Forum

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The worldwide use and meaning of the f-word

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Abstract: This article documents the increasing use of the English curse word *fuck* worldwide, as well as its degree of adaption into the host language, its syntactic function, and its meaning and its strength as taboo. Comparing the use of *fuck* with a special focus on the Nordic countries (*Norway, Denmark, and Iceland*) with its use in Eurasia and Africa (with different alphabets, namely Cyrillic in *Russia*, Devanāgarī in *India* and Ge'ez script in *Ethiopia*), we found some similar developmental patterns, but also differences, for example to what degree the English loan word has replaced local curses and in what ways among social groups within a country. Comparing the terms used for the same concept was challenging because some countries have better text corpora and more research on written languages and especially on taboos, and those without such resources required additional minor investigations for a baseline. Findings revealed that *fuck* has spread worldwide from English, and it is commonly used in Nordic languages today. In Russian *fuck* is also adopted into the heritage language to a relatively high degree, and it has further gained importance in the vocabulary of India, where English has become the most

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used language by the higher and middle classes, but less so by lower classes. In contrast, the study of Amharic language in Ethiopia shows that the *f*-word is rarely used at all, and only by youngsters. We found a pattern starting from the outer North with Icelandic having adapted and adopted the word *fuck* the most, a slight decline in use in Norwegian and Danish, with less adaption and use in Russian, even less in Indian-English or Hindi, and being more or less absent in the African language Amharic. Formally though it is used conceptually both in Hindi and Amharic.

Keywords: globalization, cursing, swearing, Norwegian, Danish, Icelandic, Russian, Hindi, Amharic

1 Introduction

Swearwords, curses, and other linguistic taboos are poorly investigated in most languages, including cursing in the modern, globalized world. Recent studies show that the vocabulary of linguistic taboos in cultures of the world (e.g., Ljung 2006; Menuta and Fjeld 2017) have much in common, but there is also great diversity in what is socially permitted to say in anger, contempt, or frustration. Due to globalization and the hegemony of the English language, modern cursing vocabularies change as traditional cursing vocabularies are infused with English words. One of the most prominent modern and global curses either includes the word *fuck* as a pure citation of English as a kind of code shift, or of the word as integrated into the local language. This study documents the use of *fuck* as a swearword in six languages in terms of the frequency of use, and the degree to which it has been naturalized into the host language. We investigate the meaning and the strength or illocutionary value of these curses in the studied languages, and to which degree the English *fuck* has been adapted into the host language, as well as the function such adaption plays in the cursing vocabulary.

Fuck is the most widespread swear word in the USA and, probably, the world (Kirk 2013). There might be several reasons why this word has replaced traditional tabooed words, which are often related to religion or evil powers. Jay (1992) suggests that *fuck* and *shit* accounted for some 50% of swearing in public in American English despite representing strong taboos. Jay emphasizes this paradox, as frequency generally is a variable that correlates with degree of taboo. However, Jay studied language changes that had not yet been documented in 1992. Recent studies of the rating degree of offensiveness of swear words in the English media between 1999 and 2013 concluded that the use of *fuck* has

witnessed a great decrease in offensiveness (cf. reports from the Broadcasting Standards Authority). In contrast, a recent study by Warriner et al., who collected affective rating for over 13,000 words, revealed that swear words, sexual terms and taboos were among the words that accounted for variable ratings (Warriner et al. 2013). Among examples of these words often learned in early school age were *motherfucker* and *fucking*, which are somewhat different from the pure imperative form of *fuck*. Obviously, *fuck* has less reference to *sexual* activity today; from being a severe taboo it is becoming more accepted and indeed, it is “everywhere” (Hughes 2006: 13). Nevertheless, the offensiveness of *fuck* should not be underestimated despite social variables, evidenced by existing stereotypes and gender differences in use (Warriner et al. 2013). Though, in the western European languages recent research shows that *fuck* is regularly used in media in Nordic languages (e.g., Fjeld (2002) for Norwegian, Rathje (2014) for Danish and Beers Fägersten (2014) for Swedish), and it has even become documented as the most frequently used swearword in Dutch (Zenner et al. 2017).

In the following, we will investigate today’s situation with a focus on Nordic countries (Norway, Denmark, and Iceland) as representatives for modern western cultures, compared to other regions (Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa), to gain insight in the use of the word globally. Since the curse word is spreading from English-speaking countries, America and Oceania are not included in this study.

2 The meaning and use of *fuck* as a curse word

The verb *fuck* most probably has its origin in the Old Norse verb *fokka*, which means ‘to hit’ (OED 1998). Traditionally, the phrase *fuck you* has been associated with sex as punishment or even rape (e.g., Berkowitz 2012), marking a masculine perspective. According to The New Oxford English Dictionary (OED 1998) the word *fuck* has two meanings in English language today: (1) ‘to have sex’ and (2) ‘to destroy’. We investigated the use or meaning of *fuck* to express a bad wish or a threat, as said in anger, contempt, frustration, irritation, fear or helplessness, but also to express joy or admiration.

Fuck has long been a linguistic taboo, even in Shakespeare’s days, but the severity of the curse at that time is unknown (Sheidlower 2009). It was not used in writing, according to Sheidlower it first appeared in *Slang and its Analogues* collected by Farmer and Henley in 1893. The subtitle of the dictionary states that it is a dictionary “of all classes of society for more than three hundred years”.

Hence, there is a lack of written sources for the use of this curse, as it originally was more used in informal settings. *Fuck* was lemmatized in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in the 1980s, and since the year 2000, the word *fuck* has appeared in song lyrics and on live TV shows, as the unpredictable nature and lack of censorship in such programs may have changed the public use of this curse and how we react to it.

Cursing and gender has often been a topic for research. Traditionally, it is more accepted for men to use taboo words than for women, even though this pattern has changed in modern time. But the modern cursing *fuck* appears to still follow the old pattern. If women utter strong curse words, they jeopardize their femininity, as severe cursing typically counters social expectations of female behavior (Stapleton 2003). Even though most cursing and swearing is ritualized and semantically bleached today, and hence lexicographically defined as routine formulas, some of the original semantics of the English word *fuck* are still intact. It is therefore still not seen as appropriate to be used by women in some contexts in most languages, which is in accordance with Stapleton's finding in investigating cursing among youngsters in Ireland (Stapleton 2003: 30), and also is in concordance with the US based investigation of Warriner et al. (2013: 1200).

3 Documentation of the use of *fuck* in six languages

This documentation of the use of *fuck* in different languages is organized according to the degree of influence of English language and culture. It starts with the Nordic countries, which seem strongly influenced by English loan words, before turning to Russia, then India and Ethiopia, which are by far less affected by the globalization of English language.

3.1 Norway

Fuck was first used in the Norwegian language in a translated Swedish novel in 1948 (*Konvoi* by Thorsten Johanson). This was a rare incident, and only after the turn of the century did the use of *fuck* as a curse word increase. It is registered in *Anglisismeordboka* (Graedler and Johansson 1997) with *fuck you* explained as the Norwegian equivalent for 'go to hell!' However, *fuck* still continues to be far less used than the traditional curse *faen* i.e., 'the devil' and its synonyms and

derivatives in the Norwegian language (Kristiansen and Fjeld Under review). *Fuck* was not used much till 1985, but from then on we can find a clear increase in its use in large text corpora of literature (Nasjonalbiblioteket 2015).

According to *The Norwegian Dictionary of the Norwegian Academy 2017* (NAOB) *fuck* is an interjection with the meaning ‘faen’. The verbal derivation *fucke* has two meanings: ‘ha samleie, pule’ i.e. ‘to have sexual intercourse’ or ‘klusse, kødde’, which means ‘to mess up’.

There are two versions of *fuck* in Norwegian, a citation form with English pronunciation and orthography and a Norwegianized version *føkk* with a hybrid adjectival form *føkkings*. In the latter version, the pronunciation has changed from the English/ʌ/ to the Norwegian/œ/ with the earliest documented use in 1998 in a film *Weekend*, where one of the lines is: *føkk de jævla medisinerne* ‘fuck the damned medicines’. Then the following year, in 1998, this curse appeared in print with the Norwegian derivative form *føkka* as adjective and verb: *De der føkka pengekøddene, fy faen! Føkk de folka!* ‘Those fucking moneygrabbers! Fuck those people!’ (Christensen 1997: 14). After that, a sudden increase in use, with a top year in 2000, followed by a decrease to 2013. *Fuck* is now a real loan word in Norwegian, also in written language.

Young people use the word *fuck* more often than older people do. A search of the balanced *Leksikografisk bokmålskorpus* (LBK; Knudsen and Fjeld 2013) shows that of the 125 occurrences of *fuck* in the corpus of 100 million words, 85 are written by persons born between 1960 and 2010, and only 40 by persons born between 1950–1959. The corpus also shows that male authors account for 64 % and female 36 % of the hits, which indicates that young men are the most frequent users of the word *fuck* in modern Norwegian.

There are derivations of English morphology in Norwegian texts: *Lykken er å bli hard og muskuløs, ha en fuckable wife og en feit bankkonto* ‘happiness is to become hard and muscular, have a fuckable wife and a fat bank account’ (LBK; Knudsen and Fjeld, 2013). There are also compounds like *fuckfinger*, *fuckface*, *fuckland*, and hybrid compounds like *fuckfinger*, *fuck-jenter* ‘fuck-girls’. Some of these were adapted into Norwegian phraseology, but most are English phrases such as *fuck you!* *anal fist fucking*, *fucked brother*. This variety of usage shows that *fuck* is well integrated in the Norwegian language.

In modern Norwegian, *fuck* seems to be both a severe expression of anger, with *fuck you* as equivalent to ‘go to hell’: *Fuck you, sa Anja, og da gråt hun forgivees på vei ut av Spektrum som kveldens forsøksvise martyr* ‘Fuck you, Anja said, and she cried in vain on her way out of Spektrum as a tentative martyr for the evening’, from a newspaper sports report of a handball match (LBK; Knudsen and Fjeld, 2013), and in other contexts it is an expression of disregard

or irritation, as in this example: *De skal ikke betale din lån, de kjøper ikke brød for deg hver morgen, så FUCK IT og kjør på!* ‘They do not pay your loans; they do not buy you bread each morning, so fuck it and go ahead!’ (Knudsen and Fjeld 2013).

To sum up, the curse word *fuck*, is frequently used and well adapted into the Norwegian language. It is used more often by men than by women, and more often by young people than older ones. It also seems that the more the *f*-word is integrated into Norwegian orthography, phonology, and morphology, the less sever its taboo (Fjeld 2018).

3.2 Denmark

The first attestation of *fuck* in Danish is found in the online dictionary *New Words in Danish* (Dansk sprognavn 2018), which is based on Jarvad (1999). It dates the first written example in Danish of both the verb *fuck* in imperative and the adjective *fucking* to 1990 (the attestations are unfortunately not presented in the dictionary). The Danish Dictionary (2018) dates the verb *to fuck* in Danish to 1986. In The Danish Language Council’s collection of words, the oldest entry of *fuck* as a noun is from 1979 (the newspaper *EkstraBladet*: “*Vi ville prøve lidt fuck med moderacet*” ‘We wanted to fuck a little with the fashion race’ and a *fucker* is from 1971 (in a newspaper: “*en celebrity fucker*” ‘a celebrity fucker’). In the same collection of words, the oldest example of *fuck off* is from 1984 (the magazine *Ung Nu*: “en kvinde, som gav mig fingertegnet “fuck off” ‘a woman who gave me the finger sign “fuck off”’).

According to The Danish Dictionary (2018), the interjection *fuck* is used to express ‘anger, contempt, surprise or another feeling’. The noun *fuck* has the meaning of ‘something that is bad, unsuccessful, annoying’, the verb *fuck* (infinitive) in the meaning of ‘showing strong contempt for someone or something’ with the preposition constructions *fucke af* ‘fuck off’, *fucke med* ‘fuck with’ and *fucke op* ‘fuck up’, which respectively mean ‘something you do not want anything to do with’, ‘influence in a disturbing, possibly manipulative way’, and ‘destroy; spoil/become unsuitable’ and the adjective *fucking*, which is used as an intensifier to express anger, irritation, regret or contempt. There is (at least) one type of usage that is not mentioned in the dictionary, namely the swear phrase *hvad fuck* ‘what the fuck’, which is used as a replacement of the traditional Danish *hvad fanden/satan/helvede* ‘what the devil/Satan/hell’, ‘for example as used in a recent novel by Zadoorian (2017)“*Mor, hvor fuck er du henne?*” *skriger min datter i telefonen*” “‘Mom, where the fuck are you?’ my daughter screams in the telephone.”

A study of the Danes' attitude to the severity of some swearwords in Danish (Rathje 2014) shows that young people (age 13–14) assessed *fuck* as the most powerful swearword out of six possible expressions. In contrast, older respondents assessed it as the second strongest, only surpassed by the Danish swearing for *fanden* for 'the Devil'. This study shows that *fuck* is still assessed as a strong taboo in Danish, despite its frequent use, especially amongst young people (see below). Indeed, the young generation used *fuck* more frequently when comparing the spoken language of three age groups in Rathje's study (2010a) of swearwords in spoken language of three generations.

In a study of fictional TV for children (aged 7–12), Rathje (2017) showed that kids and youth (in comparison to adults) swore a lot. In one of the kids' shows, *fuck* was used 50 times (4.1 incidences per 1000 words) in the one series from 2015 (*Panisk Påske*) and 17 times (1.9 incidences per 1000 words) in a series from 2012 (*Pendlerkids*), while it was not said at all in a kids' show from 1983 (*Busters Verden*); just a few religious swear words occurred at that time. *Fuck* (as interjection and verb) and *fucking* was not used at all, while *fuck* and *fucking* made up respectively 45% and 25% of the swearwords in the newer series (*Panisk Påske*, and *Pendlerkids*). The acceptance of use in fictional TV is in accordance with increased use in Danish newspapers between 1994 and 2009 (Rathje 2010b). In the 1994 study *fuck* was used in 4.7% of the newspaper articles, while the frequency increased to 9.2% in 2009. The same numbers for *fucking* was 1.5% in 1994 and 7.5% in 2009. Out of the occurrences of *fuck* in modern TV series for kids, only one was uttered by a middle-aged male. Only four occurrences of *fuck/fucking* were produced by girls, which corresponds with the fact that the boys used 94% of all the occurrences of *fuck/fucking* in both series.

The word *fuck* has been adapted morphologically into Danish language since the 1970s, but the English orthography and pronunciation has been preserved with one exception, the final consonant is pronounced voiced [g] in Danish and not unvoiced [k] as in English. In conclusion, *fuck* has become more frequent in Danish during the past 30 years, is a strong swearword and is mostly used by male adolescents.

3.3 Iceland

The words *fuck* and *fucking* have become part of colloquial Icelandic, especially among young people. They are used in a variety of expression and phrases that reflect the modern international (English) use of the words both as swearwords and for emphasis.

All examples in this survey are from Icelandic newspapers and magazines in the searchable digital library Timarit.is at the National and University Library of Iceland (Timarit.is 2018). The library contains nearly 4.5 million OCR-scanned pages from Icelandic newspapers and magazines from the early nineteenth century until today.

The first occurrences in an Icelandic context are from around 1970, one of the oldest one in a translated interview in a weekly magazine: *En svo hugsaði ég með mér: 'Fuck, til helvítis með það'* 'but then I thought: Fuck, to hell with it' (1971). It took some time for *fuck* to become established as a proper foreign word, and through the 1970s, written examples in the Icelandic context are almost always English citations, or names or titles of films or rock-bands. Little is known of its use in spoken language, which, however, must have preceded use in the written language. An Icelandic musician is cited in an interview 1985 as saying that Icelandic kids no longer swear in Icelandic but are using the loanwords *fuck* and *shit* – an exaggeration perhaps, but probably not without some truth.

Initially, *f*-words were spelled in English, but shortly after 1980, they began to show up in the written forms *fokk* (noun and interj.), *fokka* (verb) and later *fokking* (participle), reflecting pronunciation with [ɔ]. Isolated examples of the verb in the construction *fokka* sth *upp* 'fuck sth up' appear earlier, e.g. in a short story translated from English as early as 1968: *Þú hefur fokkað þessu upp* 'you have fucked this up', and again 1970, in an article about a rock concert: *gaur sem nærri því hafði fokkað upp samkomunni* 'a guy who almost fucked up the festival'. Besides that, the verb in this form appears absent from texts until in the 1980s.

The Icelandic Dictionary of Slang (Árnason et al. 1982) contains the verb *fokka* and offers the example phrase *fokka einhverju upp fyrir einhverjum* 'screw something up for somebody' and compares it to English *fuck up*. The oldest example of the verb in this Icelandicized form in the examined texts, apart from the one from 1968, is from 1983, in an interview with a young punk-rocker who used the verb phrase *fokka með* + object: *að fokka með landið* 'to fuck with the country'. Other examples from the 1980s are mostly of the phrase *fokka* + object + *upp* 'fuck sth up'. In the following expression, the verb behaves like a transitive, *fokka* + object in dative + *upp*: *þeir eru að fokka þessu öllu upp* 'they are fucking all this up' or *fokka upp* + object in dative: *hann fokkaði upp hlutunum* 'he fucked things up'. In the late 1990s, the expression *fokka í* + object 'fuck with sth, fuck in sth' comes to light. After 2000, the most common expressions seem to be *fokka í* and *fokka upp*. There are also examples of *fokka sér* 'fuck one's self' and *fokkaðu þér* 'fuck yourself'.

The oldest examples of the noun/interjection in its new, adapted form, *fokk*, were found in a 1985 article about graffiti in Reykjavík. It is accompanied by pictures of graffiti with slogans such as *fock off*, *FOK* and *Fouck is all I hear about*, without doubt reflecting the pronunciation among young people at that time. We find *fokk* used as a

strengthening expletive or interjection from the middle of the 1980s onwards. It is also used in various other and (mostly) familiar phrases, such as *fokk jú* (and more Icelandicized *fokk þú*) ‘fuck you’, *fokkit* ‘fuck it’, *fokk off* ‘fuck off’, *fokk upp* ‘fuck up’; *gefa ekki fokk* ‘don’t give a fuck’, *vera fokk sama* ‘don’t give a fuck’. The expression ‘what the fuck’ shows up as Icelandic *hvað í fokkinu* (dative with definite article). In addition, there are examples that seem to show a contamination of older loanwords from Danish and the newer words, for example in phrases such as *allt komið í fokk* ‘all in a mess’ i.e. ‘all fucked up’ and *allt er í fokki* ‘everything is in a mess’ i.e. ‘all is fucked up’. The majority of the examples are from the late 1990s or from after 2000.

Present participle *fucking*, in its Icelandicized form *fokking*, is used as a strengthening form in an adverbial function, in the same way as in English, and it can split phrases in a similar way: *Ég fokking hata heiminn* ‘I fucking hate the world’. Morphological expletive infixation of the type “abso-fucking-lutely” or “un-fucking-believable” (Aronoff 1976: 69–70; Plag 2003: 101 ff) does not occur in the examined texts, but *nákvæm-fokking-lega* ‘exact-fucking-ly’ and similar constructions such as *þokka-fokking-lega* ‘relatively’, *sannar-fokking-lega* ‘certainly’ and *klár-fokking-lega* ‘clearly’ appear when searching for the string “fokkinglega” on the Internet. The expression *fokking fokk*, usually reinforced with the swearword *helvítis* ‘damned’ (lit. ‘hell-GEN’), is particularly frequent in the texts. A little surprising is the adverbial form *fokkings*, with an s which is like an ordinary Icelandic genitive ending. One can presume that this is an attempt to let the word look like a proper Icelandic swearword in genitive, such as *djöfulsins*, *andskotans* ‘the Devil-GEN’ and *helvítis* ‘hell-GEN’ (i.e. ‘damned’).

Examples of Icelandicized versions of English compounds are *fokkfeis* = *fuck face*, *moðerfokker* = *motherfucker*, *hólyfokk* = *holy fuck*; other compounds are *fokkorð* ‘f-word’, *fokkfingur* ‘fuck finger’, *fokkmerki* ‘fuck sign’, *fokkjúmerki* ‘fuck-you sign’ and *fokkjúputti* ‘fuck-you finger’. The English derivation *fucker* becomes *fokkari* in Icelandic. Even longer phrases such as *what the fuck* appear in Icelandicized versions, *vottðe fokk*. It is, however, difficult to determine how common these words are; most of them only appear once or twice in newspapers and magazines of the last 25 years (*moðerfokker* seven times, *fokkmerki* 33 times), and this low frequency may well suggest that some of them are occasionalisms (cf. Timarit.is 2018).

3.4 Russia

According to the Russian Dictionary of Cursing, *fak* is an emphatic marker of frustration, commonly used in expressions such as *faktvoju mat’* ‘fuck your mother’ (Mokienko and Nikitina 2004: 697). While a dictionary meaning of *fak* is established, there are no studies that address the use of *fak* in Russian

discourse. In this section, we explore the semantic evolution of the swearword *fak* in the Russian language from its initial borrowing to its current use. The results of this analysis suggest that in the borrowing process the swearword lost the multitude of meanings inherent in English, while acquiring different meanings that are absent in the original language.

The data in this section is based on fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and online forums, including 115,645 texts (approximately 283 million words) from the eighteenth century to present day (Vinogradov Russian Language Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences (2003-present day) (2003)). The spoken corpus is a transcribed compilation of spontaneous conversations and oral presentations from the 1990s to the 2000s totaling 3,034 files (around 10 million words). In total, there are 86 tokens of *fak* in the written corpus and 12 tokens in the spoken corpus.

The first use of the word *fak* (with the Russian spelling) in the written corpus dates back to the 1970s. In his futuristic novel *The Island of Crimea*, Vasilij (1979) utilized this lexical item to add “foreign color” to a hero’s speech. The character in the novel uttered *fak* in the phrase *fak mai self so vseimi potrohami* ‘fuck myself with all my insides’, where the first half of the colloquialism is a transliteration of English (‘fuck myself’), while the second half is in Russian (*so vseimi potrohami* ‘with all my insides’). By combining the two, the author conveys that the protagonist has both Russian and non-Russian roots. The effectiveness of this literary fusion implies that at the time of composition *fak* was perceived as a distinctly foreign word. In later works of fiction, however, *fak* gradually became incorporated into the Russian language in a way that displaced it from its foreign origin. For instance, in the short story *Office*, Kozlov (2002) described the action of the protagonist through the following first-person narration (1).

- (1) *Doedaju, brosjaju korobku v musor, ne popadaju-*
eat up throw box in trash NEG match
nu i fak s nej. (...) Idu na
so and fuck with it:INS go on
Yandex, zabivaju “vsjo zaebalo.”
yandex insert all fucked
‘I finish eating, throw the box into the trash can, miss it – oh fuck it. (...)’
Go on Yandex, type, “I am done with this bullshit.”

The protagonist utilizes the expression *nu i fak s nej* ‘oh fuck it’ (lit. ‘well and fuck with it’) to express his frustration with his failed throw. This expression originates from the Russian phraseological colloquialism *i chort s nim* ‘to the devil with it’, where the noun in the intermediate position can be replaced with other swearwords such as *hren* ‘damn’ (lit. horseradish), and *huj* ‘dick’.

While the semantic meaning of *chort*, *hren*, and *huj* is similar, the difference lies in the degree of vulgarity or taboo (*chort* ‘devil’ being the mildest version and *huj* ‘dick’ being the harshest). Similarly, *fak* obtains a comparable semantic meaning of moderate vulgarity when inserted into the phraseological colloquialism, while the fixed structure of the expression makes it sound less foreign.

In online forums and blogs, the word *fak* is frequently used to designate the ‘middle finger’ as in the phrase *pokazat’ fak* ‘to show middle finger’ (lit. to show fuck). The Russian language has no other way to indicate this gesture except *sredniy palets* ‘middle finger,’ which refers to the middle digit in neutral contexts also and thereby lacks emotional intensity. Thus, *fak* provides an emphatic word that is suitable for informal interactions. For instance, in the following excerpt (2) from an online forum, a female writer shares that she may sometimes show the middle finger to a driver behind her.

- (2) *Mogu fak pokazat’, esli kto-to signalit szadi besprichinno.*
 Can fuck show if someone signal back reasonless
 ‘I can show “fuck” if someone behind uses their horn for no reason.’

The colloquialism *fak* serves here as a noun and follows the masculine gender declension pattern.

Analysis of the Russian spoken corpus (2003) shows that the primary function of *fak* in spoken conversations is to emphatically mark an expression with a negative connotation. For instance, in excerpt (3) a female speaker uses *fak* to express her frustration when she wakes up too late in the morning in her university dormitory.

- (3) 1 Student 1: *Fak!*
 ‘Fuck!’
 2 Student 2: *S dobrym utrom!*
 ‘Good morning!’
 3 Student 1: *Fak eshcho raz!*
 ‘Fuck again!’

Student 1 uses the emphatic marker *fak* to convey the negative emotion associated with unexpectedness of her situation (oversleeping and missing her class). When her friend greets her, she responds with the swearword again to emphasize her frustration.

The analysis demonstrates that in Russian *fak* is primarily used in two ways: 1) as a stand-alone emphatic marker or element in phraseological expressions,

and 2) as a noun meaning ‘middle finger.’ Importantly, *fak* does not function as a verb and cannot be used to create adjectival forms in the Russian language. Furthermore, all the users of *fak* in the oral corpus were young female speakers (in their teens and twenties). Perhaps they employ *fak* because it is perceived as a relatively mild swearword, without the harsh connotation of many native Russian swearwords. According to Zemskaja et al. (1993) this renders it more acceptable for female use, which is restricted by social norms that proscribe vulgar language. The present study also revealed that *fak* developed novel meanings in the Russian language, while losing some features of its language of origin. Its growing use by young language speakers in everyday conversations suggests that new usage patterns will emerge, potentially also affecting the use of native Russian expletives.

3.5 India

As India is a vast country with 29 states and 22 official languages, we will focus on the two languages that have been given official status by the central government and the constitution of India, Hindi and English. There is no direct equivalent to the English word *fuck* in Hindi. The Hindi word for *fuck* is *sambhog* (the Devanagari script is presented here in phonemic transcription), written as ‘संभोग’, which means ‘sexual intercourse’, literally ‘complete enjoyment, pleasure, delight, sensual enjoyment, carnal enjoyment, sexual union’. This word does not have the tabooed and negative connotations that the word *fuck* has. However, the most commonly used word for sex that has some of the meaning as the English *fuck* in Hindi is a slang term known as *chod* चोद’. This term and its derivations are most commonly translations of the word *fuck*. The word ‘chod’ चोद’ is commonly used in compounds such as:

(4)	<i>chod</i> /चोदू	‘fucker’
	<i>bhenchod</i> / <i>behenchod</i> /भेंचोद	‘sister-fucker’
	<i>betichod</i> /बेटीचोद	‘daughter-fucker’
	<i>mādarchod</i> /मादरचोद	‘mother-fucker’

However the term is extremely versatile and is adapted to fit the context.

In the Indian-English language, the word *fuck* can be used in many contexts such as *what the fuck, are you fucking kidding me, fuck off*, like in standard English, but in Hindi, these sentences are uttered in combination with other words, depending on the context. For example *what the fuck* would be

(5) *kyā bakwās karrahā hai* ‘what rubbish’

(6) *chal na/chalana!* ‘fuck off’

While (5) literally says ‘what rubbish’ and (6) ‘keep walking’, both are used to substitute the word *chod* as it is mostly restricted to sexual contexts.

Due to lack of research on this word in the Indian-English and Hindi context, naturalistic-participant observation was conducted to document the usage of the word *fuck/chod* in two social groups over a two-month period: English-speaking Indians (Group A) and Hindi-speaking Indians (Group B), who were also grouped by class; as upper middle class and lower middle class/working class. Groups A and B were also divided by age; i.e., young adults (1) and older adults (onset of adulthood-retirement) (2).

Group A1 consisted of English-speaking 19–23 year old boys and girls who were observed in conversations with college friends. In this group, the use of the word *fuck* was common and used up to 5–7 times in just 2–3 minutes on numerous occasions. The most commonly used phrases were *what the fuck, are you fucking serious, no fucking way, she fucked him* (and vice-versa), and *fuck off*. However, none of these phrases were used to express anger and none had reference to sexual activity. Instead, they were used to casually emphasize surprise, excitement, sarcasm, and confusion. In a conflict situation, there was less usage of curse words, yet the word *fuck* was used as an adjective to describe the other person, such as *what a fucking dumbass*. At another instance, a girl screamed *you fucking asshole* and a boy replied *I didn’t fucking do shit*, showing two different meanings of the same word, but with the same function of negative reinforcement. Though there was some usage of *fuck* in conflict situations, it was mostly used in a casual setting. Another observation was that in the entire two months of observation the hindi word *chod* was used less than 25% than the English word.

Group A2 consisted of English-speaking men and women ranging from 35–55, who were observed in their natural social setting. In this group the most used curse words were *oye behenchod*, ‘oh sisterfucker’ as equivalent for ‘you fucker’, all as qualifiers of other persons in a friendly manner. No situations of conflict or serious implications of the curse word were observed.

There is code shift between English and Hindi while conversing, as well as a different usage of the words *fuck* and *chod*, e.g., *oye behencod, you’ve been fucking around with everyone while I’ve been out, huh*. Both *fuck* and *chod* and their respective derivatives were used similarly, sometimes with a similar meaning, mostly used to characterize a person.

Group B1 consisted of 19–23 yearold Hindi-speaking boys and girls, observed in their colleges and in their interaction with friends as representatives for young, lower middle class. Through this observation, it was seen that the word *chod* and its derivations were used regularly, in interactions with friends and inconversation, e.g., *abey behencod kitni der lagā dī*, meaning ‘oh sister fucker, how long have you taken’, and *Chodū zyada bol rahi hai āj*, meaning ‘fucker, too much talk today’. It was also noticed in this group that the English word *fuck* was used even when no other English words were used, e.g. *Yār, fuck yār, kitnā kām degī*, meaning ‘fuck man, how much work will she give’.

Group B2 consisted of Hindi-speaking adults ranging from 25–60 years, observed at markets, roadside stands, and rikshaw stands as representatives for the working class. The use of the English word *fuck* or its derivations was non-existent in this group. This population was observed for two months, at least once a week each, and no use of the word *fuck* in English was observed.

However, the Hindi word *chod* and its derivations were used quite regularly in general casual conversation, as well as in conflict. Derivations of the word *chod* were used in casual conversations, such as *bakwas mat kar bhenchod*, *hat madarchod*, meaning ‘don’t talk rubbish sister fucker’, and ‘move mother fucker’ respectively. Whereas in situations of conflict, the word *chod* was used to connote a sexual meaning along with the derivations, e.g., *terī mā chod doongā behenchod* meaning ‘I will fuck your mother sister-fucker’.

In conclusion, the English curse word *fuck* is regularly used by young English-speaking Indians, and in some few cases also by young Hindi-speaking Indians. It seems as though the word is a moderate taboo and that men as well as women use it. Furthermore, people of all ages and economic classes regularly use the Hindi equivalent *chod* and all its derivations as a curse word in casual conversation. The use of the word *chod* was only observed in the conversations of men. This does not mean that women do not use the word *fuck*, but it is more taboo for them to use it. The Hindi-speaking working class stuck to Hindi throughout, with no attempt at using the English word, and they were more outspoken in conflict situations, whereas the middleclass stuck to English, but also used Hindi from time-to-time. This varied between age groups, as the youngsters did not use Hindi as much as the elders, but they used it nonetheless. Even in a conflict situation, the sexual connotation was not used by the middle class; it remained casual. It is worth noting that the young middle class Hindi-speaking group used the English curse *fuck*, but the working class did not. Overall, *fuck* can be said to be a moderate swearword in

Indian-English language as well as by Hindi-speaking youngsters. *Fuck* as referring to sexual activity is used as a curse word in both English and Hindi among the Indian population of today.

3.6 Ethiopia

Amharic is the South Ethio-Semitic language of Ethiopia. It was the National Official language in the past; it is still widely used today and; therefore, was chosen for this study's section on cursing in the Ethiopian context.

As far as we know, the English word *fuck* is not – or very rarely – used as a loan word in Amharic language but a traditional Amharic word for sexual intercourse is used as a curse word. It shows that the concept, not the expression as such, is used as a curse.

The etymology of the word in Amharic is not clear, but in related languages, such as Gurage (Ezha) *badda* refers to 'take something away'. In fact, a father who has his daughter married is referred to as *a-badda-m* 'made her taken', but a man marrying a girl is *a-gabba -m* 'made someone or something to enter into'. The term for *fuck* in Gurage is *fəna*; hence, *badda* or *abaddam* is more related to marriage, which is similar to Amharic *agabba* literally 'entered into but actually married'. The orthography of the word is *bedda*, and it is phonemically written with IPA as *badda*.

The word *badda* can be used to curse both male and female, but the curse is often used in third person singular masculine form. Furthermore, the curse can be used towards one person or many. The adjective and infinitive forms are common to both masculine and feminine. The gerundive form is used mainly in masculine because the act of fucking is considered to belong to males. The jussive form *tibda* 'let her fuck' again is less common. The noun form *bid* as having sex applies to both genders, but the word can be used as resultative 'one who is fucked' and in that context it only applies to women. The imperative form and the frequentative are used for the activity of males, but the reciprocal *təbaddadu* 'they fucked one another' applies to both genders.

Depending on the context, *təbada* 'be fucked' can have several meanings. It can be a swearword; to cheat or deceive someone as in *dəhna adrige bəddahut* 'I fucked him very well,' meaning 'I cheated him or deceived him'. It can be an expression of contempt in the adjective form: *bidatam* 'fucked'/'cheap'. It can also be used in the sense of *I do not care* or *go to hell* as in: *təbada jantə gudaj ajagəbaŋm* - 'be fucked, your issue is not my concern'/'go to hell, I do not care about your problem'. It can also be used in the sense of 'mess up' as in the expression: *nəgarof təbaddu* 'things have gotten messed up.' It can also mean

‘being confused’ or ‘inappropriateness’ as in *kartawotfun abbada-hatfaw* ‘you messed up or inappropriately arranged the play cards’.

To what extent *badda* is considered taboo varies by the age of users and the area where it is used, in addition to the situation or context. It is very common among youngsters, gangsters, prostitutes, *wajala* ‘taxi attendants,’ and some public car drivers. It is also very common among all age groups in Harar, an eastern part of Ethiopia (Birhanu 2017). Much of the Harar people’s conversation is accompanied by *inathn bida* ‘fuck your mother’. Both addressor and addressee are not very offended by the expression. Probably, it has several contexts of use in the Harar region, but a full documentation of its use in this area is not available.

It is, however, considered a severe taboo by elders - and offensive when uttered by women in some areas. The word is extremely taboo in the northern parts of Ethiopia such as Gojam and Gonder.

The word *badda* is often used with ‘mother’ in cursing expressions as in *inath tibbada* ‘let your mother be fucked’. The cursing expression was not found with a ‘sister’ or ‘wife’; it is more consistently used to the second person, namely the addressee and the addressee’s mother.

It seems that the English loan word *fuck* as a curse has not reached Sothern Ethiopia. However, urban youth in Addis Ababa may use this word as a curse. What is interesting is that the concept of having sex, especially with someone’s mother is, also in Amharic, a severe offence and a curse.

4 Results: Overview of the documentation

In this article, we explored the use of the curse word *fuck* in Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Russia, India and Ethiopia. The Nordic languages have adopted forms of the English word *fuck*, and there is up to 70 years of documentation of this borrowed curse word. Russia also adopted a form of English *fuck* and have 50 years of documented history. In contrast, Hindi and Amharic have little or no documentation of *fuck* as a curse. Table 1 provides a comparison of the use of the English curse word *fuck* in five different languages and cultures based on surveys, corpus studies, and researcher’s personal experience

The vocabulary of cursing is usually tabooed and therefore poorly documented. We had to use any sources available to us – and in some instances simply our own personal experiences due to lack of written sources. These different methodologies for finding quantifiable documents must be kept in mind when reading Table 1. The variety of languages co-existing in the

Table 1: Comparison between the countries based on surveys, corpus and researchers intuitions.

	Norway	Denmark	Iceland	Russia	India	Ethiopia
First written attestation	1948	1971	1968	1979	Unknown	Unknown
FORM						
Citation of English	fuck [fʌk]	fuck [fʌk]	fuck [ʃhʌk]/[tʌhʌk]	fuck [fʌk]	fuck [fʌk]	fuck (seldom)
Adaption to local language	føkk [føk]	fuck [fʌg]	fokk [ʃhʌk]	fak [fʌk]		
Derivations	fuckings/ fukings/ fökkings	fucking [fʌgen]	fokking [ʃhʌkɪn]	Masculine gender declension forms (fak, faka, faku, fakom, fake)		
Part of speech	verb:infinitive: fucke/føkke imperative: fuck/føkk past tense: fucka/føkka adjective: føkka, føkkings	verb: infinitive: fuckte imperative: fuck past tense: fuckede/fucktet	verb: infinitive: fokka imperative: fokkaðu past tense:	Noun; Emphatic marker	Verb: Maine ek aurat ko chod diya Noun: Kya chod macha rakhee hai?	Verb root dadd- Verb infinitive: mabbdat Gerund: badto Jussive: jibda Reciprocal: tabaddadu Frequentative: badadda Noun: bid Adjective: bidatam

(continued)

Table 1: (continued)

	Norway	Denmark	Iceland	Russia	India	Ethiopia
LOCAL EQUIVALENT					चोर चोड़ भेचोर बेटीचोर मारचोर	(ገረቤት)badia]
MEANING	Definition (meaning description) <i>fuck you</i> = cursing exclamation, as in English, an expression of contempt: 'go to hell!' <i>fökke(opp)</i> = mess up <i>fökke(ød)</i> = confused, muddled	<i>fuck you</i> = cursing exclamation, as in English, an expression of contempt: 'go to hell!' <i>fuck</i> = cursing exclamation, as in English, an expression of a positive or negative word	<i>fökki jü</i> = cursing exclamation, as in English, an expression of contempt: 'go to hell!' <i>fökki</i> = cursing exclamation, as in English	Negative emphatic marker: <i>fök s nim</i> = fuck it	चोर (verb) = Sexual intercourse चोर (noun) = Messing something up or messing around चोड़/भेचोर/बेटीचोर/मारचोर = can be used as nouns or adjectives or verbs	<i>badda</i> = make sexual intercourse <i>bidaram</i> 'insult, contempt, go to hell' <i>tabada</i> = cursing <i>tabadda</i> = messed up; confused <i>bid</i> = fucked, crazy, confused Severity depends on age and geography.
USE	Degree of taboo The more naturalized to Norwegian, the less severe taboo <i>fuck you</i> = excommunication, non-acceptance	Relatively taboored, depends mostly of the age of the user <i>fuck dig (you)</i> = excommunication, non-acceptance	Depends on the situation and the age of the user <i>fökkiä</i> = excommunication, non-acceptance	The less severe taboo compared to swearwords of native origin	The degree of the taboo depends on the situation	Informal in most cases
	Style level and connotations Informal, also used in written communication, negative connotations	Informal, but also used in newspapers and children's TV	Highly informal	Highly informal communication; negative connotation		

(continued)

Table 1: (continued)

	Norway	Denmark	Iceland	Russia	India	Ethiopia
Social variables (gender, age and social class)	Primarily used by young, male, low social class	Primarily used by younger and middle-aged	Primarily used by teenagers and young adults of both ages	Primarily used by young female speakers	Used by the youth and adults of both lower and upper middle class.	Age, profession, geography, gender
Local equivalent	<i>færn</i> (the Devil)	<i>p/s</i> (piss), bodily function connotations <i>for fanden</i> (for the Devil)	E.g. <i>djǫfulsins</i> (the Devil-gen.)	<i>chort</i> 'devil' <i>bljad</i> 'bitch' <i>hren</i> 'damn' (lit. horseradish) <i>huj</i> 'dick'	Indian form 'फ़िर' has a few connotations when used as a compound, otherwise primarily used in a sexual context	<i>Fuck</i> is conceptually but not lexically comparable to Amharic

different countries and the status of English within the countries further complicated the development of an overview. Nevertheless, the results presented in Table 1 offer a global picture of the use of this particular word, organized by form, meaning, and use.

5 Results and discussion

5.1 First attestation

Cursing is an intimate part of a language and a culture, and usually shows few neologisms over the centuries. The very earliest attestation found of the borrowed word *fuck* as a curse in the present study was by the end of the 1940s. English loan words appeared in many languages with new strength after World War II, as American-English gained a high status in this period. The innovative curse *fuck* seems to appear more regularly in the 1970s, and in 2018 it has become one of the most frequent curse words in several languages. An attestation of *fuck* in the investigated languages depends on availability of documentation and the text culture in the respective countries. The fact that Norwegian has its first written attestation two decades prior to other Nordic countries might be accidental, an explanation supported by the fact that this curse occurs in a translation from Swedish. Norway has extensive corpuses to document lexical innovations of the vocabulary. Results show that the Nordic countries have embraced and included *fuck* in their cursing vocabulary, at least by the younger generations, earlier than the other languages investigated. The findings may also be a result of the life-long level of exposure “across a wide variety of situations” (Dewaele 2016: 122). English is taught from early school years in all Nordic countries, and despite only a couple of hours even in secondary school - younger adults use and are surrounded by the English language. In fact, for example Norway, introduced an ambitious curriculum for English and a separate curriculum for other foreign languages in 2006 (Burner 2016).

5.2 Form

With regards to form, all investigated languages show some similarities in development of the loan word *fuck*, except Amharic, which might be due to an earlier stage of globalization of cursing than the other languages studied with very few occurrences of this English loan word. A citation form is normally the

first step in a word's loan history, naturalization comes when the word has become part of the normal vocabulary. The results from the Nordic languages show that these languages have naturalized this loan word to local phonology, orthography and morphology with Norwegian pronunciation/*føkk*/, Danish/*fag*/ and Icelandic/*fökk*/.

As a loan word, *fuck* first occurs as a citation word of English, with English pronunciation [fʌk], and gradually develops a local form that tends to follow the general morphology and phonology in the relevant language. Morphologically also hybrid forms are developed such as the Icelandic and Norwegian *-ings*, as in *føkkings* (see Table 1), which is used as a slang intensifier with several negative qualifiers. The Russian language has a slightly naturalized form/*fak*/. Such adaption has not happened in India and Ethiopia. When uttered by Hindi-speaking Indians and Amharic-speaking Ethiopians, it is as a citation form.

For Russian, Hindi, and Amharic, it seems that the loan word *fuck* is less adopted and not adapted. There are examples of *fuck* used both as verb and noun, just like in English. However, in Russian *fak* is normally only used as a noun, which has developed a different function and meaning than the English *fuck*. In Hindi *fuck* only functions as a noun and is used as an emphatic marker. In Amharic the word *fuck* is very rarely used.

Fuck functions both as a noun and a verb in the Nordic languages, and it has a full-fledged morphology. In phraseology, Iceland is more forward, with occasional adapted written forms like *vottðe fokk* for 'what the fuck'.

5.3 Meaning

Regarding *semantic meaning*, we actually find three meanings from the data: 1) tabooed reference to direct sexual abuse often in the phrase *fuck you*; 2) a general and not tabooed expression for 'not to bother; never mind' as a curse of the situation as such; and 3), a less tabooed meaning 'to destroy'; 'to mess up'.

First, all investigated languages gave examples of cursing referring to sexual abuse. The most used expression in the Nordic languages is in the phrase *fuck you*. In Norwegian, this phrase used as a regular curse is replacing the traditional Norwegian curse *faen ta deg!* equivalent to 'go to hell!' In the Russian section, we find this phrase only as ego-cursing (Fjeld 2002) *fak mai self so vsemi potrohami* 'fuck myself with all my insides'. It is also interesting that the Russian noun *fak* is mostly used by young females, and obviously with no or little reference to sexual activity, it is semantically bleached and used as a general negative emphatic marker. Hindi and Amharic provide no documentation of the imperative cursing phrase, but both languages use a local term for sexual intercourse as curse. In

accordance with the Russian use, to name the sexual act of fucking with the local verb is considered to belong to men and is not used by women. That supports the interpretation of the Old Norse verb *fokka* meaning ‘to hit’, which also denotes the male perspective in the sexual activity (cf. Fjeld 2018: 210).

Second, the more general meaning of *fuck* as a curse of the situation in the expression *fuck it* is common as a citation form of English in the Nordic languages, with little tabooed meaning, like a strong version of *never mind*. In Russian, the same phrase *fak s nim* is adopted into the language as a general negative emphatic marker. We find no documentation of this curse of the situation or circumstances in Hindi and Amharic.

Third, *fuck* as a verb with the meaning ‘to mess with’ is in all the Nordic languages used as a negative expression of frustration or on the spur of the moment, but not as a curse. This meaning of *fuck* lacks in Russian, cf. Table 1. The Norwegian forms *fökke*, and derivations *fökka* with the hybrid derivation *fökkings* have the meaning ‘to mess up, to destroy’, and the same applies to Icelandic. Icelandic has naturalized both meanings, as *fökk jú* for the curse and *fökka upp* as remark for irritation or frustration about something being ruined by somebody, plus the participle *fökking* used as a pure intensifier. In Danish the loan word is more often used as an exclamation and a curse, with English spelling and pronunciation. In the phrase *fuck up* the hybrid *fuck op*, means ‘mess up’.

The degree of taboo varies in the reporting from the languages in this investigation, and there are obvious cultural, social, and gender differences in the use of *fuck* or its local equivalents used as curse words in Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Russia, India, and Ethiopia.

5.4 Use and users

Unfortunately, we do not have information about frequency of this word in all the investigated languages. For Norwegian it is stated that *fuck* saw a prominent rise in use after the year 2000, and it seems that this is similar to other Nordic countries (Nasjonalbiblioteket 2015).

According to age, all languages investigated in this study show that *fuck* as a curse word is most frequently used by young people, both in the Nordic languages and in Russian, and even clearer in Hindi/Indian English and in Ethiopian Amharic, where the very few occurrences of *fuck* is produced by young urban persons.

In India, we see an interesting code-shift by English-speaking inhabitants, as the older informants code shift from English to Hindi more often when

cursing, while the young people rarely do so. In fact, young Hindi-speaking inhabitants occasionally shift from Hindi to English when cursing, even if the concept of sexual activity is present as a swear word in both languages. For the young middle-class population, the use of *fuck* is a result of code shift as a type of euphemism when speaking Hindi. The local curse word related to sex is most used by lower-class Hindi speakers as well as the intensified *bhenchod/ behenchod, beṭichod, mādashod*.

Fuck is not integrated as a loan word for Amharic-speakers in Ethiopia, even though the concept of sexual abuse is present also in this language as a curse word. The local curse *bedda* is used frequently. Russian is somewhat in a middle position between the Nordic and the Asian-African level of integration of this curse. The curse word *fuck* is frequently used by urban youngsters, but mainly as a noun with poor morphology.

The differences in adaption and meaning change may be linked to the degree of taboo, which the reporting on *use* emphasizes. Not unexpectedly, *fuck* is mostly used in informal settings. Furthermore, the users are mostly young, and in Russia include women, which is very different from the Nordic context, in which *fuck* is mostly used by males from lower social classes. An explanation might be that the Russian *fak* functions more as an exotism than as a curse in these expressions.

5.5 Limitations and future direction

In general, the use of foreign language for tabooed words is a typical means of euphemizing bad language (Dewaele 2016). Undoubtedly, cursing plays different but crucial roles in the social interaction of the respective speech communities. The respective authors of the different sections (3.1–3.7) used available data as the background for their studies. While the Nordic countries have different types of corpora or previous investigations to lean on, this was not the case for countries such as Ethiopia and India where the many coexisting languages makes it hard to pinpoint the use of *fuck*. This is a clear limitation of this study. On the other hand, this situation also underscores the lack of knowledge about swear words – not at least from a multilingual perspective – and especially the globalization of cursing vocabularies. Future studies should include several other languages, and, if possible, explanations of the etymology and history, as well as frequency of this type of curse in English speaking societies. Additionally, social variables should be studied to a broader extent. Other social variables should also undergo a deeper scrutiny to support the relatively preliminary and superficial results from this study.

6 Conclusion

The curse word *fuck* is spread worldwide from English and is today a common curse word in the Nordic languages, both as citation forms and as naturalized into the relevant language, probably a result of the global cultural hegemony won by the Anglo-Americans after World War II. This seems to be true also for languages close to Western European culture, like Russian, as the curse word is adopted into the heritage language to some degree. In post-colonized India, where English has become the most used language in the middle class and up, *fuck* is part of the common cursing vocabulary, but not to the same degree by the lower classes. In contrast, the study of the Amharic language in Ethiopia shows that the *fuck* is hardly used, and only by urban youngsters. However, local expressions for sexual abuse and regular sexual activity are used as curse words, both in Ethiopia and in Hindi-speaking India. A common trait for the investigations of *fuck* in six languages is that *fuck* as a curse word is used most frequently by young people.

We conclude that there is a pattern among foreign language users of the curse *fuck*. It is common and well-adapted in the Nordic countries, with less adaption and use in Russian, and even less in Hindi or Indian-English. It is more or less absent in the African Amharic.

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