



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DEVIANT LEXIS IN PERSONAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract: *This article explores the role and significance of deviant lexis—non-standard, vulgar, or socially marked lexical items—within the framework of personal discourse. Drawing on sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and stylistic perspectives, it examines how deviant lexis contribute to identity construction, emotional expression, and discourse strategies in interpersonal communication. While deviant lexis are often regarded as stigmatized or socially inappropriate, their use in personal discourse reveals deeper socio-psychological motivations, such as the need for authenticity, solidarity, or emotional release. The study highlights that deviant lexis function not only as linguistic markers of individuality but also as tools for negotiating social relations and expressing stance.*

Keywords: *deviant lexis, personal discourse, identity, emotion, pragmatics, stylistic variation*

Introduction

Language serves as a primary medium through which individuals construct and communicate personal experiences, emotions, and social identities. Within this complex system, deviant lexis—words and expressions that deviate from standard linguistic norms—occupy a controversial yet meaningful place. These lexical units may include vulgarisms, slang, jargon, taboo words, or colloquialisms, depending on the cultural and social context. In personal discourse, where authenticity and expressivity are valued, such deviations often perform crucial communicative functions. The investigation of deviant lexis in personal discourse is significant for several reasons. First, it illuminates the interaction between language, society, and psychology, revealing how speakers use non-standard language to negotiate meaning, identity, and social power. Second, it contributes to the understanding of stylistic variation, demonstrating that linguistic deviation is not merely a breach of norms but a strategic resource for self-expression. Third, it invites scholars to reassess attitudes toward linguistic “impurity” by situating deviant lexis within the broader context of discourse pragmatics and sociolinguistic dynamics.

Literature Review

The concept of deviant lexis has been addressed in various branches of linguistics. From a stylistic perspective, Galperin (1981) describes lexical deviation as a means of producing expressive effect, while Leech (1969) emphasizes its role in highlighting stylistic contrast. In sociolinguistics, Labov (1972) and Trudgill (1983) interpret deviation as a marker of social identity and group membership, illustrating



that language variation correlates with class, age, gender, and community affiliation. Within discourse studies, Fairclough (1995) and Gee (2014) underscore that personal discourse especially narratives, diaries, and informal conversations often integrates deviant lexical items to convey authenticity, intimacy, and emotional depth. Similarly, pragmatists such as Culpeper (2011) and Dynel (2012) view vulgar or taboo lexis as face-threatening acts that simultaneously function as solidarity-building strategies depending on context and relational dynamics.

Research on vulgarisms and slang (Allan & Burridge, 2006) reveals their dual function: while they may carry social stigma, they also signal ingroup belonging, emotional intensity, and spontaneity. In psycholinguistics, studies suggest that taboo and expressive language activates emotional centers in the brain, thereby intensifying affective communication (Jay, 2009). However, despite substantial research on non-standard language, the specific role of deviant lexis in personal discourse remains underexplored. This study seeks to bridge that gap by examining their communicative, stylistic, and social functions.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach, drawing upon examples of personal discourse collected from literary texts, online blogs, and conversational transcripts. The analysis focuses on how deviant lexical items operate within contextualized discourse units, considering their pragmatic functions, emotional loading, and social implications.

Three key dimensions guide the analysis:

1. Expressive Function – how deviant lexis convey emotional states (anger, joy, frustration, affection).
2. Identity Function – how speakers use lexical deviation to construct self-image or social belonging.
3. Pragmatic Function – how deviant lexis serve as discourse strategies (e.g., humor, emphasis, mitigation, or confrontation).

The study treats “deviant lexis” as a broad category encompassing vulgarisms, slang expressions, and stylistically marked words that deviate from the codified standard.

Discussion

1. Expressive and Emotional Functions

Personal discourse is often emotionally charged, reflecting the speaker’s internal states. Deviant lexis serve as linguistic amplifiers, enabling individuals to express emotions that may not be fully captured by neutral vocabulary. For example, a speaker saying, “*I was damn tired,*” employs a mild vulgarism not merely for



emphasis but to embody emotional intensity. Similarly, strong taboo words may serve as outlets for frustration or pain, functioning as cathartic mechanisms.

Research in cognitive linguistics supports this notion: emotional language activates affective processing more strongly than neutral terms (Jay, 2009). Thus, in personal discourse, deviant lexis are not arbitrary violations but emotionally functional tools.

2. Identity Construction and Social Belonging

The use of non-standard lexis often correlates with group identity. In personal narratives, slang or colloquial expressions may reflect the speaker's sociolect, indicating membership in a particular age group, profession, or subculture. For instance, youth discourse frequently integrates slang as a marker of modernity and solidarity. Similarly, vulgarisms can indicate a working-class ethos or a desire to appear genuine and relatable.

In this sense, deviant lexis contribute to the authentic self-presentation of speakers. They allow individuals to perform specific identities—rebellious, humorous, emotional, or intimate—thereby aligning linguistic behavior with social positioning.

3. Pragmatic and Interactional Roles

From a pragmatic standpoint, deviant lexis perform multiple context-dependent functions. In friendly interactions, mild vulgarisms can enhance solidarity and humor, serving as signs of closeness. In contrast, in confrontational discourse, the same words may operate as face-threatening acts signaling aggression or dominance.

Furthermore, deviant lexis can function as discourse markers that modulate tone or structure. For example, fillers like “*you know*,” “*bloody*,” “*damn*” may not hold semantic weight but fulfill interactional functions—marking hesitation, emphasis, or turn-taking.

The interpretive value of deviant lexis thus depends heavily on context, relationship, and intention, reaffirming the principle that linguistic meaning is co-constructed within discourse.

Conclusion

Deviant lexis in personal discourse are not random or purely stigmatized elements but strategic, expressive, and identity-laden resources. Their use reveals the speaker's affective stance, social belonging, and communicative intention. By deviating from linguistic norms, speakers achieve stylistic individuality, emotional authenticity, and contextual relevance. Recognizing the significance of deviant lexis challenges the traditional dichotomy between “correct” and “incorrect” language, promoting a more nuanced understanding of linguistic creativity and variation. Future



research should explore cross-cultural differences, gendered patterns, and digital discourse practices, as deviant lexis continue to evolve alongside social and technological transformations.

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