

## **Toastmasters Speech CC #4 – Swearing**

(5-7 minutes)

(Pause with slight smile)FFffork

A pronged implement.

It says so in the dictionary.

I looked it up.

I looked up a number of other words as well. It reminded me of the Blackadder episode where Prince George funds an English dictionary. The first words he looks up are swear words. Unfortunately, the OED didn't actually include any swear words until 1972.

Well, last night, I perused my copy of the OED, and can vouch they are still there. I discovered definitions for the F-word, the C-word, and the S-word. It turns out they've been around a long time.

The F-word was first recorded in use in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The C-word is from the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

The S-word is from earlier still.

Where are all the NEW swear words?

The only new four-letter word I've come across is Blog. Perhaps it ought to be a swear word.

But like it or not, swear words have been with us for a long time. They are a rich and powerful aspect of language. An important part of Australian culture.

So tonight I want to chat to you about our rich culture of swearing.

Swearing in advertising, swearing in literature and swearing on stage.

I think advertising is pretty cultural. People make it for money, and in order to make more money, but behind the crass capitalism is culture. Ads make us laugh. Ads add to the cultural lexicon.

And in 1975, on the Nine Network, here in Melbourne, Graham Kennedy used probably the first swear word in a TV ad. He "imitated a crow", live on-air.

Do you remember the Toyota Hilux Ad? The one where they repeatedly used a word that rhymed with mugger? We loved it because it was so Australian. But it was made in New Zealand.

Fashion sells better with swearing. French Connection changed their brand in 1997 to f-c-u-k. Clever. And oh-so classy.

Then there was the 2006 Tourism Australia ad campaign. That was the one that you might remember for having Lara Bingle at the end wearing a bikini. Maybe that's just me. Lara used a slogan involving swear words.

Well, News Limited papers published figures that showed a fall in tourists visiting Australia wherever the campaign was run. However, it wasn't due to swearing. In Singapore, the campaign had simply the slogan "So Where ... Are You?"

So that's advertising. In Literature we have a strong tradition of swearing as well.

Let's go back to one of the first books written in the English language – Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. Written in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it is a bawdy book, full of swearing. He even used the C-word, but he spelled it with a Q. You've got to give him a break – dictionaries hadn't been invented yet.

Another famous book is D H Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. You may have heard of it? It's the tale of an English lady who has wild sex with her gardener. It also used the F-word. The sex was considered okay, but the F-word got the book banned in Australia.

People get all excited about book banning, but it's boring. Even the bible has been banned. It has swearing too. Sort of. Jesus rode on an ass. No, seriously - Isaiah 36:12 of the King James Bible uses the P-word. The word that's often followed by "off". Ok, it's no biggie.

But now that I've taken you through the rich tapestry of swearing in advertising and literature, let's look at the stage. Particularly, comedians, thespians and musicians.

Let's face it – it's funny: swearing makes us cack ourselves. It's a free kick to comedians everywhere, so they use it like crazy. For a comedian, if you don't have a foreign accent, you have to swear even harder.

Although sometimes it can go too far. In 2003, the award ceremony of the British Comedy Awards received a rebuke for simply too much swearing.

Apparently there can be such a thing as a dangerous level of swearing.

I regularly go to see plays, and subscribe to the MTC (Melbourne Theatre Company). They put up warning signs in the foyer when there's going to be smoke, or flashing lights, or gun shots. These could all cause certain elderly audience members to keel over. They also put up warning signs for "strong language".

I've seen a lot of plays where there are paedophiles in them, or murders, suicides and plain bad writing. And there aren't warning signs for those!

Lastly, musicians. What comes to mind when you think "swearing in music"?

Symphony orchestras? No.

Bush bands? No.

Rappers? Yes.

There is so much swearing in rap music that I find it hard to tell when they're NOT swearing.

I discovered that one rapper was even arrested for swearing. During a concert in the Caribbean. What did they expect? Choir music?

But swearing is just words. Unclean words. Dirty language.

The great anthropologist Mary Douglas pointed out that “dirt is matter out of place”, what we consider dirty is just in its wrong place. A room is dirty when it is disordered. Shoes are dirty when on the carpet. And dirty words are just language out of place.

Swearing is not out of place in a school yard, on a building site, or in a comedy festival apparently. Swearing is out of place at a Toastmasters meeting.

A rich and powerful part of our language, but out-of-place in a forum about language.  
Bloody Ironic.

(Ended up being 9 minutes – oops)