



## Offensive Words to Beware of:

### A Forensic Linguistics and Legal Analysis from Thai Supreme Court Judgments

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#### ABSTRACT

This article examines offensive language appearing in Thai Supreme Court judgments that has been deemed to constitute defamation or insult under Sections 326–333 of the Thai Penal Code. It integrates forensic linguistic analysis to explore the speaker's intent, the cultural connotations of the expressions, and their societal impact. The study finds that such expressions frequently dehumanize the person referred to, diminishing their value as a human being. These words often intersect with issues of gender, dignity, and social status, functioning as verbal tools to assert dominance or reinforce the speaker's own identity by undermining the honor and standing of others.

**Keywords:** defamation, offensive language, semantic derogation, dehumanization, linguistic aggression

#### Introduction

In Thai society, offensive language is not merely a tool for expressing anger or dissatisfaction. It is also a linguistic phenomenon that reflects underlying structures of power, belief systems, culture, and societal values (Lakoff, 1989). Swear words and insults often possess complex linguistic nuances and carry semiotic power to construct or dismantle the social status of the person being referred to.

When such expressions are used in public or communicated to a third party, they may constitute a criminal offense of defamation or insult, particularly under Sections 326 and 393 of the Thai Penal Code (Royal Thai Government Gazette, 2007). Determining whether a given expression falls within the scope of a criminal offense involves not only considering its literal meaning but also the socio-cultural context, the nature of the relationship between the parties, and the speaker's underlying intent in the communicative act (Lakoff, 1989; Royal Thai Government Gazette, 2007).

The study of offensive language in the legal context is therefore essential for understanding both forensic linguistics and the justice process. It helps explain the criteria courts use to distinguish between language that is simply harsh and language that seriously undermines a person's honor, reputation, and dignity to the point of constituting a criminal offense (Royal Thai Government Gazette, 2007). Furthermore, it reveals how language functions as a tool for



negotiating power, constructing identity, and shaping social relations — all of which are critical to the fair interpretation and application of the law (Lakoff, 1989).

### Legal Framework

- Section 326 – Defamation: Defaming another person before a third party in a manner likely to cause damage to that person's reputation, to expose them to hatred, or to subject them to contempt.
- Section 393 – Insult: Insulting another person in their presence by using offensive language or displaying contemptuous behavior.
- Section 328 – Defamation by Publication: Committing defamation by means of publication, broadcasting, or other forms of dissemination.

### 3. Offensive Expressions and Related Supreme Court Judgments

Expression	Supreme Court Judgment	Reason for Ruling
<p>อี๊ดอกทอง, อี้อยควย (ii dok thong, ii roi khui)</p> <p>อี๊ดอกทอง → you slut / you whore (derogatory term targeting a woman's sexual morality; strongly offensive in Thai culture)</p> <p>อี้อยควย → you [woman] who's slept with a hundred men / you promiscuous slut (extremely vulgar, implying extreme sexual promiscuity; highly insulting)</p>	Judgment No. 1442/1952	Devalues the target's sexuality and dignity, conveys sexual disgrace, and causes public humiliation.
<p>อี๊สาวกนแฉะ (ii sao kon chae) → you loose woman / you slutty woman</p> <p>Literal meaning: "you woman with a wet buttocks" — a crude, sexually explicit metaphor implying promiscuity or sexual availability.</p> <p>Cultural note: In Thai, this phrase is highly vulgar and socially stigmatizing, directly attacking a woman's sexual reputation in a way that suggests shame and dishonor.</p>	Judgment No. 1348/1976	Sexually inappropriate expression, tarnishes the target's honor, and causes public embarrassment.
<p>อี๊ดอก (ii dok) → you slut / you whore</p> <p>Literal meaning: "you flower" — but in Thai slang, ดอก (dok) here is not about an actual flower. It's a vulgar metaphor used to demean a woman's sexual morality.</p> <p>Cultural note: This is a gender-specific insult that attacks dignity and sexual reputation, and in Thai usage, it is highly offensive when directed at a woman. It's commonly interpreted as degrading and defamatory in legal contexts.</p>	Judgment No. 2102/1978	Diminishes the sexual value of the target; carries gender-disparaging meaning.



<p>อี๊ดตัว, อี๊ดควาย (<i>ii sat, ii khwai</i>)</p> <p>อี๊ดตัว → you animal</p> <p>Literal meaning: “you female animal.”</p> <p>Cultural note: In Thai, calling someone an “animal” strips them of human dignity, implying they are uncivilized, cruel, or morally inferior. When prefixed with อี (a derogatory term for women), it becomes gendered and highly insulting.</p> <p>อี๊ดควาย → you buffalo</p> <p>Literal meaning: “you female buffalo.”</p> <p>Cultural note: In Thai culture, the buffalo is stereotypically associated with stupidity or ignorance. Calling someone อี๊ดควาย equates them with being foolish or incapable, and when combined with the gendered อี, it intensifies the insult, targeting both intelligence and dignity.</p>	Judgment No. 5257/2005	Compares the target to an animal, undermining human dignity, implying stupidity or worthlessness.
<p>ตอแหล (to lae) → phony / deceitful liar / two-faced</p> <p>Literal meaning: The term doesn’t have a direct literal meaning; its Thai slang used to accuse someone of being insincere, pretending to be something they’re not, or deliberately lying.</p> <p>Cultural note: In Thai, ตอแหล is a sharp insult aimed at attacking a person’s honesty and credibility. It implies hypocrisy, deceit, and moral corruption, often used in confrontational or defamatory contexts. In legal disputes, its use can be interpreted as damaging to one’s reputation and trustworthiness.</p>	Judgment No. 8919/2009	Means deceitful or dishonest; damages the credibility and trustworthiness of the target.
<p>ไอ้เหี้ย (ai hia) → you damn monitor lizard / you bastard</p> <p>Literal meaning: “you male monitor lizard.” In Thai culture, the monitor lizard (เหี้ย) is considered one of the most offensive animals to call someone, associated with evil, treachery, and bad luck.</p> <p>Cultural note: When prefixed with ไอ้ (a derogatory marker for men), it becomes a high-intensity insult directed at a male, expressing extreme contempt or hatred. In many Thai contexts, ไอ้เหี้ย is considered among the strongest profanities, and its use in public or toward another person can be deemed seriously defamatory or insulting under the law.</p>	Judgment No. 6629/2013	Highly offensive term in Thai culture, used to insult or express strong contempt.
<p>อีหน้าหี, อีหน้าหัวควาย, อีกะหรี (<i>ii na hee, ii na hua khui, ii ka-ree</i>)</p> <p>อีหน้าหี → you pussy-faced woman</p> <p>Literal meaning: “you female with a vagina face.”</p>	Judgment No. 19384/2014	Extremely vulgar sexual terms, gender-disparaging, severely damaging to honor and reputation.



<p>Cultural note: Extremely vulgar sexual insult targeting a woman, equating her face with female genitalia. It is meant to dehumanize and sexually shame the target, and is one of the most severe gender-based verbal attacks in Thai.</p> <p>อีหน้าหัวควย → you dickhead woman</p> <p>Literal meaning: “you female with a penis-head face.”</p> <p>Cultural note: Blends gendered insult (อี) with male sexual imagery, used to mock, degrade, and humiliate the target in public discourse. It carries both sexual and moral offensiveness.</p> <p>อีกะหรี → you whore / you prostitute</p> <p>Literal meaning: “you prostitute.”</p> <p>Cultural note: A direct accusation of prostitution or promiscuity. In Thai culture, this is highly stigmatizing, attacking both moral integrity and social standing, and is frequently recognized in court rulings as gravely defamatory toward women.</p>		
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## Forensic Linguistic Analysis

### Meaning and Linguistic Context

The analysis shows that these expressions involve semantic derogation, meaning they reduce the value or dignity of the person being referred to, such as:

- Sexually explicit terms – e.g., “ii dok thong”, “ii ka-ree” – emphasizing sexual behavior in a negative or shameful manner.
- Animal comparisons – e.g., “ii khwai”, “ii sat” – dehumanizing the target by likening them to animals.
- General strong profanity – e.g., “ai hia” – used to attack dignity directly.

### Speaker’s Intent

From a forensic linguistics perspective, the use of these expressions typically carries a clear illocutionary force, including:

- Establishing dominance – the speaker uses offensive language to lower the addressee’s status, positioning themselves as superior.
- Public humiliation – particularly when spoken in the presence of others or through public media.



- Social disassociation – offensive language is used to declare a lack of respect for, or rejection of, the other party.
- Releasing anger – although sometimes claimed to be in the “heat of the moment,” the words still damage the target’s public image.

### Interpretation in the Context of Evidence

In forensic linguistics, courts will consider:

- The circumstances in which the words were used.
- Whether third parties were present (a key element for defamation offenses).
- The meaning within Thai culture, which often carries strong sexual and moral connotations.

### Social Impact

The use of such offensive expressions has consequences that extend far beyond individual legal cases, because:

- Fostering social division – Language that humiliates or degrades others deepens rifts between individuals, groups, and communities.
- Reinforcing a culture of verbal violence – Repeated public use of strong insults normalizes aggressive speech and reduces tolerance for respectful discourse.
- Heightening legal risks in the digital age – With the immediacy and wide reach of online platforms, defamatory or insulting expressions can be disseminated instantly, increasing the likelihood of lawsuits and long-term reputational harm.
- Perpetuating gender discrimination – Many of these terms are gender-specific, particularly targeting women’s sexuality, thus reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes and inequality.
- Undermining public trust in dialogue – The prevalence of verbal abuse erodes confidence in civil discourse and discourages constructive debate.

### Conclusion

The offensive language documented in Thai Supreme Court judgments serves as a clear reminder that language is not only a medium for conveying meaning but also a powerful tool for constructing dominance and dismantling the dignity of others. These expressions operate as acts of linguistic aggression, with tangible consequences for both personal relationships and societal cohesion.



A combined understanding of linguistic intent and legal ramifications enables society to recognize the broader implications of such speech, particularly in an era where communication is instantaneous and far-reaching. By acknowledging these dynamics, individuals and communities can foster greater awareness, promote responsible speech, and actively avoid language that could lead to litigation or perpetuate cycles of verbal violence.

Ultimately, cultivating mindful communication is not only a matter of legal prudence but also a critical step toward building a more respectful and equitable society.

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