

UDC 316.4.063.5

DOI: 10.61727/ssppj/1.2023.38

## Obscene response as an individually responsible act

**Mariia Sliusarenko\***

PhD in Social Communications, Senior Lecturer  
South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University named after K.D. Ushynsky  
65020, 26 Staroportofrankivska Str., Odesa, Ukraine  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0015-5160>

**Abstract.** The problem of the spread of slander is relevant today. Obscene language is opposed by social institutions (church, science, education, justice), but swear words actively function in society, and individual expressions can become phrasemes. The obscene response of the defender of the island of Zmiinyi has become widely used. This fact has not received a scientific explanation. The purpose of the study was to identify the reasons for the positive perception and large-scale distribution of obscene (abusive) expressions by society. The paper uses the following methods: dialectical, interdisciplinary, inductive, comparative, analysis and synthesis, processing of reference literature. In science, the following properties of obscene language are known: an attribute for people who want to look special; a weapon for verbal abuse; a tool against psychological overstrain; an indicator of a person's experience of stress; evidence of speech negligence of a person. In science, abusive vocabulary was not considered relevant for expressing the civic position and personal courage of the speaker as a fact of their responsible act. M. Bakhtin explained the act as an activity of a unique individual consciousness and called the role of intonation important for its implementation. The obscene response of the Ukrainian defender is a verbal counteraction to the enemy, and the refusal of captivity in conditions of threat to life testified to an act that charmed society and caused delight. The intonation of the response (disrespectful attitude, reduced style of speech) demonstrated the lack of fear in the Ukrainian defenders and disregard for the enemy's strength. The obscene expression of the Ukrainian defender has become a kind of truth of life, a fact of overestimating the power of the enemy to a worthless, pathetic, ridiculed force. In the opinion of the authors, tracing the features of mass consciousness in the perception of information can be promising for investigating the problem of spreading profanity. Examining the verbal reactions of society is useful for consolidating forces in overcoming the enemy

**Keywords:** obscene response; defender of the island of Zmiinyi; act; intonation; mocking assessment; society

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of obscene language has synonyms: invective, offensive, vulgar, rude, taboo, profanity, cheeky, and "reduced speech". In common parlance, the name "bad words" are common.

Obscene language – these are words and expressions that are not usually used in public because they go beyond the generally accepted moral norms. Most members of society recognise that the literary language

and the language of a noble person cannot contain bad words; profanity is opposed by the system of education, science and justice, the church, the family, the state, etc. However, obscene language functions in society, and some of its samples become actively used and even an example for admiration and imitation.

As is known, the obscene statement of the famous Ukrainian defender of the island of Zmiinyi, with which

**Article's History:** Received: 29.03.2023 Revised: 05.06.2023 Accepted: 29.06.2023

### Suggested Citation:

Sliusarenko, M. (2023). Obscene response as an individually responsible act. *Scientific Studios on Social and Political Psychology*, 29(1), 38-42. doi: 10.61727/ssppj/1.2023.38.



Copyright © The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

\*Corresponding author

he responded to the demand of the Russian invaders from the ship “Moscow” to surrender, not just gained publicity, but became a meme, a popular expression. The phrase was suddenly spread in the press, replicated on big boards and visible signs; it was picked up by high-ranking officials and immortalised with a special postage stamp.

The phrase, which is taboo for the literary language, has won the information space of our country for a long period of time and spread beyond its borders (for example, in Europe, the expression of the Ukrainian defender is often chanted by participants in anti-war events). It can be stated that a kind of retransmission of an indecent expression continues, the effect of an echo has appeared, (in the dictionary definition, an echo – something that comes from afar; a response to something (Dictionary of the Ukrainian language, 1973).

The phenomenon of large-scale spread and positive perception of obscene (abusive) utterance by society has not received a scientific explanation, which determined the relevance of this study.

The problem of profanity as a fact of language and speech is in the circle of scientific interests of representatives of various sciences: pedagogy, psychology, philology, linguistics, journalism, cultural studies, law, etc.; the studies by such authors as O. Disa, M.O. Zubrytska, L. Kleputs, Yu. Kostyuk, A.I. Sayenko, L. Stavvytska, L. Struganets, L.M. Taborovets, O.B. Talko, O.V. Khrushch, O.M. Shevchenko, A.V. Shydelko are devoted to it.

Researchers are unanimous in their opinion that obscene language – it is harmful, immoral, destructive, and contrary to biblical values and serves for the “spiritual world of darkness” (Taborovets, 2013). Obscene words are called “a manifestation of ignorance, illiteracy, low cultural level” (Khrushch, 2021), “vocabulary of people of low qualification” (Stavvytska, 2008), which arose in the circle of representatives of the antisocial stratum and is acceptable for marginals, criminals, prostitutes, drunks, etc.

Therewith, researchers state the negative fact of the rapid spread of abusive words in society, especially among schoolchildren and young people. It is paradoxical that obscene language functions not only in everyday life but also has gained great popularity in fiction. A possible reason for this phenomenon, some researchers call the desire of authors to speak on the pages of novels and stories about previously unacceptable (Kleputs & Zubrytska, 2009) as a consequence of “liberation from the old social system, under which there was a ban, censorship” (Stavvytska, 2008).

On the one hand, as noted, obscene language can help in reproducing “a special everyday flavour or characterisation of the low cultural level of the characters depicted in it” (Kleputs & Zubrytska, 2009) or witness the manifestation of “democratisation, liberalisation, globalisation of the information space” (Tavrovetska & Shebanova, 2020), and on the other – to be used as

a convenient way to commercialise the printed word, earning money under the guise of a liberated writing style (Kleputs & Zubrytska, 2009).

Reduced speech is actively distributed in social networks. Bloggers often resort to language “looseness” to increase the number of subscribers and advertising revenue (Tavrovetska & Shebanova, 2020). The dominance of obscenities in communication, from the standpoint of researchers, threatens to impoverish the nation, increase aggression and demoralisation of society (Shevchenko & Talko, 2017). Researchers appeal to the authorities with demands to strengthen control over compliance with language norms (Shevchenko, & Talko, 2017; Shydelko, 2017; Khrushch, 2021), while legal experts note the imperfection of legislation to bring to justice persons for profanity as minor hooliganism (Sayenko, 2017). Purpose of the study: identify the reasons for the large-scale spread and positive public perception of the obscene (abusive) statement of the Ukrainian defender of the island of Zmiinyi.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the course of this study the following scientific methods were used: dialectical method (to trace the features of perception of the world in different epochs); analysis and synthesis (to understand scientific trends in the interpretation of obscene language); processing of reference literature (to clarify the essence of such concepts as intonation, act, echo); deduction (to generalise thoughts about the individual based on knowledge about the general); interdisciplinary research (philosophical papers on literary studies for the needs of psychology).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Awareness of the reasons for the spread of obscene language becomes available through the clarification of its specific functions.

Taboo vocabulary can act as:

1. an invariable attribute of authority; often people of a certain environment (athletes, soldiers, criminals) use vulgar vocabulary in their speech to stand out, rise above others, “in a certain sense cross the line of what is allowed, declare their special status and the right to act contrary to certain attitudes” (Stavvytska, 2008);
2. weapons in verbal confrontation; obscene language can cause moral damage to the addressee, reduce the social status of the opponent and confirm the superiority of the one who swears (Stavvytska, 2008);
3. a tool for preventing psychological overstrain; representatives of professions associated with mental stress or a sense of being that factually or potentially lies on the verge of life and death turn to obscene words (military, surgeons) (Stavvytska, 2008);
4. stress factor; under certain conditions, a person most often loses self-control and is able to act and talk in a way that is not usually typical of them (Tavrovetska & Shebanova, 2020);

5. speech negligence; obscene language is used by people with a low vocabulary who are not aware of the needs of speech culture.

Negative vocabulary, as practice confirms, can become relevant for expressing civic position and personal courage and manifest itself as a responsible act of the speaker. In psychology, an act is defined as a conscious action, evaluated as an act of moral self-definition of a person in which it asserts itself as a personality – in the attitude to another person, oneself, a group or society, to nature in general (Shapar, 2007).

The theoretical aspect of the act was philosophically justified by M. Bakhtin (2019). From his standpoint, an act is an activity of a unique individual consciousness, which can be realised in a word, a thought, desire, feeling, mood, vision, deed, etc. M. Bakhtin (2019) distinguished between two manifestations of human life: life as being-given and life as an event; each of which is characterised by a certain activity: a technical or biological action – for being-given, and an act – for life-events. Life-event is explained by M. Bakhtin (2019) as some difficult act since “to really be in life means to commit”, and “to live with yourself does not mean to live for yourself, but means to be responsibly involved with yourself, to assert your forced real non-alibi in being” (Bakhtin, 2019).

The statement of the Ukrainian defender as a verbal counteraction to the enemy, refusal to surrender in conditions of threat to life testified to an act worthy of respect, admiration, and delight. For the manifestation of an act from the inside and a unique being-event, according to M. Bakhtin, the completeness of the word is decisive, and its intonation component is no less important than the content-semantic or visual-expressive component (Bakhtin, 2019). According to the researcher, a spoken word cannot but be intoned since the intonation follows from the very fact of its utterance, “the word denotes an object as a certain presence, and the intonation of the speaker expresses a value attitude to the object, desired and undesirable in it, and this is what sets the word in motion-progress in the direction of its task, makes it a moment of eventfulness” (Bakhtin, 2019).

As is known, intonation (from Latin *intono* – pronounce loudly) is a set of sound speech tools that convey the semantic, emotional-expressive, and modal characters of the expression, communicative meanings, and situational predestination, stylistic colouring of the text, the individuality of the speaker's expressive techniques (Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine, 2011). In linguistics, emotional stylistically coloured words include abusive and vulgar words and suggest the appropriateness of their use in literary speech in cases where emotional information is more important than conceptual (rational) information (Kostyuk, 2018).

Based on the properties of intonation (Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine, 2011), it is possible to characterise

the obscene expression of a Ukrainian soldier: considering the structural integrity of the statement – it is a *completed* utterance; depending on the communicative type of utterance and its varieties – this is a *response*; regarding the nature of the emotional colouring of the speech text – *swear words*; considering the expressiveness of speech – a *disrespectful attitude of the speaker to the addressee*; according to the modal-volitional characteristics of speech – *categorical*; regarding the stylistic and expressive features of the text – *the official nature of the refusal in a reduced style*.

By intonation (disrespectful attitude, reduced style of speech), the statement of the Ukrainian defender demonstrated the lack of fear among the defenders and their disregard for the enemy's strength. For this study, the idea of abusive vocabulary as a means of accusatory assessment, as a “native sister of criticism and satire”, is relevant (Kleputs & Zubrytska, 2009) as a tool for rethinking the threatening phenomenon that humanity has successfully used since ancient times.

Analysing the novel by François Rabelais, M. Bakhtin (1965) recognised obscene language as a form of familiar and square speech and one of the components of folk laughter culture, along with ritual and spectacular actions (carnivals, square celebrations) and verbal works. According to M. Bakhtin, the folk square carnival culture was relevant not only for the artistic world of the Middle Ages but also acted as the essence of life itself as a special game phenomenon. From his standpoint, in the Middle Ages, there were two parallel worlds: official (church, state) and square (fun, funny, folk, festive), and what is important, as M. Bakhtin notes, on the carnival square, the truth of life crystallised by means of familiar-square broadcasting (first-name addressing, using the short name of the interlocutor, regardless of their origin, official, material, family, or age qualification, and obscene words and expressions).

In the explanation of M. Bakhtin, obscene words served to create a free carnival atmosphere and a second, funny aspect of the world, and the carnival worldview helped citizens to rethink despotic and terrible power as distorted and ridiculous. Interestingly, as the researcher suggests, negative for speech and suitable only for insults, modern obscenities, to a certain extent, retain the charm, “a vague echo of experienced carnival liberties and carnival truth” (Bakhtin, 1965). It can be stated that in some cases abusive words can perform a life-affirming function.

Psychology considers human genetic code, formal patterns of behavior, on the basis of which specific stereotypes of behavior and experiences of people of different eras and cultures are formed. Author of the theory of the collective unconscious, K.H. Yunh (2013) noted the important role of the individual inherited for the psyche and life, in the author's opinion, “a person of the past lives inside us”, and the collective unconscious is able to periodically activate.

The response of obscene language in society showed the solidarity of Ukrainians, the general laughter of people as their acceptance of a mocking attitude to the illusory power of the enemy army and rethinking it from threatening to insignificant. In Ukrainian reality, there are well-known cases when obscene words were perceived somewhat condescendingly. As an example, the songs of the popular singer Kuzma from the musical group "Scriabin" can be cited, with which he vulgarly criticised Putin, and listeners joined the singing and repeated those abusive words; the attitude can also be called loyal to the well-known song addressed to the president of Russia, which was performed at various events after the aggression of 2014 and was perceived in society not as swearing, but as "a reflection of the objective opinion of the Ukrainian population" (Sayenko, 2017).

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, obscene words and expressions are a negative phenomenon for the language, which should be avoided.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Bakhtin, M. (1965). *Creativity of Francois Rabelais and folk culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*. Moscow: Fiction.
- [2] Bakhtin, M. (2019). [To the philosophy of action](#). *Psychology and Society*, 1, 5-34.
- [3] Dictionary of the Ukrainian language. (1973). Retrieved from <http://sum.in.ua/p/4/555/1Словник>.
- [4] Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine. (2011). Retrieved from <https://esu.com.ua/article-12426>.
- [5] Khrushch, O.V. (2021). *Peculiarities and factors of non-normative manifestation vocabulary (slang) among modern schoolchildren*. Ivano Frankivsk: Suprun V.P.
- [6] Kleputs, L., & Zubrytska, M.O. (2009). [Functional paradigm of profanity in postmodern literature](#). *Studia Methodologica*, 29, 107-112.
- [7] Kostyuk, Yu. (2018). [Negative vocabulary in the language of modern Ukrainian newspaper periodicals](#). Ternopil: Osadtsa Yu.V.
- [8] Sayenko, A.I. (2017). [Profanity as a form of petty hooliganism](#). *Scientific Bulletin of Public and Private Law*, 5(2), 154-161.
- [9] Shapar, V.B. (2007). *Modern explanatory psychological dictionary*. Kharkiv: Prapor.
- [10] Shevchenko, O.M., & Talko, O.B. (2017). [Psychological and cultural aspects of the use of profanity in the youth environment](#). *Young Scientist*, 3(43), 280-283.
- [11] Shydelko, A.V. (2017). Slander as a manifestation of deviant behavior: The basics of prevention. *Actual problems of psychology. Collection of scientific papers of the H.S. Kostyuk Institute of Psychology of the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine*, XI(16), 237-245.
- [12] Stavyska, L. (2008). *Ukrainian without taboos: A dictionary of obscenities, euphemisms and sexual slang*. Kyiv: Krytyka.
- [13] Taborovets, L.M. (2013). [Spirituality as the basis of a young person's physical health](#). *Scientific Papers*, 23, 251- 258.
- [14] Tavrovetska, N., & Shebanova, V. (2020). A cross-cultural study of the use of obscene vocabulary in the youth environment. *Psycholinguistics*, 28(1), 239-266. doi: 10.31470/2309-1797-2020-28-1-239-266.
- [15] Yunh, K.H. (2013). *Archetypes and the collective unconscious*. Lviv: Astroliabiia.

However, in conditions of a threat to life, they can represent an Act (decisive opposition of the speaker to aggressors) and intone a disrespectful attitude towards the enemy. The obscene response of the defender of the island of Zmiinyi became popular due to the public's awareness of and admiration for the Act and the general approval of the mocking assessment of the enemy army. The obscene expression of the Ukrainian defender has become a kind of truth of life, a fact of rethinking the power of the enemy into a worthless, pathetic, reprehensible force. In the opinion of this study, tracing the features of mass consciousness in the perception of obscenely expressed information is promising for investigating the problem of profanity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

None.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

## Нецензурна відповідь як індивідуально-відповідальний вчинок

**Марія Іванівна Слюсаренко**

Кандидат наук із соціальних комунікацій, старший викладач  
Державний заклад «Південноукраїнський національний педагогічний університет імені К. Д. Ушинського»  
65020, вул. Старопортофранківська, 26, м. Одеса, Україна  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0015-5160>

**Анотація.** Проблема поширення лихослів'я актуальна для сучасності. Проти нецензурної мови виступають соціальні інститути (церква, наука, освіта, правосуддя), проте лайливі слова активно функціонують у суспільстві, а окремі вислови можуть ставати крилатими. Нецензурна відповідь захисника острова Зміїний стала широкоживаною. Цей факт не набув наукового пояснення. Метою дослідження було з'ясувати причини позитивного сприйняття і масштабного поширення суспільством непристойного (лайливого) вислову. У роботі використані методи: діалектичний, міждисциплінарний, індуктивний, порівняльний, аналіз та синтез, опрацювання довідкової літератури. У науці відомими є такі властивості нецензурної лексики: атрибут для осіб, які прагнуть виглядати особливими; зброя для словесного враження; інструмент проти психологічного перенапруження; показник переживання особою стресу; свідчення мовної недбалості людини. У науці лайливу лексику не розглядали як актуальну для вираження громадянської позиції та особистої мужності мовця, як факт його відповідального вчинку. М. Бахтін пояснив вчинок як активність неповторної індивідуальної свідомості, а важливою для втілення вчинку назвав роль інтонації. Нецензурна відповідь українського захисника – це словесна протидія ворогу, а відмова від полону в умовах загрози для життя засвідчила вчинок, який зачарував суспільство, викликав захват. Інтонавання відповіді (неповажне ставлення, знижений стиль мови) продемонструвало відсутність страху в українських захисників і нехтування сили ворога. Нецензурний вислів українського захисника став своєрідною правдою життя, фактом переоцінки могутності ворога на нікчемну, жалюгідну, варту висміювання силу. Перспективним для дослідження проблеми поширення лихослів'я, на наше переконання, може стати простеження особливостей масової свідомості у сприйнятті інформації. Дослідження вербальних реакцій суспільства корисне для консолідації сил у подоланні ворога

**Ключові слова:** нецензурна відповідь; захисник острова Зміїний; вчинок; інтонація; глумлива оцінка; суспільство