

A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF SWEARING UTTERED BY THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN QUENTIN TARANTINO'S *PULP FICTION* MOVIE

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Abstract

This research aims to (1) find out the type of swearing uttered by the main characters in *Pulp Fiction* movie, and to (2) observe the reasons for swearing uttered by the main characters in *Pulp Fiction* movie. In order to analyze swearwords which emerge within the movie, the researcher employed sociolinguistic approach. This research used the descriptive qualitative method in order to describe each scene of the movie. Moreover, the quantitative method is also employed to support the interpretation of the data by displaying fixed percentages in the numerical form. The sources of data were the transcripts of each scene which involve the main characters in it. The data were collected and analyzed by categorizing the utterances which contain swearwords based on the objectives of the research and matching the transcripts within the movie carefully. The results of this research are as follows. Firstly, five types of swearing are uttered by the main characters in *Pulp Fiction* are dysphemistic, abusive, idiomatic, emphatic, and cathartic swearing. From sixty three data found in the movie, the emphatic swearing becomes the most frequently used type of swearing. The least frequently used type of swearing is abusive swearing. Secondly, three reasons for swearing are found in the movie, in which they are triggered by psychological motives, social motives, and linguistic motives. Social motives become the most frequently used reason for swearing. Psychological motives become the least motives used by the main characters.

Keywords: *Pulp Fiction* movie, sociolinguistics, swearing.

INTRODUCTION

In daily life, people invariably use language to interact with others. They interact in order to convey their inclinations to the others. Nonetheless, the use of language is not that simple. It can be used to identify the status of people in society as well. This condition can be seen when the speakers comprehend to employ proper language to the hearers in a certain circumstance. The more they experience to grasp the language deeply, the more they will be respected by society. Therefore, language is not simply a role in communicative

purpose, but it likewise serves to establish and maintain relationship with others.

By the existence of the culture in society, language automatically becomes bounded with the culture itself. The relation between language and culture reflects the structure of a language whereby speakers of that language view the world. It is inconceivable to understand or appreciate both language and culture without acknowledging the relation between them. In fact, various concepts such as Kinship System, Colour Terminology, Prototype, Taboo, and Euphemism emerge since

there are relationships between language and culture. They describe how the culture affects language to contrive various words in order to be tolerable in society.

Taboo, which becomes one of the concepts in relation to language and culture, needs to be explored further since it is an interesting phenomenon in society. According to Wardhaugh (2006:239), taboo is the proscription or restriction in any of society which causes anxiety, embarrassment, or shame for the one who employs it. In other word, taboo is acts created by society but society itself refuse their community to produce nonetheless. However, there are always people who tend to utilize taboo in an attempt to demonstrate their own freedom from such social constraints or to reveal the taboo as illogical and unwarranted, as in certain movements for 'free speech'. In addition, the use and definition of taboo words are basically the same but it varies in terms of expressions for every language, for example, the expressions of taboo words between English and Bahasa Indonesia are different. It is extremely forbidden to utter *anjing* (dog) in Bahasa Indonesia since dog is considered as impure animal particularly for Moslem (majority people in Indonesia). Meanwhile, the word dog in English has no effect to either the speaker or hearer, because dog is considered as a friendly animal and almost people have it as their pet.

In relation to taboo subject whereby exposes about bad language, it is necessary to involve swearing as the part of taboo, since swearing is

described as a form of linguistic activity employing taboo words to impart the expression of strong emotions. This is in line with Karjalainen (2012:18), who states that swearing is kind of linguistic expression which refers to bad language especially taboo, although not all of taboo words are swearwords. Swearing is used as the main device of the speakers in order to give emphasis to their speech, which often combine with techniques like stress, intonation and tone of voice, as well as non-linguistic phenomena like gestures and facial expression (Ljung 2011:5). Thus, the usage of swearing must involve the taboo words to strengthen swearing taking place in circumstance. The list of taboo words such as: *shit, fuck, prick, and bitch* are well considered as swearing, but actually not all taboo words contain swearing. Consider for instance the words *shag* and *fuck* in which officially accepted as the words for having sex and taboo in English speaker. However, only word *fuck* works as swearing, since comparing them by using well-formed structure such as *fuck you, not give a fuck, and fucking idiot* with the impossible phrase like *Shag you, not give a shag, and shagingg idiot*. In fact, although the use of swearing is believed to intimidate and disturb others, in certain circumstance they do not affect at all. It is due to the intimacy between the speaker and the hearer. Thus, it is interesting to find out the context beneath the conversation of the speakers which contains swearing.

Swearing, in fact, does not emerge in daily conversation but in movies as well, since it is

believed that movie is the representation of reality. It is quite possible to find those phenomena in the characters of movie based on the conversation of the characters. Therefore, in order to explore swearing phenomena, it is interesting to analyze a movie which contains many swearwords entitled “Pulp Fiction”. This movie is about the story of American gangsters in the United States. The narration is presented out of sequence for each scene, but it is actually related one to another. The story is about Vincent, as the main character in this movie who plays as a hit man, who does an order to take back a secret luggage which belongs to his boss. During his mission, accompanied by his partners, Jules, he has to murder some people who deceived their boss. Shortly, they manage to do the mission given by their boss with a lot of struggles. Another scene tells about Butch, a prizefighter, who plays as second main character in the movie. As a prizefighter, he has been ordered by Vincent’s boss, Marcellus, to manipulate the match and get lost by his opponent. However, he accidentally beats his opponent and wins the match instead. Marcellus gets angry and intends to chase him, but he manages to escape with his girl from the town.

Pulp Fiction becomes a suitable subject due to the possibility of swearwords uttered by the main characters, since the main characters are the representation of criminal lifestyle in society. This can be seen from the dialogues among the characters which frequently add some swearwords. In addition, the scenes in this movie are presented by mixing humour and violence acts. It is quite

possible to find out the differences of swearwords uttered by characters depending on the context of this movie. Therefore, *Pulp Fiction* is an appropriate subject in this research.

This research has two objectives: (1) to find out the type of swearing employed by the main characters in *Pulp Fiction* Movie, and (2) to observe the reasons for swearing which uttered by the main characters in *Pulp Fiction* Movie.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Type

This research used qualitative approach. However, quantitative method was also employed in this research to obtain the frequency of the data occurrences in order to support the qualitative interpretation.

Forms, Contexts, and Source of Data

In this research, the data were in the form of utterances uttered by two main characters, Vincent Vega and Butch Coolidge in *Pulp Fiction* Movie. The contexts of data were the dialogues between the characters which contain swearwords. The sources of data were the transcripts of each scene which involve the main characters in it. These transcripts were taken from <https://subscene.com>.

Research Instrument

The researcher was the main instrument of this research, supported by the data sheet as the secondary instrument.

Data Collection Techniques

In this research, in collecting the data, the researcher used note-taking technique.

Data Analysis Techniques

The steps of data analysis technique are illustrated as follows.

First, the data were categorized into the data sheet after the researcher had found the utterances containing swearing. Second, the researcher classified the data into data sheet based on the classification of the objectives of the study through the characters dialogues in the transcript of the movie. Third, the data were interpreted in order to answer the objectives of the research. Fourth, the trustworthiness of the data was applied during the process of data analysis. Last, the conclusion of the research was made based on the result of the research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

Table 2: Data findings of types of swearing and reasons for swearing

No	Types of Swearing	Reason for Swearing			Total	Percentage (%)
		Psychological Motives	Social Motives	Linguistic Motives		
1	Dysphemistic Swearing	-	16	-	16	25.39
2	Abusive Swearing	-	4	-	4	6.34
3	Idiomatic Swearing	-	13	-	13	20.64
4	Emphatic Swearing	-	11	11	22	34.93
5	Cathartic Swearing	8	-	-	8	12.70
Total		8	44	11	63	100
Percentage (%)		12.70	69.84	17.46	100	

DISCUSSIONS

There are five types of swearing performed by Vincent and Butch in *Pulp Fiction*. They are dysphemistic swearing, abusive swearing, emphatic swearing, idiomatic swearing, and cathartic swearing. Each of types is explained one by one followed by the examples:

Vincent : “Then what did Marcellus do?”

Jules : “Sent a couple of cats over to his place. They took him out on his patio, threw his ass over the balcony. Nigger fell four stories. They had a little garden down at the bottom enclosed in glass, like a greenhouse. Nigger fell through that. Since then he kind of developed a speech impediment.”

Vincent : “That’s a **damn** shame.”

(datum no 7)

The dialogue happens when Vincent and Jules are waiting for the right time in order to execute the targets. In order to kill the time, both of them are talking about the incident which happens between their boss, Marsellus, and his rival, Antwan. Vincent wonders what happens with Antwan after messing around with his boss. Hence, Jules responds it with scary-detailed explanation that Antwan is completely done after messing around with Marsellus. In response to this, Vincent utters the swearword **damn** followed by the word *shame*. In fact, the word **damn** uttered by Vincent does not mean that he is going to condemn or provoking someone, but it is simply as adverb in order to express emphasis of the word *shame* uttered by him.

Esmeralda : “and what is your name?”

Butch : “Butch”

Esmeralda : “Butch, what does it mean?”

Butch : “I’m American honey, our name doesn’t mean **sh*t**”

(datum No 32)

This conversation occurs when Butch attempts to escape from Marsellus. He knows Marsellus is going to after him since he defeats his enemy in the ring and breaks his promise toward Marsellus. Therefore, he quietly calls taxi in order to bring him into his girlfriend’s place. Esmeralda, the name of taxi driver, seems to find out that his passenger is the fighter in the boxing match who just defeated his enemy. She asks many things about him then, including the meaning of his name. Butch responds to her straight to the point by using the swearword “**shit**” in order to interpret the meaning of his name, since he is still in tension escaping from Marsellus and does not want to talk about such thing.

Jody : “Listen, while you’re looking for it, she’s gonna die on our carpet”

Lance : “Honey, I’m going to fucking kill you if you don’t shut up!

Vincent : Get in here! **Quit fucking around** and give her the shot!

(datum No 30)

This conversation occurs when Vincent is in trouble with Mia’s overdose. Vincent asks Lance to save Mia as soon as possible; hence Lance attempts to look for his medical book. While he is looking for the book, Jody keeps talking about the trouble caused by Vincent and it seems to bother Lance so much. Both of them are eventually arguing each other until Vincent stops it by swearing at them.

Vincent utters swearing **quit fucking around** in which it cannot be interpreted literally since the obscene word **fucking** does not make sense when it is combined with other words. In fact, that phrase idiomatically could be interpreted as “stop arguing”, since Lance and Judy constantly argue one another while Mia is dying. Therefore, in order to arouse the attention, Vincent utters such swearing toward both of them.

Vincent : “all right, Mia. So, listen, I gotta go. All right? Oh **Jesus fucking Christ**. You f... Oh, **Jesus Christ. Of fuck me! Fuck me!** Oh come on girl, we’re getting out of here. We gotta walk now.”

(datum No 20)

This dialogue occurs when Vincent wants to get back home after he had a dinner with Mia, Marsellus’ wife. He needs to practice first in the toilet in order to tell her that he needs to go home earlier since Vincent respects his boss so much and does not want to give bad impression toward Mia. When he tries to talk with Mia, he surprises to find out that Mia overdoses on drugs and seems dying. This situation triggers Vincent to utter swearing subconsciously. He utters several swearwords which refer to religious things and sexuality such as **Jesus Christ** and **fuck me**. In fact, those swearwords indicate cathartic swearing since the uses of them do not refer to anyone, they are employed in order to release Vincent’s stress button.

Paul : “have you meet Mia?”

Vincent : “Not yet”

Jules and Paul : (laughing)

Vincent : “What’s so fuckng funny?”

Paul : “Not a goddamn thing”

Jules : “I got to piss”

Vincent : “Look, I’m not a fuckng idiot, all right? It’s the big man wife. I’m gonna sit across from her... chew my food with my mouth closed... laugh at her fuckng jokes, and that’s it.”

Paul :”hey my name is Paul, and this sh*t is between you all”

Vincent :”Then why you did fuckng ask me about it for? **Asshole**

(datum No 17)

This conversation occurs when Vincent and Jules have finished their job and stay in a pub. Paul, a bartender in Marsellus’s pub, serves and asks some questions to them. One of the questions is about Mia, Marsellus’ wife who is going to have a dinner with Vincent. In this scene, Vincent who does not know about the background of Mia is being laughed by Jules and Paul. It makes Vincent looks silly among them. Thus, he utters various type of swearing at Paul, the one who provokes him in the first time, by referring him into effluvia term **asshole** in the end of his conversation. In fact, Vincent forces himself to utter abusive swearing to Paul since he is totally aggrieved at Paul and does not have any choice but to abusing him in order to release his distress.

Jules : “You want to play blind man, go walk with the shepherd, but me, my eyes are f*ck*ng open.”

Vincent : “what the f*ck does that mean?”

Jules : “I mean that’s it for me. From here on, I consider myself my a*s retired.”

Vincent : “**Jesus Chirst!!!**”

Jules : “Don’t blaspheme”.

Vincent : “**Goddammit!!!**”

Jules : “I said don’t do that”.

Vincent : Why are you fucking freaky out on us?”

(datum No 52)

This conversation occurs when Vincent and Jules are heading back to their boss in order to giving back Marsellus’ suitcase. In order to retrieve the suitcase, they face many problems and almost being killed by their rivals. Luckily, all of the bullets miss and they manage to survive. In the middle of the journey, Vincent discuss about the incident which is just happened logically. However, Jules still consider it as miracle and divine interventions. Hence, Jules decides to retire and looks for another life after he finishes this job. The statements which are uttered by Jules make Vincent turning mad and swearing automatically. He subconsciously utters profanity words such as **Jesus Christ** and **Goddamn** in order to reduce his stress over Jules’ statements, since the uses of profanity words employed by Vincent does not refer to Jules. Therefore, those swearwords are highly influenced by psychological motives over Jules emotion.

Vincent : “but you know what the funniest thing about Europe is?”

Jules : “what?”

Vincent : “It’s a little difference. I mean, they got the same **shit** over there and they got here, but it’s just a little different”.

(datum No 1)

The background of this conversation is when Jules and Vincent are heading to their target in order to retrieve his boss' suitcase. In his car, Vincent tells a story about his experiences when he was in Europe. Mostly his stories tell about funny thing at there. Meanwhile Vincent happily tells about his story, sometimes he adds some swearwords in it. One of the swearwords uttered by Vincent is **shit**. In fact, the inappropriate word like **shit** which has been uttered by Vincent does not represent that he is in high tension. The word "shit" in this circumstance is kind of dysphemistic term which It is used simply to amuse Jules since at the moment he tells about something funny and swearing seems like a common conversation for them. Therefore, the word **shit** uttered by Vincent indicates social motives as its reason.

Vincent : "So, that means it could be up to five guys up there?"

Lance : "It's possible."

Vincent : "We should have **fucking** shotguns."

(datum No 5)

This dialogue occurs when Vincent and Jules are heading to execute their targets. While preparing everything, they calculate how many enemies in the building which they are going to face. Finding out that they are armed by revolver, Vincent swears to himself that he should bring shotgun in order to anticipate the trouble once they go inside the building. He utters swearwords **fucking** in order to emphasize his statement over

the guns. Actually, the word **fucking** in this scene used as the emphasis of noun **shotgun**, hence the use of this swearword does not provoke Jules and it simply indicates emphasis over Vincent's way of speaking.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The first objective of this research is to identify and to describe the types of swearing in *Pulp Fiction*. There are five types of swearing which have been analyzed in this movie. They are dysphemistic swearing, abusive swearing, idiomatic swearing, emphatic swearing, and cathartic swearing. The most frequently used type of swearing in *Pulp Fiction* is emphatic swearing in which it is presented in twenty-two data (34.93%). This is due to the background of the main characters in which they deal with criminal activities in daily lives. Thus, emphatic swearing is employed in order to strengthen their statement or simply as their way of speaking. On the other hand, the least frequently used type of swearing is abusive swearing. There are only 4 data (6.34%) which indicate the use of this type. It becomes the least used type of swearing since employing it is considered as inefficient and the main characters prefer to use others type of swearing in order to provoke others.

The second objective is to describe the reasons for swearing in *Pulp Fiction*. There are three motives which indicate the reasons for swearing which is found in *Pulp Fiction*. They are psychological motives, social motives, and

linguistic motives. Social motives become the most frequently used reasons for swearing in which there are forty-four data (69.84%) which indicate these motives. The main characters mostly employed social motives because their background of society which represents criminal life. Thus, it triggers them to utter swearwords almost in every conversation. On the other hand, psychological motives become the least frequency used reason for swearing in which it only appears eight times (12.70%). This is due to the characteristic of psychological motives in which they are only triggered by the tension of the speakers and the intention is to release stress relief. Therefore, the main characters rarely used such motives since the conflict which triggered them uttering swearwords are mostly influenced by people in their surroundings.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the conclusion of the research, then there are some points that can be suggested for some parties. First, to linguistics students, In analyzing swearwords, it is expected that they need to pay more attentions on the uses of swearing in society. Currently, there are still many people who consider that swearing as bad language in which it is only used in order to hurt or to provoke other people's feeling. In fact, based on the research which has been conducted on this movie, the uses of swearing might be triggered by various motives such as stress relief in psychological motives or speaking behavior in linguistic motives Therefore, the linguistic students are suggested to discover

swearing phenomenon further in order to have a deeper understanding. Second, to other researchers, it is suggested on the next research that there will be researchers who conduct the same topic with a further analysis, such as the issue between swearing and gender, or the relation between the use of swearwords and social class in society.

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