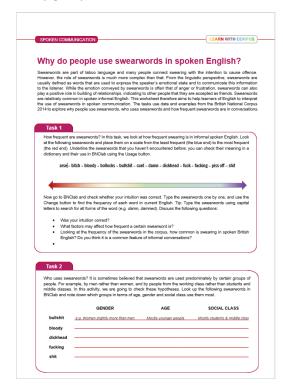
## Do we need resources for teaching about swearing in English language classes?

It is probably fair to say that *swearing* is not among the most common topics in English language classrooms; in fact, it hardly ever appears in textbooks or on the language curriculum. Yet this is perhaps somewhat strange given how common swearwords are in spoken (British) English and given their importance when it comes to interpreting the linguistic and social messages they help to convey.

Without a doubt, the frequency and ubiquity of swearwords in spoken British English makes them an important component of language use, with implications for learners' ability to understand communication around them. Especially if coming from linguistic and cultural backgrounds with different attitudes to taboo language, it may be difficult for learners to interpret, linguistically and socially, the role and impact of swearwords in the language they encounter. There are various reasons for swearing and it is important for learners of English to be aware of the different functions that swearwords fulfil in conversations and to be able to distinguish between the potentially more offensive and dangerous uses of swearwords on the one hand and the more light-hearted and friendly use of taboo language on the other hand. It is crucial for learners to be able to determine whether the swearwords are directed at them or not and whether they are intended to offend. As Finn (2017, p. 20-21) emphasises, "The dangers of not being able to comprehend swear words correctly could potentially be harmful to ESL students. Understanding that swear words have different levels of offensiveness is pertinent in being able to identify verbal aggression." Thus, while the use of taboo language is, understandably, a sensitive topic and talking about swearwords is not suitable for every classroom and every group of learners, there should be teaching materials available on the topic.



Therefore, Corpus for Schools decided to offer teaching resources that address this topic. The main reason for creating these teaching materials, that deal with the use of swearwords in spoken English, is to help English learners to understand the language and society around them. These materials seek to empower the learners by giving them a better understanding of how and why swearwords are used and in what situations they may encounter them. This will help to prepare them to navigate interaction that may involve swearwords. The intention behind these teaching materials and the learning aims that guide them are thus different from other materials on this website which both seek to raise learners' awareness of patterns in language use and give them space to practice them. The materials dealing with swearwords are not intended to encourage students to incorporate swearwords into their lexicon and, as a result, do not include tasks that would involve practicing swearwords by the learners. Instead, the focus is on the tasks that help students interpret the meaning of swearwords in the communication of British English speakers.

So, these teaching materials do come with a warning – the worksheets contain taboo language and while doing the tasks, learners would be asked to search the corpus for examples of swearwords and discuss their findings. This is not something that is suitable for every class and each teacher has to consider the advantages and potential issues with using the material with their students. But as long as there are some teachers and learners interested in finding out more about this feature of spoken English and are comfortable with teaching about swearing as one of components of language, there should also be materials that they can use in discussing the topic with their students.

## References

Finn, E. (2017). Swearing: The Good, the Bad & the Ugly. ORTESOL Journal, 34, 17-26.