

## **A Sociolinguistic Study of the Functions of Swear-Words Used by Motivator Gary Vaynerchuk in the Video Titled *The World is Abundant, Stop Holding Yourself Back* | London Keynote 2021**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the functions of swear-words by motivational speaker Gary Vaynerchuk, using Holmes' (2013) social factors and Ljung's (2011) swear words functions theory. The qualitative method was applied to textual data from 26 units of Gary Vaynerchuk's speeches, identifying 76 swear-words in the video. These words, often found in intimate conversations in American society, follow specific patterns and are used as slot-fillers within sentence structures to emphasize Gary Vaynerchuk's ideas. Gary Vaynerchuk primarily focused on impersonal topics and informative functions, delivering facts and information to his audience while maintaining an objective relationship. The use of idiosyncrasy in his speech may be due to his fresh and inspiring ideas about business opportunities in technology, and the fact that many swear-words are aimed at himself.

**Keywords:** motivational speaker, motivator, sociolinguistics, swear-word, swear-word functions

### **INTRODUCTION**

Tony Robbins, Nick Vujicic, Robert Kiyosaki, and Oprah Winfrey are examples of motivators who are known by most people. A motivator is "a person who motivates others" (Merriam-Webster, n.d). The word motivate means "makes somebody want to do something, especially something that involves hard work and effort" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2024). Motivation is the noun of the verb "motivate". Motivation is part of communication, and when people communicate, they often have to adapt to their addresses, depending on the situation. Therefore, when motivators adapt, they usually try to fulfill the psychological needs of their audiences, such as encouragement, compliments, affirmations, etc.

However, it seems that not all motivators would adapt to their audiences. Some motivators even have the habit of swearing. Motivational speaker Gary Vaynerchuk is one of the motivators the writer could find on the internet as a motivator who seems to combine swear words and motivational speech to inspire his audience. Gary Vaynerchuk is one of the most famous motivators around the world with a total of more than 4 Million subscribers in his own official YouTube channel (Vaynerchuk, 2021) By 2024, Gary Vaynerchuk has established himself as a successful motivational speaker, having met Tony Robbins, the world's most famous motivator, and Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook.

Out of more than 4.800 videos posted on Gary Vaynerchuk's YouTube channel, the writer finds one particular video that draws the writer's attention to the subject of the study. *The World is Abundant, Stop Holding Yourself Back* | London Keynote 2021 is a 40-minute long video of Gary Vaynerchuk as the only speaker who seems to swear a lot in his speech towards business owners using one-way communication. The writer chose this video because Gary Vaynerchuk seems to be able to connect with the audience more intimately.

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The frequent use of swear-words by a motivator is certainly uncommon. This makes the writer wonder whether indeed Gary Vaynerchuk has used many swear-words, what are the functions of the swear-words, and what social-factors govern the use of the swear-words.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **1. Swear-Words Functions**

Ljung (2011) asserts that there are two primary groups for swearing. Based on its functions, swearing is divided into two categories: stand-alone functions and slot filler. The following section will elaborate on the two functions.

#### **A. Stand-Alone Functions**

The categorization by Ljung (2011) identifies various categories of stand-alone swear words functions used independently as expressions. These include expletive interjections like "God!" and "shit!", used globally for emotional expression. Oaths invoke divine or revered figures to validate statements, while cursing ranges from serious, intending harm, to non-serious, expressing dislike. Swearing also serves to affirm or contradict statements in conversations, highlighting agreement or disagreement. Unfriendly suggestions involve non-serious aggression through hurtful thoughts, often starting with verbs like kiss, lick, suck, or bite. Ritual insults are aggressive swearing used more as social gestures than actual harm, often directed at men and referencing alleged affairs. Name-calling directly insults the addressee or refers derogatorily to others

#### **B. Slot-Fillers**

According to Ljung (2011), swear-words also serve as slot fillers in speech, fulfilling roles such as verbal placeholders, intensifiers, and emphasis markers. An adverbial or adjectival intensifier strengthens adjectives or adverbs to emphasize high degrees, similar to words like "very" or "extremely". Swear-words are used as adjectives of dislike to express disapproval towards a person or object. Emphasis slot fillers highlight nouns or follow adverbs and question pronouns to underscore specific aspects. Modal adverbials modify verbs to convey the speaker's perspective on actions, and those can be reinforced with expletives. Epithets are used anaphorically to refer back to previously mentioned persons or objects, enhancing emphasis on points

### **2. Social Factors and Social Dimensions**

Social Factors and Social Dimensions are used to determine who is speaking, assess the formality of the settings, determine whether each unit of utterance is personal or impersonal, and ultimately determine whether the units of utterances serves an informative or affective function (Holmes, 2013). The writer makes use of social factors and social dimension theory to help in finding the context for each unit of utterances in the video.

## **METHOD**

The research as entirely done in this study used qualitative methods. The approach relied more on the textual, and audio data which were gathered and analyzed by the writer himself, using an approach that aimed to understand the phenomena entirely by non-statistical methods (Creswell, 2018) The writer is the primary instrument for this research. study data

gathered were utterances of Gary Vaynerchuk taken from the video. The source of data were all utterances from Gary Vaynerchuk as the motivator at London Keynote 2021.

Several actions were performed to obtain the data. First, the writer watched the 40-minute long video on YouTube streaming video platform (Vaynerchuk, 2021). Next, the writer downloaded the video through YouTube downloader along with transcripts. The writer made sure the transcript is in accordance with the video by listening to the video and reading the transcript simultaneously.

As a whole, the data analysis procedure consists of two stages. The first stage is to answer the first research question. In this stage, begins the examination of the transcript as the only possible data. The data collected will be going through several steps, such as exploration, observation, and identification. The examined data were all utterances that contained swear-words in it. the examination data were the utterances that contain the word *fuck*, *fucking*, *fucker*, *damn*, *shit*, *crap*, etc. Next, those words were assumed as swear-words and identified by using the yellow marker, and grouped into several units of utterances. After the units of utterances gathered, The writer used two more tables to do the organization, identification, and classification of the swear words functions and social factors. The second stage of research begins after the data has been gathered and processed. The second stage of the analysis is presented in Findings and Discussion.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Only occurrences with a high frequency (i.e., function words with most frequencies) is discussed here, and the writer will provide the examples). The rest will not be discussed.

### 1. The Swear-words Used by Gary Vaynerchuk

The first table which the writer will present below answers the first research question in the statement of the problem, what swear words are used by Gary Vaynerchuk and what patterns do they have in common.

Table 4.1 Patterns of the Swear-words Used by Gary Vaynerchuk

Fuck	Fucking	Fuckers	Shit	Shitless	Crap
10	26	3	35	1	2

As we see in the Appendix, Gary Vaynerchuk uses 76 swear words in his speech. These 76 swear words have a lot in common. They use key words such as *fuck* (*whatever the fuck, oh fuck*), *fucking* (*fucking eating, you fucking hired, fucking with*), *fuckers* (*old fuckers, fucking fuckers*), *shit* (*certain shit, buy shit*), *shitless* (*scared shitless*), and *crap* (*oh crap*).

From the table above, we can see that the patterns commonly used by Gary Vaynerchuk are *shit*(35), *fucking*(26), and *fuck*(10); while the other forms like *fuckers*, *crap*, and *shitless* are not very productive.

### 2. Functions of the Swear-words Used by Gary Vaynerchuk

The second table which the writer will present below answers the second research question in the statement of the problem, that is, what functions the swear words have.

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Table 4.2 The Functions of Swear words Used by Gary Vaynerchuk

Swear Words Functions											
Stand - Alone Functions							Slot Filler				
Expletive Interjections	Oaths	Curses	Affirmation Contradiction	Unfriendly Suggestion	Ritual Insults	Name-Calling	Adverbial or Adjectival Intensifier	Adjectives of Dislike	Emphasis	Modal Adverbials	Anaphoric Use of Epithets
6	0	4	0	2	0	3	2	3	20	22	14

As we see in the table above, there are two swear words functions, Stand-Alone Functions and Slot-fillers. Out of 7 categories from the Stand-Alone Functions, 4 of the productive categories are: Expletive Interjections(6) (e.g., oh shit, oh fuck, oh crap), Curses(4) (e.g., you fuck, what the fuck, full of shit), Name-Calling(3) (e.g., you fuckers, old fuckers), Unfriendly Suggestion(2) (e.g., you better be taking a shit, give a fuck); while Oaths, Affirmation and Contradiction, and Ritual Insults(0). The second part of the swear words functions, the Slot-Fillers, the most categories are Modal Adverbials(22) (e.g., show-shit, real as fuck), Emphasis(20) (e.g., fucking fresh kicks, fucking eating), Anaphoric Use of Epithets(14) (e.g., buy me shit); while the Adjectives of Dislikes (e.g., fucking social media, fucking little swoosh), Adverbial or Adjectival Intensifier (e.g., scared shitless, fucking not true), are 3 and 2 each. This may imply that the Slot-Fillers are more productive than the Stand-Alone Functions. The Slot-Fillers is four times more productive than the Stand-Alone Functions, the Stand-Alone Functions and Slot-fillers are 15 and 61 respectively.

The first category for Slot-Filler is Modal Adverbials. Modal Adverbials are swear-words that modify verbs to express speakers' points of view on particular actions or events. The following is the example of Modal Adverbials:

Example 1

13:10 Anybody who's standing right now just this is the easiest- my favorite framework- this is probably the most simplistic sentence that I genuinely- this is not some foofy-foofy, let's do a show-shit<sup>3.7</sup>.

This example is categorized under Modal Adverbials in Slot-Filler because here Gary Vaynerchuk wants the audience to understand that he is not joking around by making some of the audience stand up from their chairs.

The second category for Slot-Filler is Emphasis. Emphasis is used to draw attention to the next noun that follows an adverb or pronoun that poses a question. The following is the example of Emphasis:

Example 2

7:42 You're not worried about fucking fresh-kicks<sup>1.1</sup>, you're worried about fucking eating<sup>1.2</sup>.

The swear word is categorized under Emphasis in Slot-Filler. This swear-word is related to Gary Vaynerchuk's topic about immigrants would only care and worry about how they can eat. The swear word "fuck" is used to put stress the next word, "eating"

The third category for Slot-Filler is Anaphoric Use of Epithets. Anaphoric Use of Epithets are descriptive swear-words commonly used as a substitute to characterize a person or an object. The following is the example of Anaphoric Use of Epithets:

#### Example 3

7:45 And so, when you have that, and then you have a little bit of a frugal mom like I did, my parents didn't buy me shit<sup>1.3</sup>

The swear word for Slot-Filler is identified as the Anaphoric Use of Epithets in Slot-Filler. Here Gary Vaynerchuk uses the word "shit" as the replacement for the word "stuff". The writer thinks that Gary Vaynerchuk wants the audience to focus on his frugal parents who never bought him anything when he was in his first decade as an immigrant.

### 3. The Social Factors Governing the Swear Words Functions Used by Gary Vaynerchuk

The third table which the writer will present below answers the third research question in the statement of the problem, what social factors govern the use of swear-words.

*Table 4.3 The Social Factors Governing the Use of Swear Words Used by Gary Vaynerchuk.*

Social Factors			
Topic		Functions	
Personal	Impersonal	Informative	Affective
7	19	19	7

As we see in the table above, the social factors table consists of two components, the topic and the functions, and each element has two different sub-variables which show where the 26 swear-words-related Units of Utterances in the Appendix belong to. The Participants and the Setting component has all the 26 results each in one sub-variables, the Who sub-variable and the Formal sub-variable respectively (see Appendix 4), due to the lack of differences between sub-variables, both Participants and Setting component are removed from the table. However, the results are still used to find out the social factors governing the swear-words. The Who sub-variable in the Participants shows that Gary Vaynerchuk's speech is indeed a one-way-communication, where Gary Vaynerchuk does most of the talking. The Formal sub-variable in the Settings component could mean that Gary Vaynerchuk speaks in a serious situation, mainly about business and opportunities.

Out of the 26 Units of Utterances, the Personal and the Impersonal sub-variable in the Topic component are 7 and 19 each. The second part of the table, the Functions, the sub-variables are Informative(19) and Affective(7).

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This implies that the Impersonal sub-variable in the Topic component and the Informative sub-variable in the Functions component in the second part of the table is almost three times more productive than the Personal sub-variable in the Topic component and the Affective sub-variable in the Functions component.

The first sub-variable of topic is personal. The following is an example of a personal topic.

Example 4

7:20 The fact that I get to go to America, a foundational country in our society that cherishes and applauds entrepreneurship, when I was born a purebred entrepreneurship, luck.

7:32 The fact that I was an immigrant and– you know, for all the immigrants in here– you know, immigrant life in that first half-decade or decade is basically about food and shelter.

7:42 You're not worried about fucking fresh-kicks<sup>1.1</sup>, you're worried about fucking eating<sup>1.2</sup>.

7:45 And so, when you have that, and then you have a little bit of a frugal mom like I did, my parents didn't buy me shit<sup>1.3</sup>

The topic in the utterances above is personal. Because Gary Vaynerchuk talks about his harsh childhood as an immigrant from a former Soviet Union country, moving to the United States.

The second sub-variable is impersonal topic. The example below discusses the impersonal topic:

Example 5

12:41 Now, now, this is very important.

12:47 For the people that are standing, the number one most obvious thing that I see every day of my life over the last 20 years is they think somebody in their company, is at fault for something without realizing it's their fault.

13:06 This is the breakthrough- you like that one? You're excited about that?

13:10 Anybody who's standing right now just this is the easiest- my favorite framework- this is probably the most simplistic sentence that I genuinely- this is not some foofy-foofy, let's do a show-shit<sup>3.7</sup>.

13:31 This is real as fuck<sup>3.8</sup> to me, Everybody who's standing right now, the quickest way for your business to get much-much bigger is for you to realize right now, every single thing that's wrong in your company- is not Johnny or Sally's fault, it is 100 percent your fault because you fucking hired<sup>3.9</sup> Johnny and Sally.

13:45 You can sit.

The topic in the utterances above is impersonal. Because Gary Vaynerchuk tells the audiences in the ballroom that the quickest way for their business to get much bigger is by realizing their fault, rather than talking about himself.

The Impersonal sub-variable in the Topic component could mean that Gary Vaynerchuk maintained a distant relationship, or focus on speaking objectively, or stay on the business ideas.

The first sub-variable of function is informative. This is an example of informative function.

Example 6

22:18 From TikTok to Meta, to YouTube, to podcast, you are now pretty much capable of reaching almost any person on earth if you're good enough.

22:27 My favorite other non-accountable thing, "My Instagram is down because Meta wants me to just run ads, and they're fucking with<sup>9,30</sup> the algorithm these fucking fuckers<sup>9,31</sup>."

22:41 My favorite part of that is, not true, Rick.

22:48 Here's what's actually happening— from Facebook, to TikTok, to Twitter, to YouTube, they're just a blank supply and demand machine.

The functions in the utterances above are informative, because Gary Vaynerchuk talks about people's mindset in general towards how a social media machine works.

The second sub-variable of function is affective. The following example discusses affective function.

#### Example 7

30:40 You love a good confrontation.

30:44 Love it- my dad once got so I- I once saw my d- ,we had a beer truck delivering beer, the beer truck was leaving, they- it's a big truck, a beer truck!

30:57 The guy didn't have a lot of room in the parking lot, he ran over a flower.

31:04 I saw my dad from the corner, this man was so happy that he was about to get into a fight with the beer driver, he would have thought he won the fucking lottery<sup>17,56</sup>!

31:16 He ran so fast, he was looking for it.

The functions in the utterances above is affective, because Gary Vaynerchuk talks about his dad confronting a beer truck to the audience, rather than giving his ideas or opinions about confrontation.

The Informative sub-variable in the Functions component could mean that Gary Vaynerchuk's speech is based on cognitive, or ideas, or facts.

From the examples and discussions above, this implies that there may have been an attempt of having a closer relationship with the audiences, despite the swear-words delivered. Gary Vaynerchuk maintained his professionalism as a motivator, which is to present his ideas and knowledge in his speech. If Gary has used a lot of swear-words in his motivational speech and his audience do not seem to mind, maybe because it is Gary Vaynerchuk's idiosyncrasy, his ideas about business opportunities in technology are very good (fresh and inspiring), and the swear-words are not meant for any particular individual in the ballroom; many of the swear-words are in fact aimed at himself.

## CONCLUSION

The study investigates the swear-words used by Gary Vaynerchuk, the swear-words functions, and the social factors that govern the use of swear-words by motivational speaker Gary Vaynerchuk, using Holmes'(2013) social factors theory and Ljung's (2011) swear words functions theory. The study reveals that Gary Vaynerchuk uses 76 swear-words in his speech, primarily in the form of *fuck* and *shit* words, which are common in intimate conversations in American society. These swear-words functions are mostly identified as slot-fillers within sentence structures to emphasize his ideas, primarily in the Modal Adverbials, Emphasis, and Anaphoric Use of Epithets categories. The social factors of Gary Vaynerchuk's speech are

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mostly impersonal, with the functions being informative rather than affective. If Gary has used a lot of swear-words in his motivational speech and his audience do not seem to mind, maybe because it is Gary Vaynerchuk's idiosyncrasy, his ideas about business opportunities in technology are very good (fresh and inspiring), and the swear-words are not meant for any particular individual; rather for himself, highlighting his unique style and ideas. For further study, the research could explore the situations that are happening during Gary Vaynerchuk's speech, such as the audience response to certain swear words, like clapping, cheering, laughing, etc.

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