A study on the effects of first- and second-language swear words in advertisements

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Abstract

An experimental study investigated the effects of first- and second-language swear words in advertisements (ads). In total, 196 Dutch participants participated in the experiment. The experiment had a between-subject design. The design was a 2 (swear word/no swear word) x 2 (English/Dutch) design. Each participant was randomly distributed to one of the four different conditions. The participants saw three different ads. After each ad, participants filled in questions about the attitude towards the ad (attractiveness, offensiveness, credibility, persuasiveness, remarkability, ordinariness, and comprehensibility), the attitude towards the product, purchase intention and recall. Results showed that swearing in ads makes the ad less attractive, less persuasive, less credible and less comprehensible. It did make the ad more remarkable and less ordinary. Also, recall of ads containing swear words was better than ads not containing swear words. Language was an important factor in research into the effects of swear words in ads. The experiment confirms that the emotional load of first-language swear words is experienced to a higher degree than second-language swear words (Caldwell-Harris & Ayçiçeği-Dinn, 2009; Dewaele, 2004; Pavelenko, 2002). Gender did not have an effect on the attitude towards ads containing swear words. Age did affect the attitude towards ads containing swear words. The attractiveness of the ad and purchase intention decreased with age. The offensiveness of the ad increased with age. English proficiency positively affected recall of the ad. Also, it affected the offensiveness of the swear words. Finally, it was found that self-reported frequency of swearing positively affected the attitude towards ads containing swear words.

1. Introduction

The Dollar Shave Club mentions that their "blades are fucking great" (Dollar Shave Club, 20120) and Thug Kitchen wants you to "eat like you give a fuck" (Thug Kitchen, n.d.). Some organizations like to use swear words in their ads to attract consumers' attention. In general, swearing is found to be effective because negative emotions like 'fuck you' are rare and carry more information than positive words (Garcia, Garas & Schweitzer, 2012). Swearing is usually used to express emotions like anger or frustration (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). Its ability to shock and disturb is often judged negatively (Vingerhoets, Bylsma & de Vlam, 2013). Many people have learned not to use swear words when they were young (Jay, 2009). The assumption about swear words is that they are used in order to hurt someone's feelings. If this assumption is true, then why do some marketers use swear words in their ads?

The harmfulness of swear words depends on the situation in which they are used (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). When a company writes "our blades are fucking great", swearing is used to emphasize that their blades are good and to attract consumers' attention. It is not used to hurt someone's feelings. Besides attracting the attention of consumers, swear words may have some other positive effects (e.g. Baker & Broadus, 2015). For example, testimonies containing swear words are perceived as more credible (Rassin & van der Heijden, 2007) and swearing in a proattitudinal speech makes the speech more persuasive (Schrerer & Sagarin, 2006). Also, it is suggested that ads containing shocking content perform better on recall (Dahl, Frankenberger & Manchanda, 2003). However, attitudes towards swearing may differ depending on the language of the swear words (e.g. Dewaele, 2004; 2010) and the evaluator's gender (e.g. Dewaele, 2004) and age (e.g. Urwin & Venter, 2014). The outcomes of studies into the effects of swearing are sometimes inconclusive. For instance, it was found that swear words in one's first language are more emotional than in one's second (Gawinkowska, Paradowski, Bilewicz, 2013). However, people sometimes overestimate the offensiveness of second-language swear words because they are not aware of the exact meaning of the words (Dewaele 2016). Also, the second language proficiency of a person influences the offensiveness of second-language swear words, according to Dewaele (2016). The most crucial gap in literature is that only one of the studies focused specifically on swearing in advertisements (Baker & Broadus, 2015). Therefore, this research will dig deeper into the effectiveness of the use of swear words in advertisements, with emphasis on first- and second-language effects.

2. Theoretical framework

The use of swear words in advertising is part of shock advertising (Dahl, Frankenberger & Manchanda, 2003). Shock advertising can be described as intentionally, rather than unintentionally, violating the norms and offending the audience in order to attract them (Dahl et al., 2003). Some also call it 'shockvertising' (e.g. Machová, Huszárik & Tóth, 2015; Parry, Jones, Stern & Robinson, 2013). Swearing in ads can have some positive effects. Dahl et al. (2003) and Picktong and Broderick (2005) pointed out that shock advertising is used in order to attract the attention of the audience. Also, ads may perform better on recall when including shocking content (Dahl et al., 2003). Recall of memory is an important aspect of defining the effectiveness of ads. An ad is effective when the brand as well as the message are remembered by the consumers (Bushman & Phillips, 2001). Memory functions as an important tool in determining the response of consumers towards the ad. Therefore, Dahl et al. (2003) examined if shocking content had a different effect on memory and attention than non-shocking content in the context of HIV/AIDS prevention. Their experiment contained three different ads with three different appeals: shock, fear and information. The results indeed showed that the shock appeal outperformed the other two appeals on attracting attention and memory. However, in political discourse different results were found (Cavazza & Guidetti, 2014). Participants were given a fictitious blog post written by a candidate in the elections. They were exposed to either a blog post containing vulgar language (e.g. "a situation that pissed off everyone") or neutral language (e.g. "a situation that worries everyone"). At the end of the questionnaire, they wrote down what they remembered of the blog post. In contrast to Dahl et al. (2003), no significant effects in recall between the vulgar and the neutral posts were found.

Beside research on the effects of swearing on recall, several researchers have investigated the effect of swearing on persuasion (e.g. Bostrom, Baseheart & Rossiter, 1973; Cavazza & Guidetti, 2014; Scherer & Sagarin, 2006). Scherer and Sagarin (2006) wanted to find out if judicious swearing increases persuasion due to language intensity. According to Bradac, Bowers and Courtright (1979), obscene language is a form of intense language which contributes to a change of attitude of the source. In the experiment of Scherer and Sagarin (2006), participants watched a speech either including or not including the swear word 'damn'. After partipants had watched the speech, they filled in a questionnaire with which the persuasiveness of the speech was tested. Results showed that when swear words were used, this did indeed increase persuasion of the (pro-attitudinal) speech. However, the authors mention that the swear word 'damn' is a relatively mild swear word. Swearing might, therefore, only increase persuasion when the swear word is rather inoffensive. Schrerer and Sagarin (2006) state that future research should use stronger swear words. Another study about the persuasiveness of using swear words in speech was done by Bostrom, Baseheart and Rossiter (1973). The authors conducted an experiment in which participants listened to an interview about the legalization of marijuana for adults. The interview contained several swear words. A control group heard the same speech, but then without swear words in it. The authors did not find an effect of swearing on the persuasiveness of the message. Also, they found a negative effect of swearing on the credibility of the interviewee. Cavazza and Guidetti (2014) investigated if people perceive a political message including vulgar language as more or less persuasive than a neutral message. After the participants had read two messages (vulgar versus neutral), they answered some questions about the persuasiveness of the speech. It was speculated that vulgarity would make the message more persuasive due to the language intensity; surprisingly that was not the case. The vulgar message was perceived as less persuasive. At the same time, the vulgar message was assessed as most influencing. Therefore, outcomes of the effect of swearing on persuasion are inconsistent.

Another effect of swearing is that it might make the message more credible. As discussed above, Bostrom et al. (1973) found that swearing decreased the credibility of the speaker. Rassin and van der Heijden (2007) also studied the effect of swearing on credibility. The authors investigated the impact of swearing on the credibility of a testimony. The authors conducted three different studies: one in which the participants were simply asked if they thought that swearing would make a statement more credible or deceitful; in the other two they rated the credibility of several fictitious statements with and without swearwords. The results were inconclusive. Participants said that swearing would make a statement more deceitful. However, when confronted with several statements, they rated the statements including swearwords as more credible. Schrerer and Sagarin (2006) also examined the effect of swearing on credibility. They speculated that swearing would contribute to credibility because it makes the speaker more human. Humans often swear to express their genuine feelings like anger or frustration (Feldman, Lian, Kosinski & Stillwell, 2017). This might be related to credibility. Participants watched a speech including swear words or not including swear words (Schrerer & Sagarin, 2006). After watching, they rated the credibility of the speaker. The authors did not find any effect of swearing on credibility. However,

they state that "swearing may be affecting credibility both positively and negatively, leading to an overall null effect" (Schrerer and Sagarin, 2006, p. 144).

Another study by Westrop, Nordmann, Bruce and Scott (2018) also did not find an effect of swearing on credibility. The authors investigated the effect of swearing in Facebook timelines. They wanted to know what the effects of swearing are on the perceived attractiveness and credibility of the Facebook owner. Credibility was measured as trustworthiness, honesty, and approachability. It was predicted that swearing would increase the credibility of the Facebook owner. However, swearing led to a more negative attitude towards the credibility of the owner. Using neutral language was preferred over profane language. Although swearing was found to have a negative effect on the credibility (trustworthiness, honesty, and approachability) of the Facebook owner, ratings on the honesty of the owner were significantly higher than on the trustworthiness and approachability of the owner. Feldman et al. (2017) also examined the relationship between profanity and honesty. Unlike Rassin and van der Heijden (2007) and Schrerer and Sagarin (2006), Feldman et al. (2017) did find a positive correlation between profanity and honesty. Participants were asked why they swear and how often they swear. They also listed their favourite swear words and answered a Lie scale. The Lie scale was used to measure their honesty. Honesty and profanity were positively correlated. Participants who listed a higher number of swear words, lied less. Feldman et al. (2017, p. 818) state that "people regard profanity more as a tool for the expression of their genuine emotions rather than being antisocial and harmful". Therefore, it might be the case that judicious swearing in ads may also be seen as expressing genuine emotions.

How people react to swearing depends upon multiple factors. One of these factors is language (Jay, 2008). Research has shown that swear words have a different impact on people in their first (L1) or their second language (L2). For instance, recall of swear words in L2 is higher than in L1 (Ayçiçegi & Harris, 2004). In the experiment of Ayçiçegi and Harris (2004) late learners of English rated several positive, negative and neutral words on unpleasantness. Some words were shown in L1, and some in L2. Each word was shown for ten seconds. In total, the experiment took 15 minutes. After the 15 minutes they were surprised with a recall test. Results showed that the memory effect was strongest for negative L2 words. According to Ayçiçegi and Harris (2004), bilinguals remember negative L2 words better than negative L1 words because of the lower negative mood that accompanies these words.

The emotional load of words is also different in L1 and L2. Multiple studies on the emotional load between words in one's first and one's second language have been conducted (e.g. Besemeres, 2010; Caldwell-Harris & Ayçiçeği-Dinn, 2009; Ferré, García, Fraga, Sánchez-Casas & Molero, 2010; Pavlenko, 2002, 2008). Research has shown that the emotional load of words in one's first language is experienced to a higher degree than in one's second language (Caldwell-Harris & Ayciceği-Dinn, 2009; Dewaele, 2004; Pavelenko, 2002). According to Pavlenko (2002), the emotional impact between the first and the second language differs when the second language is learned after puberty. One's first language is the language of personal involvement, the second of distance and detachment. People might use their second language in cases that are too disturbing to describe in their first language, like confessing for instance (Bond & Lai, 1986). Switching to the second language therefore acts as a distancing function. Javier and Marcos (1989) argue the same; people shift from their first to their second language in order to avoid unacceptable and anxiety-provoking materials, like taboo words. In early research, Gonzales-Reigosa (1976) already discovered that the use of swear words in one's first language evoke stronger anxiety than in one's second (as cited in Eilola, Havelka and Sharma, 2007, p. 1064). Spanish-English bilinguals associated taboo words in their first language with higher anxiety than in their second. A more recent study on swearing in a second language was conducted by Mohammadi (2020). Mohammadi (2020) were interested in people's behaviour in first- and second-language swearing when being confronted with different emotional scenarios. In the experiment, 34 participants with English as their second language watched 14 short emotion-evoking videos. Half of the videos showed highly negative emotional situations, the other half low-negative emotional situations. Participants were given a question in English, and the same question in their first language. Participants were also asked to answer in English, and in their first language. They were asked to write down what they thought the subject of the video may have said in each emotional situation. The results showed that when being confronted with highly negative emotional situations, participants wrote down utterances containing first- and second-language swear words. When being confronted with low-negative emotional situations, they preferred utterances containing swear words in their second language. According to the researcher, the results "partially confirm previous claims about the first language being perceived more emotional than the second language in bilingual speakers" (Mohammadi, 2020, p. 14). The degree of emotional arousing is an important factor in research into the emotional load of first- and second-languages.

Research points out that swearwords in one's first language usually evoke a stronger emotional force than in one's second language (e.g. Dewaele, 2004; Dewaele, 2010; Gawinkowska et al. 2013; Mohammadi, 2020). Swearing in L2 distances the speaker emotionally from the information expressed (Gawinkowska et al., 2013). However, the emotional force of swear words in L2 does depend on the L2 proficiency of the listener (Dewaele, 2016). Dewaele (2016) examined the differences in emotional effects of swearwords between L1 and LX (English foreign language) users and the relationship between the offensiveness of words and English proficiency. Each participant rated the offensiveness of 30 swear words, all different in emotional valence (slightly negative to extremely negative). Surprisingly, the LX users overestimated the offensiveness of most words, which is in contradiction with findings of previous research that found that the emotional load of swear words in a second language is low (Dewaele, 2004; Dewaele, 2010; Gawinkowska, Paradowski, Bilewicz, 2013). English proficiency was an important factor in the experiment of Dewaele (2016). The more proficient the participants were, the better they understood the meaning of the negative words. Therefore, they were able to rate the more offensive words like 'slut' as highly offensive. The less offensive words like 'silly' were linked to lower offensiveness. Proficient bilinguals did not experience any difference in the intensity of words in their first or second language because they are better aware of the real meaning (Ferré et al, 2010; Dewaele, 2016). Differences in intensity mostly occur when people have learned the second language after puberty (Pavlenko, 2002).

A problem for research on the use of swear words in ads is that the effects differ per person (Jay, 2008). Besides the English proficiency of a person, there are some other characteristics which have an impact on the effects of swear words. One of these characteristics is gender. Studies have already demonstrated the differences in the impact of swearing on men and women (e.g. Dewaele, 2004; Fine & Johnson, 1984, Jay, 2000). For instance, it was found that swearing is linked to the trait of masculinity (Jay, 2000). Early findings illustrate that men use more taboo words in daily life than women (Rayson, Leech & Hodges, 1997). However, does this mean that women are more offended by swearing or that men are more attracted to it? Dewaele (2004) mentions that the emotional force of swear words is higher for women than men. The same results were found by Jay and Janschewitz (2008) and Sapolsky, Shafer and Kaye (2011). Women were more offended by swearing in Facebook timelines showed that men and women both judge swearing negatively. Baker and

Broadus (2015) also found that there were no gender differences in the (positive) effects of swearing in ads. Baker and Broadus (2015) gave their participants a survey containing a fictitious ad for a fictitious product. There were eight different ads: four containing a swear word, and four exactly the same ads but then without the swear words. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight ads. It was expected that the use of swear words would have a more positive effect on men than on women. However, no significant differences were found. This could be due to the fact that the participants were all undergraduate students between 18 and 24. There may be a chance that the younger population is not affected by swear words at all. Baker and Broadus (2015) state that future research should investigate the effects of swearing in older age groups.

Age is a key characteristic when examining the effects of swearing. According to Dewaele (2004), age does not affect the emotional force of swear words. In an experiment with more than 1000 participants, no differences in the emotional force of swear words were found between age groups ranging from 16 to 70. However, Urwin and Venter (2014) do think that age, and specifically generation, affects the responses to shocking advertisements. The authors investigated if shocking advertising is still effective among Generation Y (born between 1979 and 1994) (Urwin & Venter, 2014). A total of 300 participants between the age of 18 and 25 filled in a questionnaire containing questions about five different types of shocking ads. The results showed that all shocking ads were ineffective. This might be explained by the fact that people swear more when they are young and that it declines with age (Thelwall, 2008; Jay, 2009). Urwin and Venter (2014) state that future research should look into the differences between several age groups.

In summary, the question concerning swearing is what the attitudes towards swearing exactly are. Several studies have been done about the effects of swearing on attracting attention (Dahl et al.; 2003; Picktong & Broderick, 2005), recall (Dahl et al. 2003; Cavazzi & Guidetti, 2014), persuasion (Bostrom et al., 1973; Fine and Johnson, 1984; Cavazzi & Guidetti, 2014) and credibility (Rassin & van der Heijden, 2007; Schrerer & Sagarin; 2006; Feldman et al, 2017). However, the results were sometimes inconclusive. Also, there are factors which may influence the attitude towards swearing. One of these factors is language. The language of swear words is an important factor in research to the effects of swearing. On the one hand it was found that swear words in one's first language evoke stronger emotions than in one's second (e.g. Dewaele, 2004; Dewaele, 2010; Gawinkowska et al. 2013). On the other hand, research by Mohammadi (2020) only partially confirmed the claims about the first language being perceived more emotional than

the second language. Also, proficient bilinguals do not experience any difference in the emotional load between first- and second-language swear words (Dewaele, 2016). And the most crucial gap is that only one of the studies focused specifically on the effects of swearing in advertisements (Baker & Broadus, 2015) .To gain more insight into the effects of swearing in advertisements, with emphasis on the effects of first- and second-language swear words, the main research question is:

RQ1: What are the effects of using swear words in advertisements and to what extent do these effects differ when being evoked by first- or second-language swear words?

As the outcomes of the use of swearwords on recall (Dahl et al. 2003; Cavazzi & Guidetti, 2014), persuasion (Fine and Johnson, 1984; Cavazzi & Guidetti, 2014) and credibility (Rassin & van der Heijden, 2007; Schrerer & Sagarin; 2006; Feldman et al, 2017) were inconclusive, the present research focuses on these variables. Besides, it also focuses on the effects of swear words in ads on the attractiveness of the ad, the offensiveness of the ad, (Dewaele, 2016), the attitude towards the product and on purchase intention as this is meaningful for marketers to know. As research points out, gender (Dewaele, 2004; Jay, 2000; Rayson et al. Jan & Janschewitz, 2008; Baker & Broadus, 2015), age (Dewaele, 2004; Urwin & Venter, 2014) and English proficiency (Ayçiçegi & Harris, 2004; Dewaele, 2016; Pavlenko, 2002) may influence the effects. However, the results of research into the effects of gender, age and English proficiency on the attitude towards swearing were inconclusive. For instance, a couple of studies found that the emotional force of swear words is higher for women than for men (Dewaele, 2004; Jay & Janschewitz, 2008; Shafer & Kaye, 2011) while other studies did not find gender differences in the attitude towards swearing (e.g. Baker & Broadus, 2015). The same applies to the effects of age on the attitude towards swearing. Dewaele (2004) did not find an effect of age on the emotional load of swear words. However, Urwin and Venter (2014) do think that age might affect the emotional load of swear words and state that future research should look into it. Lastly, the more proficient someone is in their second language, the better they might understand the meaning of negative words (Dewaele, 2016). Therefore, English proficiency may also influence the effects of swear words. To further investigate the effects of gender, age and English proficiency on the attitude towards swearing, the sub questions are:

SQ1: To what extent does gender affect the attitude towards the ad, the attitude towards the product and the purchase intention when the ad contains first- or second-language swear words?

SQ2: To what extent does age affect the attitude towards the ad, the attitude towards the product and the purchase intention when the ad contains first- or second-language swear words?

SQ3: To what extent does English proficiency affect the attitude towards the ad, the attitude towards the product and the purchase intention when the ad contains first- or second-language swear words?

In addition, the effect of self-reported frequency of swearing on the attitude towards swearing in ads was also investigated. Dewaele (2016) investigated the relation between the English proficiency of second language learners and the self-reported use of thirty second language emotion-laden words. However, he did not investigate the effect of self-reported frequency of swearing on the attitude towards swearing. Therefore, the fourth sub question is:

SQ4: To what extent does self-reported frequency of swearing affect the attitude towards the ad, the attitude towards the product and the purchase intention when the ad contains first- or second- language swear words?

Addressing these research questions will fill the gap of first and second language effects of swear words in advertisements. The results of this research are important for marketers and specifically for marketers of multinational companies. The present research will inform marketers about the effects of swearing and the language in which swear words in ads are most effective.

3. Method

3.1 Materials

In order to investigate the effects of swear words in L1 or L2 in ads, four different questionnaires were created. Every questionnaire contained three ads for a non-existing product of a non-existing company, which was based on Baker and Broadus (2015). Baker and Broadus (2015) also

examined the effects of swear words in advertising by showing an ad for a fictitious product of a fictitious company. In the present study, the three ads all had the same manipulation. That is, the first questionnaire only contained ads with swear words in Dutch. The second questionnaire only contained ads with swear words in Dutch. The second questionnaire only contained ads with swear words in English. The third only contained ads with non-swear words in English. Because the participants only saw three ads with the same manipulation they did not know what the main goal of the experiment was. The three ads (per questionnaire) were all different in how the swear words/non-swear word were used. They were used as personal insults ('hey idiot!') general expletives ('goddamn') and destinational usages ('bugger off!') taken from McEnery (2006). The advertisements were all different in their appearance. Beer was chosen as the product for the advertisement. In total, 12 different advertisements for a non-existing beer of a non-existing company were created (see Appendix 1). Table 1 shows which swear words and non-swear words were chosen.

	Personal insult	General expletive	Destinational usage
Swear word in EN	Idiot	Goddamn	Bugger off
Swear word in NL	Idioot	Godverdomme	Flikker op
Non-swear word in EN	You	Wow	Go away
Non-swear word in NL	Jij	Wauw	Ga weg

The sentence containing the personal insult was: 'Hey idiot, you have to try this beer! [Hé idioot, je moet dit biertje proberen!]'. Without the swear word it was: 'Hey you, you have to try this beer! [Hey jij, je moet dit biertje proberen!]'. The sentence in which the general expletive was used, was: 'Goddamn, this beer is tasty! [Godverdomme, dit biertje is lekker!]'. Without the swear word in it, it was: 'Wow, this beer is tasty! [Wauw, dit biertje is lekker!]'. Lastly, for the destinational usage swear word the sentence was: 'Bugger off, you still haven't tried this beer!? [Flikker op, heb je dit biertje nog steeds niet geprobeerd!?]'. And without the swear words the sentence was: 'Go away, you still haven't tried this beer!? [Ga weg, heb je dit biertje nog steeds niet geprobeerd!?]'.

All English swear words had to have a Dutch equivalent. The swear word 'idiot' was taken from Dewaele (2016). Dewaele (2016) mentioned in his research that the swear word 'idiot' is an emotional-laden word and used frequently enough to be recognized for both native and non-native speakers. The swear word falls within the category 'insults' (Pavlenko, 2008). 'Idiot' was chosen because it is not limited to one gender like 'bitch' or 'wanker'. The literal Dutch translation of 'idiot' is 'idioot' (van Dale, 2020). According to McEnery (2006), 'idiot' is a very mild swear words on the scale of offence. The general expletive 'goddamn' was taken from Jay (2009). According to Jay (2009), who looked at 20 years of taboo word data, this word is among the ten most frequently used swear words. 'Goddamn' is a religious taboo word. According to Interglot (2020), an online dictionary, the literal Dutch translation of 'goddamn' is 'godverdomme'. 'God' and 'damn' are both described as very mild swear words according to the scale of offence (McEnery, 2006). 'Bugger off' was taken from McEnery (2006). McEnery (2006) described 'bugger' as a mild swear word on the scale of offence. The swear word 'bugger' is a sexual taboo word. According to the online Dutch-English dictionary 'van Dale', the meaning of the noun 'bugger' is 'sodomite' or 'homosexual' (van Dale, 2020). The Dutch word 'flikker' is also a synonym for 'homosexual' (van Dale, 2020).

3.2 Design

The experiment had a between-subject design. The design was a 2 (swear word/no swear word) x 2 (English/Dutch) design. Each participant was randomly distributed to one of the four different conditions.

3.3 Subjects

In total 196 participants participated in the experiment. All participants had the Dutch nationality. The average age of the participants was 34.01 (SD = 13.98) with a range of 18 to 72. Of all participants, 33.7 % was men. A chi-square test showed no significant relation between the four versions and gender ($\chi 2(3) = 3.15$, p = .369. Most of the participants (67.3 %) were not students. A chi-square test showed no significant relation between condition and being a student or not ($\chi 2$ (3) = 2.82, p = .420. The majority of the participants were in or had finished higher professional education (HBO) (43.4%) or university education (WO) (43.4%). The educational level of the participants ranged from preparatory secondary vocational education (VMBO) to university level

(WO). A chi-square test showed no significant relation between condition and educational level $(\chi 2(18) = 15.40, p = .634)$. The English proficiency of the participants was measured by asking about their English speaking-, listening-, writing- and reading skills on a scale from 1 (very bad) to 7 (very good). When taking the all the English skills together, the average English proficiency of the participants was 5.91 (SD = 1.02). A two-way analysis of variance with language and swear word yes/no as factor showed no significant main of language (*F* (1. 192) < 1) and swear words yes/no (*F* (1, 192) = 1.56, *p* = .312) on the English proficiency. The interaction effect of language and swear word yes/no was also not statistically significant (*F* (1, 192) < 1).

3.4 Instruments

After each advertisement participants were asked questions about the advertisement, the product and their purchase intention. The questions were the same for every version of the questionnaire. Therefore, only one of the versions is added in Appendix 2. Firstly, the attitude towards the ad was measured with 7-point semantic differential scales, following the statement 'I think the advertisement is...'. The attitude towards the ad was measured by seven dimensions: attractiveness, offensiveness, credibility, persuasiveness, remarkability, ordinariness, and comprehensibility.

The attractiveness, offensiveness, credibility, persuasiveness and remarkability of the ad were all measured with one item. Attractiveness was measured with the item: not attractive – very attractive. Offensiveness was measured with the item: not offensive – very offensive (Dewaele, 2016). Credibility was measured with the item: not credible – very credible (Schrerer & Sagarin, 2006). Persuasiveness was measured with the item: not persuasive – very persuasive (Cavazza & Guidetti, 2014) and the remarkability was measured with: very unremarkable – very remarkable.

The ordinariness of the ad was measured with two items: 'very strange – very ordinary' and 'totally not what I expected – totally what I expected'. The reliability of the 'ordinariness of the advertisement' was good: $\alpha = .81$. It was tried to merge the dimension 'remarkability' together with the dimension 'ordinariness'. The remarkability of the ad was recoded the other way around, as 'very remarkable – very unremarkable'. However, the reliability of the merge was negative: $\alpha = .429$. Therefore, the remarkability of the ad was taken separate. The comprehensibility of the ad was also measured with two items: 'very unclear – very clear' and 'totally incomprehensible –

totally comprehensible'. The reliability of 'comprehensibility of the advertisement' was good: $\alpha = .88$.

Secondly, the attitude towards the product was measured with three 7-point semantic differential scales based on Hornikx and Hof (2008), following the statement 'I think this product is...': 'not tasty – tasty', 'not attractive – attractive' and 'of bad quality – of good quality'. The three items were merged together as 'attitude towards the product'. The reliability of 'attitude towards the product' was good: $\alpha = .92$.

'Purchase Intention' was also measured with a semantic differential scale. This scale was: "provide a score on how likely you are to purchase the product (1 = very unlikely, 7 = very likely). The scale was based on Zafar and Rafique (2008).

Thirdly, background questions about swearing were asked. The participants were asked to rate the offensiveness of the following words: 'bugger off', 'flikker op' [bugger off], 'idiot', 'idioot' [idiot], 'goddamn', 'godverdomme' [goddamn]. The items were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 'totally not offensive' to 'very offensive'(Dewaele, 2016). After that, the participants were asked to indicate how often they swear themselves on a 7-point scale ranging from 'never' to 'very often' (Dewaele, 2015). Lastly, it was measured in which language the participants prefer to swear (Dewaele, 2004a). The item was measured with a multiple choice question. The answers the participants could give were: 'Dutch', 'English' and 'other'.

Fourthly, demographic questions were asked about participants age, gender, mother tongue and educational level. After that, the participants rated their English proficiency. The English proficiency of the participants was measured with four items. They rated their English speaking, listening, writing and reading skills on a 7-point semantic differential scale ranging from 'very bad' to 'very good' (taken from Krishna & Ahluwahlia, 2008). The four items were merged together as 'overall English proficiency'. The reliability of 'overall English proficiency' was good: $\alpha = .92$. Participants were also asked at what age they learned English (Pavelenko, 2002).

Lastly, the dependent variable 'recall' was measured. Participants wrote down what they remembered of each slogan. The answers were coded as a score. For the versions containing swear words, the participants received one point if they mentioned the correct swear word (idiot/idioot, bugger off/flikker op, goddamn/godverdomme) or if they mentioned 'swear word', as this means that they did remember that the ad contained a swear word. For the versions containing no swear words, the participants received one point if they mentioned 'go away/ga weg', 'hey you/hé jij' or

'wow/wauw. They also received a point if they mentioned 'slogan', as this means that they did remember the slogan. Spelling errors were not considered and, for example, 'bugger' instead of 'bugger off' was also correct. The system of giving points to the answers on recall was based on Cavazzi and Guidetti (2014). In total, 588 answer had to be coded. A second coder coded 10 % of the answers. The interrater reliability of the variable 'recall' was good: $\kappa = .97$.

Because all participants were Dutch, the questionnaire and consent form were also in Dutch.

3.5 Procedure

An online questionnaire was used and participants were approached online via WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Facebook or Instagram. Because of the Corona virus approaching participants face-to-face was not allowed. All participants had to be Dutch and older than 18 years old so that parental consent was not needed. A short introduction was given at the beginning of the questionnaires together with a consent form. The consent form was formulated as the following: *indicate your choice below. By clicking the 'I agree' button, you indicate that you: have read the above information; voluntarily participate in the study; are 18 years and older. If you do not want to participate in the questionnaire, click the 'I do not want to participate' button.* Participants were told that they participated in an investigation to the effects of advertisements. In order not to bias the participants only little information was given. Participants were thanked for participating in the experiment and they were told how much time the questionnaire would take. They saw three different ads; after each ad they received questions about the ad. Participants were not rewarded for completing the questionnaire. Filling in the questionnaire took an estimated 5 minutes.

3.6 Statistical treatment

First, a two-way multivariate analysis was conducted to find main effects and interaction effects of language (Dutch/English) and swear words (yes/no) on the dependent variables: attitude towards the ad (attractiveness, offensiveness, credibility, persuasiveness, remarkability, comprehensibility and ordinariness), attitude towards the product, purchase intention and recall. When non-significant interaction effects on a dependent variable were found, one-way univariate analyses were conducted to find the main effects of language and presence swear words on this variable. For the significant interaction effects, follow-up one-way multivariate and univariate

analyses were used to determine the effects of language (Dutch/English) on the evaluation of ads with swear words and ads without swear words separately. Paired sample t-tests were conducted to determine the differences between the offensiveness of English and Dutch swear words. Followup one-way multivariate and univariate analyses were also used to find to effect of swear words (yes/no) on the evaluation of Dutch and the English ads separately. For the effect of gender on the dependent variables, a one-way multivariate analysis was conducted. The effect of gender on the self-reported frequency of swearing and the offensiveness of the swear words (bugger off', 'flikker op' [bugger off], 'idiot', 'idioot' [idiot], 'goddamn', 'godverdomme' [goddamn]) was measured by one-way univariate analyses. For the effect of age on the dependent variables, a correlation coefficient was used. To determine the effects of English proficiency and self-reported frequency of swearing on the dependent variables, correlation coefficient tests were again conducted.

4. Results

The aim of the study was to determine the effects of first- and second-language swear words in advertisements. It was also investigated if gender, age, English proficiency and self-reported frequency of swearing influenced the effects of swear words in ads. The dependent variables were attitude towards the ad (attractiveness of the ad, offensiveness of the ad, credibility of the ad, persuasiveness of the ad, remarkability of the ad, comprehensibility of the ad and ordinariness of the ad), attitude towards the product, purchase intention and recall.

4.1 Effect of language and presence swear word on the dependent variables

As mentioned above, the aim was to find out what the effects of the presence of swear words and language were on the dependent variables. Therefore, a two-way multivariate analysis was conducted with language (Dutch/English) and presence swear word (yes/no) as factors. A two-way multivariate analysis with language (Dutch/English) and swear word (yes/no) as factors showed a significant main effect of language (F(10, 183) = 2.53, p = .007) and swear word (F(10, 183) = 15.22, p < .001) on the dependent variables. These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction effect between language and presence swear word (F(10, 183) = 3.36, p < .001). Table 2 shows all the means and standard deviations of the dependent variables in function of ad version.

Table 2Means and standard deviations of all dependent variables in function of ad version
(1 = not attractive, 7 = very attractive/1 = not offensive, 7 = very offensive/1 = not
credible, 7 = very credible/1 = not persuasive, 7 = very persuasive/1 = not
remarkable, 7 = very remarkable/1 = not comprehensible, 7 = very comprehensible/
1 = very strange, 7 = very ordinary/1 = very negative attitude towards the product,
7 = very positive attitude towards the product/1 = very low purchase intention, 7 =
very high purchase intention/0 = bad recall, 3 = good recall)

	Swear	· words	Non-swe	ar words
	Dutch	English	Dutch	English
	n = 50	n = 47	n = 50	n = 49
	M (SD)	M(SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Attractiveness	2.82 (1.20)	3.60 (1.24)	3.88 (0.84)	3.57 (1.02)
Offensiveness	4.30 (1.57)	3.26 (1.44)	2.22 (1.30)	2.16 (1.28)
Credibility	2.99 (1.24)	3.67 (1.10)	3.99 (0.71)	3.75 (0.89)
Persuasiveness	3.04 (1.13)	3.54 (1.34)	3.77 (0.82)	3.46 (1.19)
Remarkability	5.19 (1.26)	4.32 (1.39)	4.06 (1.07)	3.96 (1.00)
Comprehensibility	4.06 (1.42)	4.66 (1.58)	4.97 (0.92)	4.51 (1.27)
Ordinariness	2.98 (1.20)	3.75 (1.20)	4.24 (0.76)	3.94 (1.05)
Attitude towards product	3.41 (1.12)	3.78 (1.10)	4.16 (0.74)	4.07 (0.93)
Purchase intention	2.85 (1.36)	3.09 (1.54)	3.61 (1.02)	3.37 (1.18)
Recall	1.92 (1.16)	1.53 (1.30)	0.68 (1.02)	0.45 (0.94)

4.1.1 Interaction effects of language and presence swear words

The interaction effect between language and the presence of swear words was significant (F (10, 183) = 3.36, p < .001). Significant interactions were found of language and swear words yes/no on the attitude towards the ad (attractiveness (F (1, 192) = 12.39, p = .001), offensiveness (F (1, 192) = 6.08, p = .015), credibility (F (1, 192) = 10.06, p = .002), persuasiveness (F (1, 192) = 6.26, p = .013), remarkability (F (1, 192) = 5.18, p = .024), comprehensibility (F (1, 192) = 7.95, p = .005) and the ordinariness (F (1, 192) = 12.50, p = .001)). No significant interaction effect was found of

language and presence swear word on the attitude towards the product (F(1, 192) = 2.56, p = .001) purchase intention (F(1, 192) = 1.68, p = .196) and recall (F(1, 192) < 1).

4.1.2 Main effects of language and presence swear words for attitude towards the product

A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of language on the attitude towards the product (F(1, 194) < 1). Another one-way analysis of variance did show a significant effect of presence swear words on the attitude towards the product (F(1, 194) = 14.01, p < .001). The attitude towards the product was lower when the ad contained swear words (M = 3.59, SD = 1.12) than when the ad did not contain swear words (M = 4.12, SD = 0.83).

4.1.3 Main effects of language and presence swear words for purchase intention

A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of language on the purchase intention (F (1, 194) < 1). Another one-way analysis of variance did show a significant effect of presence swear words on the purchase intention (1, 194) = 8.17, p = .005). The purchase intention was lower for ads containing swear words (M = 2.96, SD = 1.45) than for ads not containing swear words (M = 3.48, SD = 1.11).

4.1.4 Main effects of language and presence swear words for recall

A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of language on recall (F(1, 194) = 3.23, p = .074). Another one-way analysis of variance did show a significant effect of presence swear words on recall (F(1, 194) = 53.57, p < .001). Recall was higher for ads containing swear word (M = 1.73, SD = 1.24) than for ads not containing swear words (M = 0.57, SD = 0.98).

4.2 Effect of language on the evaluation of ads with and without swear words

Since there were significant interactions between language and swear word presence, follow-up analyses were conducted to determine the effect of language on the evaluation of ads with swear words and ads without swear words. One-way multivariate and univariate analyses were conducted for the ads with swear words and the ads without swear words separately.

4.2.1 Effect of language on the evaluation of ads with swear words

A one-way multivariate analyses for the evaluations of the advertisements containing swear words, with language as factor, found a significant multivariate effect of language (F(7, 89) = 4.87, p < .001). The univariate analyses showed an effect of language on the attractiveness of the ad (F(1, 95) = 10.01, p = .002), the offensiveness of the ad (F(1, 95) = 11.64, p = .001), the credibility of the ad (F(1, 95) = 8.10, p = .005), the persuasiveness of the ad (F(1, 95) = 3.94, p = .05), the remarkability of the ad (F(1, 95) = 10.38, p = .002) and the ordinariness of the ad (F(1, 95) = 10.10, p = .002). No effects were found of language on the comprehensibility of the ad (F(1, 95) = 3.88, p = .052). The ads containing swear words in Dutch were less attractive (M = 2.82, SD = 1.20), more offensive (M = 4.30, SD = 1.57), less credible (M = 2.99, SD = 1.24), less persuasive (M = 3.04, SD = 1.13), more remarkable (M = 5.19, SD = 1.26) and less ordinary (M = 2.98, SD = 1.20) than the ads containing English swear words (attractiveness: M = 3.60, SD = 1.24; offensiveness: M = 3.26, SD = 1.44; credibility: M = 3.67, SD = 1.10; persuasiveness: M = 3.54, SD = 1.34; remarkability: M = 4.32, SD = 1.39; ordinariness: M = 3.75, SD = 1.20).

4.2.2 Effect of language on the evaluation of ads without swear words

A one-way multivariate analysis for the evaluations of the advertisements containing non-swear words, with language as factor, found no significant multivariate effect of language (F (7, 91) < 1).

4.3 Effect of language on the offensiveness of swear words

All participants were asked to rate the offensiveness of the swear words: 'idiot', 'goddamn' and 'bugger off' and their translations 'idioot', 'godverdomme' and 'flikker op'. Paired sample t-tests were conducted to find the effect of language on the offensiveness of the swear words.

4.3.1 Offensiveness of first- and second-language swear words

A paired samples t-test showed a significant difference between the offensiveness of the swear word 'idiot' and 'idioot' (t (195) = 5.15, p < .001). The word 'idioot' (M = 4.86, SD = 1.72) was shown to be more offensive than the word 'idiot' (M = 4.47, SD = 1.77).

A second paired samples t-test showed a significant difference between the offensiveness of the swear word 'goddamn' and 'godverdomme' (t (195) = 9.76, p < .001). The word

'godverdomme' (M = 4.34, SD = 2.06) was shown to be more offensive than the word 'goddamn' (M = 3.33, SD = 2.00).

A third paired samples t-test showed a significant difference between the offensiveness of the swear word 'bugger off' and 'flikker op' (t (195) = 12.21, p < .001). The utterance 'flikker op' (M = 5.05, SD = 1.78) was shown to be more offensive than the utterance 'bugger off' (M = 3.53, SD = 1.87).

4.4 Effect of swear words on evaluation of Dutch and English ads

Since there were significant interactions between language and swear word presence, follow-up analyses were conducted to determine the effect of presence of swear words on the evaluation of ads with English and ads with Dutch. One-way multivariate and univariate analyses were conducted for the ads with English words and the ads with Dutch words separately.

4.4.1 Effects of swear words on evaluation of Dutch ads

A one-way multivariate analyses for attitude towards the Dutch advertisements, with swear word (yes/no) as factor, found a significant multivariate effect of swear word (yes/no) for the fully Dutch ads (F(7, 92) = 14.21, p < .001). The univariate analyses showed an effect of swear word yes/no on the attractiveness, (F(1, 98) = 26.19, p < .001), offensiveness (F(1, 98) = 52.14, p < .001), credibility (F(1, 98) = 24.50, p < .001), persuasiveness (F(1, 98) = 13.69, p < .001), remarkability (F(1, 98) = 23.22, p < .001), comprehensibility (F(1, 98) = 14.29, p < .001) and ordinariness (F(1, 98) = 39.52, p < .001) of the ad. The Dutch ads containing swear words were found to be less attractive (M = 2.82, SD = 1.20), more offensive (M = 4.30, SD = 1.57), less credible (M = 2.99, SD = 1.24), less persuasive (M = 3.04, SD = 1.13), more remarkable (M = 5.19, SD = 1.26), less comprehensible (M = 4.06, SD = 1.42) and less ordinary (M = 2.98, SD = 1.20) than the ads not containing swear words (attractiveness: M = 3.88, SD = 0.8; offensiveness: M = 2.22 SD = 1.30; credibility: M = 3.99, SD = 0.71; persuasiveness: M = 3.7, SD = 0.82; remarkability: M = 4.06, SD = 1.49, SD = 0.92; ordinariness: M = 4.24, SD = 0.76).

4.4.2 Effect of swear words on evaluation of English ads

A one-way multivariate analyses for attitude towards the English advertisements, with swear word (yes/no) as factor, found a significant multivariate effect of swear word (yes/no) for ads with

English words (F(7, 88) = 3.47, p = .002). The univariate analysis of variance found a significant effect of swear words yes/no on the offensiveness of the ad (F(1, 94) = 15.43, p < .001). The ads containing English swear words (M = 3.26, SD = 1.44) were found to be more offensive than the ad containing English non-swear words (M = 2.16, SD = 1.28). No significant effects were found of swear word yes/no on the attractiveness, credibility, persuasiveness, remarkability, comprehensibility and ordinariness of the ad (p's > .156).

4.5 Gender differences

In order to determine if there were gender differences in the effects evoked by ads containing swear words, one-way multivariate analyses with gender as factor were conducted for the attitude towards the advertisements (attractiveness of the ad, offensiveness of the ad, credibility of the ad, persuasiveness of the ad, remarkability of the ad, comprehensibility of the ad, ordinariness of the ad), the attitude towards the product, purchase intention and recall. A one-way analysis of variance with gender as factor was conducted to find the effect of gender on how often people swear in daily life. Participants rated how often they swear on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 'never' to 'very often'. Furthermore, several one-way analyses of variance with gender as factor were conducted to find gender differences in the offensiveness of the swear words 'idiot', 'goddamn' and 'bugger off' and their translations.

4.5.1 Gender differences in the effects evoked by ads containing swear words

A one-way multivariate analysis for attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the product, purchase intention and recall when the ad contained swear words, with gender as factor, found no significant multivariate effect of gender (F(8, 88) = 1.70, p = .109).

4.5.2 Gender differences in the self-reported frequency of swearing

A one-way analysis of variance showed a significant effect of gender on the self-reported frequency of swearing (F(1, 194) = 5.75, p = .017). Men (M = 4.68, SD = 1.58) were found to swear more in daily life than women (M = 4.16, SD = 1.37).

4.5.3 Gender differences in the offensiveness of the swear words

Several one-way analyses of variance were conducted to find if women are more offended by swear words than men. One-way analyses of variance showed a significant effect of gender on the offensiveness of 'bugger off' (F(1, 194) = 5.23, p = .023), 'flikker op' (F(1, 194) = 8.73, p = .004), 'idiot' (F(1, 194) = 3.92, p = .049), 'idioot' (F(1, 194) = 4.00, p = .047) and 'godverdomme' (F(1, 194) = 4.69, p = .031). Women were more offended by 'bugger off' (M = 3.75, SD = 1.87), 'flikker op' (M = 5.31, SD = 1.37), 'idiot' (M = 4.65, SD = 1.78), 'idioot' (M = 5.03, SD = 1.68) and 'godverdomme' (M = 4.56, SD = 1.95) than men ('bugger off': M = 3.11, SD = 1.82; 'flikker op': M = 4.53, SD = 1.88; 'idiot': M = 4.12, SD = 1.71; 'idioot': M = 4.52, SD = 1.72; 'godverdomme': M = 3.89, SD = 2.21). No significant effect of gender was found on the offensiveness of 'goddamn' (F(1, 194) = 2.05, p = .154. Table 3 shows how offended men and women were by the swear words.

women ($1 = not offensive$, $7 = very offensive$)								
	Offensiveness of swear words							
	Men	Women						
	n = 66	<i>n</i> = 130						
	M (SD)	M (SD)						
Bugger off	3.11 (1.82)	3.75 (1.87)						
Flikker op	4.53 (1.88)	5.31 (2.37)						
Idiot	4.12 (1.71)	4.65 (1.78)						
Idioot	4.53 (1.72)	5.03 (1.68)						
Goddamn	3.05 (2.02)	3.48 (1.98)						
Godverdomr	ne 3.89 (2.21)	4.56 (1.95)						

Table 3Means and standard deviations of the offensiveness of swear words of men and
women (1 = not offensive, 7 = very offensive)

4.6 Age differences

A correlation coefficient analysis was conducted to examine the effect of age on the attitude towards the ad (attractiveness of the ad, offensiveness of the ad, credibility of the ad, persuasiveness of the ad, remarkability of the ad, comprehensibility of the ad, ordinariness of the ad), the attitude towards the product, purchase intention and recall for ads containing swear words. Another correlation coefficient analysis was conducted to determine the correlation between the age of the participants and how often they estimate they swear themselves.

4.6.1 Age differences in the effects evoked by ads containing swear words

For ads containing swear words, a significant positive correlation was found between the age of the participants and the offensiveness of the ad (r(97) = .32, p = .001). The offensiveness of the ad increased with the age of the participants. Also, negative correlations were found between the age of the participants and the attractiveness of the ad (r(97) = ..31, p = .002) and purchase intention (r(97) = ..25, p = .016) when de ad contained swear words. The attractiveness of the ad and purchase intention decreased with the age of the participants. No significant correlations were found between the age of the participants and the other dependent variables (p's > .084). Table 4 shows the correlations between the age of the participants and the dependent variables.

Variable	Age of the participants
Attractiveness of the ad	31**
Offensiveness of the ad	.32**
Credibility of the ad	18
Persuasiveness of the ad	13
Remarkability of the ad	.08
Comprehensibility of the ad	09
Ordinariness of the ad	11
Attitude towards the product	09
Purchase intention	25*
Recall	163

Table 4Correlation between age of the participants and the dependent variables for ads
containing swear words

* *p* < .050, ** *p* < .010

4.6.2 Correlation between age and self-reported frequency of swearing

A significant negative correlation was found between the age of the participants and their self-reported frequency of swearing (r(196) = -.41, p < .001). The self-reported frequency of swearing decreased with the age of the participants.

4.7 English proficiency

To determine the effect of English proficiency on the attitude towards the ad (attractiveness of the ad, offensiveness of the ad, credibility of the ad, persuasiveness of the ad, remarkability of the ad, comprehensibility of the ad, ordinariness of the ad), the attitude towards the product, purchase intention and recall when the ad contained English swear words, a correlation coefficient analysis was conducted. Secondly, another correlation coefficient analysis was conducted to examine the effect of English proficiency on the offensiveness of the English swear words 'bugger off', 'idiot' and 'goddamn'. Lastly, the effect of when people started learning English was tested on the offensiveness of the English swear words.

4.7.1 Effect of English proficiency on the dependent variables

A significant correlation was found between English proficiency and recall of the ad containing English swear words (r(47) = .38, p = .008). Recall of the English swear words increased with the English proficiency of the participants. No significant correlation was found between English proficiency and the attractiveness of the ad (r(47) = .02, p = .883), the offensiveness of the ad (r(47) = .02, p = .876), the credibility of the ad (r(47) = .09, p = .557), the persuasiveness of the ad (r(47) = .09, p = .552), the remarkability of the ad (r(47) = .03, p = .854), the comprehensibility of the ad (r(47) = .03, p = .854), the comprehensibility of the ad (r(47) = .09, p = .530), the attitude towards the product (r(47) = .04, p = .776) and the purchase intention (r(47) = .05, p = .717) when the ad contained English swear words.

4.7.2 Effect of English proficiency on the offensiveness of the English swear words

A significant negative correlation was found between English proficiency and the offensiveness of the swear word 'bugger off' (r (196) = -.15, p = .033). The offensiveness of the swear word 'bugger off' decreased with the English proficiency of the participants. No significant correlation

was found between English proficiency and the offensiveness of the swear words 'idiot' (r (196) = -.05, p = .477) and 'goddamn' (r (196) = -.10, p = .178).

4.7.3 Effect of when people started learning English on the offensiveness of swear words

No significant correlation was found between when people started learning English and the offensiveness of the swear words 'idiot' (r (96) = .03, p = .759), 'bugger off' (r (96) = -.03, p = .784) and 'goddamn' (r (96) = .05, p = .662).

4.8 Effect of how often people swear on the evaluations of ads containing swear words

The effect of how often people swear was tested on evaluations of ads containing swear words by conducting a correlation coefficient analysis.

4.8.1 Correlation between 'frequency of swearing' and the evaluations of ads containing swear words

A significant positive correlation was found between how often people swear and the attractiveness of the ad (r(97) = .34, p = .001), the credibility of the ad (r(97) = .21, p = .039), the persuasiveness of the ad (r(97) = .23, p = .024), the comprehensibility of the ad (r(97) = .25, p = .013), the ordinariness of the ad (r(97) = .29, p = .004), the attitude towards the product (r(97) = .28, p = .006) and the purchase intention (r(97) = .26, p = .011) when the ads contained swear words. The attractiveness, credibility, persuasiveness, comprehensibility, ordinariness, attitude towards the product and the purchase intention of the ad increased with how often people swear. Also, a significant negative correlation was found between how often people swear and the offensiveness of the ad scontaining swear words (r(97) = .40, p < .001). The offensiveness of the ad decreased with the frequency of swearing. No significant correlation was found between how often people swear and the advecte set with the remarkability of the ad (r(97) = -.03, p = .765) and recall of the ad (r(97) = -.15, p = .132). Table 5 shows the correlation between how often people swear and the dependent variables.

Variable	Frequency of swearing
Attractiveness of the ad	.34**
Offensiveness of the ad	40**
Credibility of the ad	.21*
Persuasiveness of the ad	.23*
Remarkability of the ad	03
Comprehensibility of the ad	.25*
Ordinariness of the ad	.29**
Attitude towards the product	.28**
Purchase intention	.26*
Recall	15

Table 5Correlation between how often people swear and the evaluations of ads containing
swear words

* *p* < .050, ** *p* < .010

5. Discussion

The main aim of the study was to examine the effects of using first- and second-language swear words in ads on the attitude towards the ad (attractiveness, offensiveness, credibility, persuasiveness, remarkability, comprehensibility and ordinariness), the attitude towards the product, purchase intention and recall. In total, 196 Dutch participants participated in an experiment in which they answered a questionnaire about three different ads. There were four different versions which were randomly distributed. The version could either contain three ads with swear words in Dutch, three ads with swear words in English, three ads with non-swear words in Dutch, or three ads with non-swear words in English. Other aims of the study were to examine the effects of gender, age, English proficiency and self-reported frequency of swearing on the attitude towards the ad, the attitude towards the product, purchase intention and recall.

5.1 Effects of swear words

The presence of swear words in ads had an effect on every dependent variable: attitude towards the ad (attractiveness, offensiveness, credibility, persuasiveness, remarkability, comprehensibility and ordinariness), the attitude towards the product, purchase intention and recall. However, these were not all positive. To begin with, the inclusion of swear words had an effect on the attractiveness of the ads. On the one hand, participants rated ads containing swear words as less attractive than the ads not containing swear words. This finding is in line with research of Westrop et al. (2018). Westrop et al. (2018) showed that swearing in Facebook timelines negatively influenced the attractiveness of the Facebook owner. On the other hand, the present study did show that swearing in ads made the ad more remarkable. According to Dewaele et al. (2003), using swear words in ads is rare and therefore contributes to the remarkability of ads. Subsequently, the remarkability of ads might contribute to recall of ads. According to Dahl et al. (2003), ads containing swear words perform better on recall than ads not containing swear words. The authors state that recall is an important aspect of defining the effectiveness of ads. An ad is most effective when the brand as well as the message are remembered by the audience (Busman & Philips, 2001). Although the present study did not include any brands, the results did show that including swear words in ads indeed contributed to recall of the message. Ads containing swear words performed better on recall than the ads not containing swear words. On the one hand, this is a positive effect. On the other hand, participants did not remember the ad because they thought the ad was attractive. It is more likely that participants remembered the ad containing swear words better because it offended them. Recall of emotionally-laden words is therefore higher than for non-emotionally-laden words.

Another negative effect of swear words was found on persuasion. Ads containing swear words were found to be less persuasive than ads not containing swear words. This result is incongruent to the results of Schrerer and Sagarin (2006). Scherer and Sagaring (2006) did find a positive effect of swearing on the persuasiveness of speech. The authors used the word 'damn', a relatively mild swear word. Scherer and Sagarin (2006) mentioned that a positive effect of swearing on persuasion can only be found when using appropriate swear words. However, the swear words presented in the present study were also mild swear words (McEnery , 2006). According to Cavazza and Guidetti (2014), who also found a negative effect of swearing on persuasion, this might have to do with the design of the experiments. In the experiment of Scherer and Sagarin (2006), swear words were given in speech form. In the present experiment, swear words were given in written form. (Cavazza & Guidetti, 2014). This may have contributed to the persuasiveness of the message in the experiment of Scherer and Sagarin (2006). However, Bostrom et al. (1973)

conducted an experiment in which participants listened to an interview about the legalization of marijuana for adults and no support was found for using profane language on the persuasiveness of the speech. Research of Bostrom et al. (1973) does not mention which swear words were used in the interview. It might be the case that Bostrom et al. (1973) used stronger inappropriate swear words which affected the persuasiveness of the speech negatively.

Additionally, Bostrom et al. (1973) found that swearing made the speaker less credible. Although the present study does not focus on the attitude towards the speaker but on the attitude towards the ad, it did also show that swearing in ads made the ad less credible. This finding was to be expected, as Schrerer and Sagaring (2006) and Westrop et al. (2018) found the same negative result of swearing on credibility. In the experiment of Schrerer and Sagarin (2006), participants watched a speech either including swear words or not. After watching, they rated the credibility of the speaker. The authors did not find any effect of swearing on credibility. Westrop et al. (2018) investigated the effects of swearing in Facebook timelines. Swearing made the Facebook owner less credible. The only results of swearing on credibility that are contrary to the present study are those of Rassin and van der Heijden (2007). Participants in the experiment of Rassin and van der Heijden (2007) mentioned that in general swearing would make a testimony more deceitful. However, when confronted with several statements they rated the statements containing swear words as more credible. These swear words were not directed at the listener. The authors mention that it might be the case that if the listeners were insulted directly, the listeners would not have want to believe the narrator. In the present study, the participants were directly insulted. By using the personal pronoun 'you' in the sentences 'hey idiot, you have to try this beer!' and 'bugger off, you still haven't tried this beer !?' the swear words were directly directed at the participants. This might have been the reason for the negative effect of swearing on credibility.

Other variables that were tested were the comprehensibility of the ad and the ordinariness of the ad. The participants of the present study rated the ads containing swear words as less comprehensible than the ads without swear words in it. It is possible that people do not understand why marketers would use swear words in their ads, as they think swearing in ads is less attractive and the profane language offend them. Participants also rated the ads containing swear words as strange.

5.2 Effects of language

Language turned out to be an important factor in research into the effects of swear words in ads. An unexpected result was found in the differences between English ads containing swear words and English ads not containing swear words. Whereas the Dutch ads containing swear words differed significantly from the Dutch ads not containing swear words on every evaluation, the only differences in the English ads containing swear words were found in the offensiveness and recall of the ad. An explanation for this result might be the fact that swear words have a different impact on people in one's first or one's second language. The emotional load of first-language swear words is experienced to a higher degree than second-language swear words (e.g. Caldwell-Harris & Ayçiçeği-Dinn, 2009; Pavelenko, 2002; Dewaele, 2004). One's first language is the language of personal involvement, while one's second language is the language of distance and detachment (Pavlenko, 2002). According to Gonzales-Reigosa (1976), swear words in one's first language evokes stronger anxiety than in one's second language. However, more recent research of Mohammadi (2020) only partially confirmed the claims about the first language being perceived as more emotional than the second language. In the present experiment, participants with Dutch as their first language and English as their second language participated. The results showed that participants were indeed more offended by ads containing Dutch swear words than ads containing English swear words. Therefore, it is confirmed that the emotional load of swear words in one's first language is experienced to a higher degree than in one's second language (e.g. Caldwell-Harris & Ayçiçeği-Dinn, 2009; Pavelenko, 2002; Dewaele, 2004). Participants also rated the Dutch ad containing swear words as less attractive, less credible, less persuasive, more remarkable and less ordinary.

The language of the swear words was also expected to have an effect on recall of the ads. According to Ayçiçegi and Harris (2004), recall of swear words in one's second language is higher than recall of swear words in one's first language. The authors state that bilinguals remember negative L2 words better because the negative mood of these words is lower than of negative L1 words and therefore more accepted. However, no differences in recall between the ads containing Dutch swear words and the ads containing English swear words were found in the present study. An explanation for this result might be the fact that the participants of the present study, at least according to self-report, had a very high English proficiency. Therefore, they might experience the difference in the negative mood that accompanies L1 and L2 swear words to a lower extent. As mentioned, participants were more offended by Dutch ads containing swear words than by English ads containing swear words. The present study also asked participants to rate the offensiveness of the following English swear words and their Dutch equivalents: *idiot*, *idioot* [idiot], *goddamn*, *godverdomme* [goddamn], *bugger off* and *flikker op* [bugger off]. Again, the results showed that participants were more offended by Dutch swear words than by English swear words. This too confirms that the emotional load of first-language swear words is higher than second-language swear words (e.g. Caldwell-Harris & Ayçiçeği-Dinn, 2009; Pavelenko, 2002; Dewaele, 2004).

5.3 Effects of gender

Another aim of the paper was to find out if gender had an effect on the attitude towards swearing. According to Jay (2000), swearing is linked to the trait of masculinity. Men use more swear words in daily life than women (Rayson, Leech & Hodges, 1997). The present research confirmed that men swear more in daily life than women, at least according to self-reports. An aim was to find out if this means that women are therefore more offended by swearing or men for instance more attracted by swear words. According to Dewaele (2004), Jay and Janschewitz (2008) and Sapolsky, Shafer and Kaye (2011), the emotional force of swear words is higher for women than for men. That might be the reason why women are more offended by swear words than men. However, the present study did not show an effect of gender on any of the variables: the attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the product, purchase intention and recall for ads containing swear words. Men and women had the same attitude towards swearing in ads. This result is in line with the results of Westrop et al. (2018) and Baker and Broadus (2015). According to Westrop et al. (2018), men and women both judge swearing negatively. Baker and Broadus (2015) also found that there are no gender differences in the attitude towards swearing. However, in the present study, participants were also asked to rate the offensiveness of the swear words bugger off, flikker op [bugger off], *idiot*, *idioot* [idiot], *goddamn* and *godverdomme* [goddamn]. Surprisingly, the results did show an effect of gender on the offensiveness of the swear words when the they were rated separately from the ads. Women were more offended by all swear words, except for the swear word 'goddamn'. This finding might be related to how often people swear daily. A correlation analysis showed that the more one swears, the less offended one is by swear words. As mentioned earlier, the present study confirmed that men swear more than women according to self-report.

Due to how often men swear, men might be less offended by swear words than women. Yet, no gender differences were found for the other variables. This is, as mentioned above, in line with research of Baker and Broadus (2015). However, the participants of Baker and Broadus (2015) were all undergraduate students between 18 and 24 and gender differences are likely to be smaller among the younger population. The researchers stated that future research should investigate the effects of swearing on older age groups.

5.4 Effect of age

Baker and Broadus (2015) state that they might not have found gender differences in the attitude towards swearing due to the young age of their participants. Urwin and Venter (2014) also examined the effects of shocking advertising amongst the younger generation. The authors state that for the younger generations shocking advertising is ineffective. Their experiment showed that participants of 18 to 25 were not affected by shocking ads. Therefore, the present study also examined the effects of age on the evaluations of ads containing swear words. The results showed that age is indeed an important factor in research into the effects of swearing. A negative correlation was found between the age of the participants and the attractiveness of the ads containing swear words. The older the participants were, the less attractive they rated the ads. Purchase intention was also negatively influenced by the age of the participants when the ads contained swear words. The older the participants were, the less likely they were to buy the product when the ad contained swear words. And lastly, the offensiveness of ads containing swear words increased with the age of the participants. Thellwall (2008) and Jay (2009) state that the increasement of the offensiveness might be explained by the fact that people swear more when they are young and that swearing declines with age. The present study indeed showed that the older the participants were, the less they swear.

5.5 Effect of English proficiency

Another factor which might have influenced the attitudes towards swearing (in English) is the English proficiency of the participants. According to Dewaele (2016), how people react to swear words in one's second language depends on their English proficiency. The author states that people whose second language is English sometimes overestimate the offensiveness of English swear words, because they are not aware of the exact meaning of the word due to their low English proficiency. The experiment of Dewaele (2016) showed that the more proficient people were in their second language, the less offended they were by second language swear words. The present experiment partially supports this finding. No correlation was found between the English proficiency of the participants and the offensiveness of the ad when the ad contained English swear words. However, participants also rated the offensiveness of the words 'bugger off', 'idiot' and 'goddamn'. No correlation was found between the English proficiency and the offensiveness of the swear words 'idiot' and 'goddamn'. However, 'idiot' and 'goddamn' are both swear words that are easily recognized by non-native speakers. The English proficiency of the participants did show a correlation with the offensiveness of the utterance 'bugger off'. The less proficient the participants were in English, the more offensive they rated the utterance 'bugger off'. This might be due to the fact that participants are not aware of the exact meaning of the utterance 'bugger off'. According to Pavlenko (2002), differences in the intensity of the emotional impact of swear words occur when one has learned the second language after puberty. However, the present study did not show a correlation between when people have learned their second language (English) and the offensiveness of the swear words. Therefore, the age of when someone has learned English does not affect the offensiveness of the swear words.

5.6 Effect of self-reported frequency of swearing

The present study examined if the self-reported frequency of swearing of the participants affected the attitude towards swearing in ads. The results showed that the self-reported frequency of swearing is an important factor in research into the effects of swearing in ads. The attractiveness, credibility, persuasiveness, comprehensibility, ordinariness, attitude towards the product and the purchase intention of the ad increased with how often people swear. Also, the offensiveness of the ad decreased with the frequency of swearing. The self-reported frequency of swearing did not affect the remarkability and recall of the ad.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the effects of first- and second-language swear words in advertisements. Overall, it can be concluded that it is better not to include swear words in advertisements. The advertisements containing swear words performed worse on attractiveness, persuasion, credibility and comprehensibility compared to the ads not containing swear words. Also, the attitude towards

the product and purchase intention were lower when swear words were included. Whereas the attitude towards Dutch advertisements containing swear words differed significantly on every evaluation compared to the Dutch ads not containing swear words, almost no differences were found between English ads containing swear words and English ads not containing swear words. The only difference was found in recall. Recall of ads containing English swear words was better than ads not containing English swear words. This is due to the fact that emotionally-laden words are easier to remember. The result of finding almost no other differences in the attitude towards English ads containing swear words and English ads not containing swear words might be due to the low emotional load of English swear words. The emotional load of second-language swear words is experienced to a lower degree than swear words in one's first language (Caldwell-Harris & Ayçiçeği-Dinn, 2009; Dewaele, 2004; Pavelenko, 2002). Therefore, the Dutch ad containing swear words did show a lot of significant differences compared to the Dutch ad not containing swear words. Dutch swear words were rated as more offensive than the English swear words.

Another aim of the paper was to find out if gender, age, English proficiency and selfreported swearing affected the attitude towards swearing. No gender differences were found in the attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the product, purchase intention and recall for ads containing swear words. However, significant differences were found in the offensiveness off the swear words. Women were more offended by the swear words 'bugger of' and 'idiot' than men. This effect might be explained by the fact that the more one swears, the less offended they are by swearing. Men were found to swear more in daily life than women, according to the self-reports. Age was also found to have an effect on the attitude towards swearing. The older the participants were, the less attractive they rated the ads containing swear words. Also, the older the participants were, the more offended they were by the ads containing swear words. And lastly, a negative correlation was found between age and purchase intention for ads containing swear words.

English proficiency was found the have an effect on recall of the ad containing swear words and on the offensiveness of the swear words taken separately. The better the participants were in English proficiency, the better they remembered the slogan of the ad containing English swear words. Also, the more proficient participants were in English, the less offended they were by the English swear words.

Lastly, the self-reported frequency of swearing affected the attitude towards swearing in ads. The more one swears daily, the more positive their attitude towards the ads containing swear

words was. Also, the offensiveness of the ads containing swear words decreased with the frequency of swearing.

7. Limitations and further research

The present study had a number of limitations. One of these limitations is the product used for the advertisements. The use of beer as the product for the advertisements may have influenced the results. Some people may have liked beer in general, and some people may have not. Participants' beer consumption and their attitude towards beer in general were not measured. Further research should use a more neutral product or measure participant's beer consumption and attitude towards beer in general. Secondly, according to McEnery (2006) all swear words used in the ads are (very) mild swear words. This might have affected the results. Further research should include stronger swear words in the ads. A third limitation is that all participants were Dutch. Although this was the aim of the study, it is known that the Dutch population has the highest English proficiency of Europe according the EF English Proficiency Index (2020). The aim was to find out if the English proficiency of the participants affected the outcomes when the swear words were shown in English. However, on a scale from one to seven the average English proficiency of the participants was 5.81 (SD = 1.02). Therefore, it was hard to determine if there is a difference in the attitude towards swearing in English between people with a high English proficiency and people with a low English proficiency. Further research should include nationalities with a lower English proficiency according to the EF English proficiency Index.

Theoretical contribution

Several findings from earlier studies are confirmed by the findings of the present research. Swearing in ads makes the ads less attractive. This result is in line with research of Westrop et al. (2018). The present study also confirms that swearing makes an ad less persuasive (Bostrom et al., 1973; Cavazza & Guidetti, 2014) and less credible (Bostrom et al., 1973; Schrerer & Sagarin, 2006, Westrop et al., 2018). When looking at the emotional-load of second language swear words, it is confirmed that the emotional load of words in one's first language is experienced to a higher degree than in one's second language (Caldwell-Harris & Ayçiçeği-Dinn, 2009; Dewaele, 2004; Pavelenko, 2002). The present study partially supports the effect of English proficiency on the offensiveness of second language swear words (Dewaele, 2016). The less proficient the participants were in English, the more offensive they rated the utterance 'bugger off'.

No significant effects of gender on the attitude towards swearing were found. This result supports the findings of Westrop et al. (2018) and Baker and Broadus (2015) who also did not find an effect of gender on the attitude towards swearing. The age of the participants did influence the attitude towards swearing in the present study. The attractiveness of the ad and purchase intention decreased with age. The offensiveness of the ads containing swear words increased with age. According to Thellwall (2008) and Jay (2009), the increasement of the offensiveness might be explained by the fact that people swear more when they are young and that swearing declines with age. The present study indeed showed that the older the participants were, the less they swear.

Only one of the previous studies about the effects of swearing focused on swearing in ads (Baker & Broadus, 2015). Therefore, almost all of the findings are new. Baker and Broadus (2015) stated that future research should indicate if swearing impact the attitude towards the product and purchase intention. The present study showed that swearing in ads negatively influenced the attitude towards the product and purchase intention. Another new finding is the effect of self-reported frequency of swearing on the attitude towards swearing. The more one swears daily, the more positive their attitude towards the ads containing swear words was.

Practical implications

On the basis of the results of the present study, it is best for marketers to not include swear words in advertisements. Swearing in an ad makes the ad less attractive, less persuasive, less credible and less comprehensible. However, it did make the ad more remarkable and less ordinary. Also, recall of ads containing swear words was better than ads not containing swear words. If a marketer wants to include swear words in ads, it is best to use second language swear words. The ads containing second language swear words performed better on attractiveness, credibility and persuasiveness than the ads containing first language swear words. Also, participants were less offended by second language swear words than by first language swear words. Using swear words in ads is more effective for a younger target audience than for an older target audience. The attractiveness of the ad and purchase intention decreased with age. Lastly, swearing in ads might work better for a male target audience than for a female target audience as women were more offended by (most of) the swear words.

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Appendix 1. The advertisements

2.1 Idiot/idioot/hey you/hé jij



2.2 Goddamn/godverdomme/wow/wauw





2.3 Bugger off/flikker op/go away/ga weg



Appendix 2. Questionnaire of all versions

V1. Ik vind de advertentie... (This question was asked after each ad)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zeer onaantrekkelijk	0	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	0	Zeer aantrekkelijk
Totaal niet beledigend	0	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	Zeer beledigend
Zeer ongeloofwaardig	\bigcirc	Zeer geloofwaardig						
Totaal niet overtuigend	\bigcirc	Zeer overtuigend						
Totaal niet duidelijk	\bigcirc	Zeer duidelijk						
Zeer onopvallend	\bigcirc	Zeer opvallend						
Zeer vreemd	0	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	Zeer gewoon
Helemaal niet wat ik van een advertentie verwacht	\bigcirc	Helemaal wat ik van een advertentie verwacht						
Totaal onbegrijpelijk	0	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	Zeer begrijpelijk

V2. Het product lijkt mij...

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Totaal niet lekker	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	0	Zeer lekker
Zeer onaantrekkelijk	\bigcirc	Zeer aantrekkelijk						
Van zeer slechte kwaliteit	\bigcirc	Van zeer goede kwaliteit						

V3. Hoe waarschijnlijk is het dat u dit product gaat kopen?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zeer onwaarschijnlijk	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	0	Zeer waarschijnlijk

V4. Hoe beledigend vindt u onderstaande woorden?

	Totaal niet beledigend						Zeer beledigend
Bugger off	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc
Flikker op	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc
Idiot	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc
Idioot	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc
Goddamn	0	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc
Godverdomme	0	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc

V5. Hoe vaak scheldt u zelf?



V6. In welke taal scheldt u het liefst?

○ Nederlands

○ Engels

○ Anders

V7. Geslacht:

O Man

○ Vrouw

 \bigcirc Anders

 \bigcirc Zeg ik liever niet

V8. Leeftijd:

V9. Moedertaal:

○ Nederlands

 \bigcirc Anders

V10. Student:

 \bigcirc Ja

○ Nee

V11. Wat is uw huidige opleidingsniveau of hoogst genoten opleiding?

0	geen
0	basisschool
0	vmbo
0	havo
0	VWO
0	mbo
0	hbo
0	universiteit

O anders, namelijk _____

V12. Hoe beoordeelt u uw onderstaande vaardigheden?

	Zeer slecht						Zeer goed
Engelse spreekvaardigheid	\bigcirc	0	0	0	0	\bigcirc	0
Engelse luistervaardigheid	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc
Engelse schrijfvaardigheid	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc
Engelse leesvaardigheid	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc

V13. Op welke leeftijd bent u begonnen met het leren van Engels?

V14. Wat herinnert u zich van de eerste advertentie?

V15. Wat herinnert u zich van de tweede advertentie?

V16. Wat herinnert u zich van de derde advertentie?