additionally, the list comprises the word كديانة *kudyāna* 'faggot', which is synonymous with the لوطي *lūṭiyy* 'faggot' (8 % admissibility rating by men compared to zero tolerance among women), and the word أحمق *'aḥmaq* 'idiot', which men use more often than women are prepared to hear (64 compared to 50 %). Conversely, women overestimate the tolerance of unknown men for the words حمار *ḥimār* 'donkey' (60 versus 46 %) and قحبة *qaḥba* 'whore' (12.5 versus 1 %). In addition, both women and men would prefer that strangers of the opposite sex use the words كس *kuss* 'cunt', خراء *ḫarā'* 'shit', كلب *kalb* 'dog' less.

It can thus be argued that men are more willing than women to use swear words related to the intimate side of a person's life, including taboo names for genitals and people with deviant sexual behavior. At the same time, women tend to underestimate men's vulnerability and hurt them by excessively free using invectives indicating mental or moral deficiencies.

The study identified several distinctive characteristics in the perception of Arabic invective vocabulary by Sudanese native speakers:

1. The idea of the admissibility of a word can differ significantly between men and women.

2. In addition to the gender factor, the status of the interlocutor (friend/stranger) and their age have a significant impact on the assessment of admissibility. Other factors are considered to a lesser extent by communicators.

3. Men are more inclined to utilize taboo vocabulary with individuals of the same gender, even in the absence of a prior relationship. Conversely, women tend to reserve such language for use within the context of friendship.

4. Women display a high level of intolerance towards the strongly sexualized swear words. The most acceptable swear words for them are those that refer to personal faults. For men, the sex-relatedness of a swear word is not a major limiting factor in its use. In contrast, lexemes indicating specific faults of a person are perceived somewhat more strongly by men than by women.

5. Different attitudes towards insults can give rise to a communicative conflict if a man or a woman overestimates the admissibility of using a certain lexeme when communicating with an interlocutor of the opposite gender.

At the same time, given the limited scope of the study and the inherent limitations of the research design employed regarding accurate evaluation of the potential impact of discrepancy in gender between the gender-marked nomination and the addressee, it is reasonable to consider these findings as hypothetical which should be verified and adjusted in subsequent large-scale surveys.

CONCLUSION

The survey enabled the compilation of an admissibility rating for the 15 most common invectives. In the rating, each word was assigned both a consolidated assessment, which is more nominal, and assessments that characterize the perceived admissibility of invectives separately for men and women (Fig. 1).

Concurrently, the undertaking of this study has revealed a number of challenges that impede the implementation of larger surveys using this methodology. In particular, the extensive list of characteristics of communicators, coupled with the simultaneous presence of several questions, markedly increased the complexity of participation in the study for respondents and complicated the processing of results, thereby limiting the potential for expanding the scope of respondents. Moreover, the study demonstrated that the utilized research design was constrained in its capacity to accurately assess the potential influence of gender-marked nominations, which could introduce bias into the final results.

In light of these considerations, it seems prudent to employ the UTI (Universal Taboo Indicator) as a method of assessing the acceptability of profanity, as it offers a more straightforward and effective approach. The UTI methodology provides a means of determining whether a given word is considered taboo (forbidden for use) or non-taboo (permissible) within a specific language community. This entails characterizing the word in question by responding to a single query: “Is it acceptable for an unknown person of the opposite sex to use the word XXX in your presence?” The response to this inquiry serves as a universal indicator of taboo status: if the answer is positive, the word is not taboo; if the answer is negative, it is (Pallades 2022).

The key features of the UTI are that the focus is on the recipient’s reaction rather than on the speaker’s choice and that the question involves the respondent’s evaluation of the word in abstraction from the speaker’s intention. The respondent evaluates the acceptability of the utterance of the word in their presence, rather than the seriousness with which they might take a particular insult directed towards them (cf.: “in your presence” and “in your address”). This approach allows for the minimization of the impact of external factors, such as the respondent’s general sensitivity to insults, their perception of the offensiveness of certain topics, or the mismatch between the gender of the certain nomination and the one of the hearer.

In addition to determining taboos, the UTI also allows for the ascertainment of the degree of acceptability. This is achieved by calculating the proportion of positive and negative responses for each lexeme, with the percentage of positive responses serving as an index of acceptability. As the number of respondents participating in the study increases, the relevance of the index also increases (Pallades 2022: 314). It can thus be concluded that while the

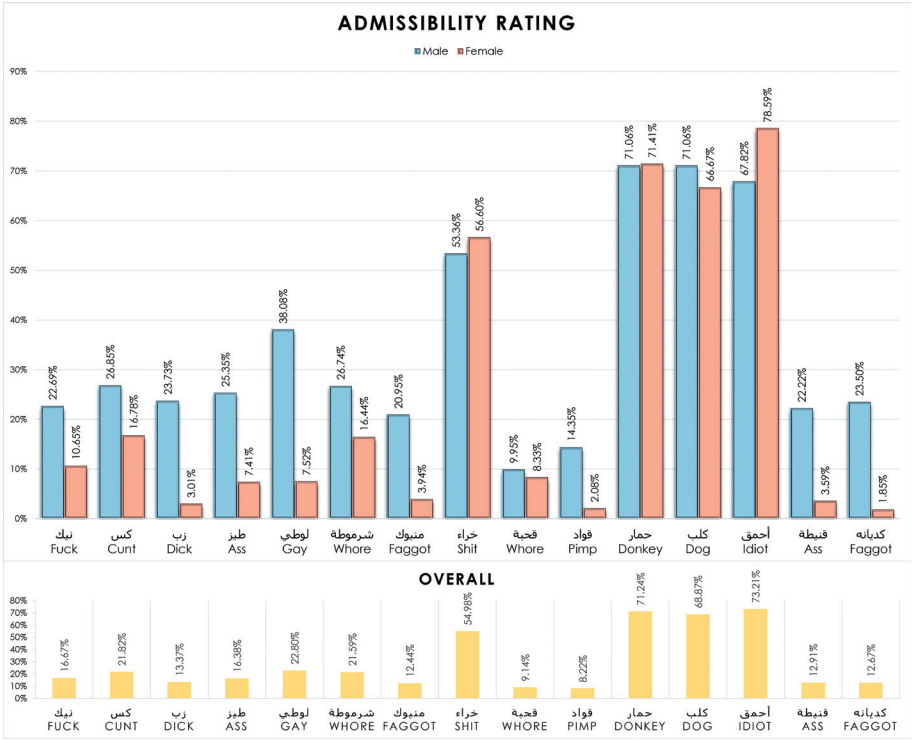

Fig. 1. Admissibility Rating: Gender-Related and Overall

complex nature of swear words requires large-scale research with the use of a special tool such as UTI, the current study of the admissibility of swear words represents a significant undertaking that offers valuable insights into the nuances of swearing.

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