

SWEARING IN MILLER'S *DEADPOOL*: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The existence of swearing in Miller's *Deadpool* raises American parents' anxiety that swearing which is a considerably bad linguistic practice will affect children's way of speaking. This study, therefore, addresses two objectives: 1) to delineate the categories of swearing, and 2) to reveal the characters' reasons for deploying such swearing. To achieve the objectives, the principles of sociolinguistics on swearing as both theoretical and methodological underpinnings were adopted. Moreover, considering the issue was a social phenomenon which was demonstrated through language, a qualitative research design was chosen as its research type. Furthermore, linguistic units in this research were in the forms of morphemes, words, and phrases portraying the use of swear words in *Deadpool* while the context of the data was in the form of utterances in both dialogues and monologues. To gain credibility of the research then, investigator triangulation was utilized. Through a careful examination using the perspective of sociolinguistics, this study reveals that 1) there are six types of swearing occurring in the motion picture, namely abusive swearing, cathartic swearing, humorous swearing, idiomatic swearing, dysphemistic swearing, and emphatic swearing. Furthermore with respect to second objective, this study suggests seven out of nine factors appeared such as anger/tension-release, emphasis, story-telling, intimacy, a way to shock, part of personality, and vulnerability, whereas normality and habit are not found as there is no in-group pressure or social expectation, and less awareness triggering speakers for swearing. However, there are also three new emerging motivational factors which are not stated in the expert's theory during the study, i.e. aversion, pain, and surprise motives.

Keywords: swearing, Miller's *Deadpool*, sociolinguistics, the United States

INTRODUCTION

The existence of swearing which is the realization of tabooed act has become more prevalent in media nowadays (Preston, 2008). The prevalence does not necessarily mean that swearing is widely accepted because Farkas, Duffet, and Collin (in Kaye and Sapolsky, 2004: 911) state that the pervasiveness of swearing in media gains public concerns that swearing will cause moral degradation on the young generation. As a consequence, such fear on the negative impact of swearing causes the practices, which are not necessarily intended to abuse others, problematic.

Miller's *Deadpool*, for example, is issued by the board of censorship of China due to some elements, and one of which is the existence of excessive foul language (Loughrey, 2016; Siegel, 2016). China as one of the dominant market for movies has deemed to ban this blockbuster film;

this policy is consequently financially disadvantageous for Marvel Studios. Additionally even in its home country, *Deadpool* gains a controversy in terms of foul language although the censorship board of the United States has authorized the movie screening in the American cinemas; American parents demand the home production movie to lower its rating code from R to PG-13 because of their fear that children will watch the motion picture (Wolmerdorf, 2006). Such phenomenon signifies that swearing is not well-accepted in American media. As a consequence, swearing in *Deadpool* with respect to American social value is a worth examining issue through the perspective of sociolinguistics to see how American society which issues the movie values emotion.

Since swearing itself is a broad subject in sociolinguistics, this present study is only concerned with Miller's *Deadpool*, specifically on types of swearing, and motives for swearing.

Types and motives for swearing are considerably related to the linguistic phenomenon because observing types will give an insight about the uses of swear words, and examining motives will reveal the speakers' underlying reasons for using the stigmatized expressions which can be used as an evaluation the values of swearing practices that those practices are not always negative. Furthermore, this study will only focus on the United States because swearing is issued in in the country.

Swearing itself according to Kaye and Sapolsky (2004: 912) and Ljung (2011: 4) is also called as *cussing*, *obscenities*, or *offensive language* and in line with them, this technical term refers to the employment of any objectionable or tabooed language. The expressions are considerably unpleasant because the employment of such language is breaks social norms (Ljung 2011: 4). Consequently, both the practices and the expressions are stigmatized by society. Since they are tabooed, they gain power to perform particular effects when they are deployed in a given context.

Swearing can be categorized into abusive swearing, humorous swearing, expletive swearing, and auxiliary swearing (Andersson and Trudgill 1990: 61). Pinker also shares a similar idea on the forms of swearing (2007: 350). He as a consequence distinguishes five different types of swearing which are nearly similar to the previous experts: dysphemistic swearing, idiomatic swearing, cathartic swearing, emphatic swearing, and abusive swearing. Since those experts share the same idea on the categorization of swearing, and the difference is on the technical terms, types of swearing which can be drawn from those theories are abusive swearing, idiomatic swearing, dysphemistic swearing, cathartic swearing, emphatic swearing, and humorous swearing.

First, abusive swearing practice involves terms which are designed to insult a person as the addressee of the insult. For instance, *Fuck you, motherfucker!* (Pinker, 2007: 350). This example illustrates that the speaker uses abrasive words

fuck you which is followed by a name-calling carrying a negative sense to injure the addressee.

Second, idiomatic swearing relies upon expressions which the meaning cannot be deducible from word-by-word. For example, *it's fucked up!* (Pinker, 2007: 350). *Fucked up* cannot be interpreted anyway because it is not possible to combine the meaning of *fuck* and *up*; meaning of the expression is conventionally fixed.

Third, dysphemistic swearing is realized through the substitution of expressions with neutral senses with tabooed terms which are intended to show how disagreeable something is. For example, *let's fuck* (Pinker, 2007: 350). The speaker chooses the expression *fuck* instead of *have sex* which possesses or carries a more neutral sense of meaning to force the interlocutor to think about the most unpleasant depiction on having sexual intercourse.

Fourth, cathartic swearing, which is called expletive swearing in Andersson and Trudgill's terminology, is characterized by the use of swear word in a sudden condition which is commonly uncontrollable by the speaker. Cathartic swearing involves an exclamatory mark although not always. Besides, it is also linguistically characterized by a short expression. For example, *fuck!* (Pinker, 2007: 350). The interjection indicates that there is an unpleasant situation happening and driving the speaker to employ the copulation-related term.

Fifth, emphatic swearing or expletive swearing in Andersson and Trudgill's technical term helps speakers to deliver their points in utterance adjectivally or adverbially. Such type is commonly inoffensive because it is not directed to a particular addressee. For instance, *this is fucking amazing!* (Pinker 2007: 350). *Fucking* which is used in an adverbial manner in the same way as *very* and *so* is not disparaging any addressee, as *fucking* is not targeted for harming the hearer verbally.

Last, similar with emphatic swearing and cathartic swearing, humorous swearing is also not aimed at abusing others as it tends to be intended to make a comic effect. For example, *get your ass in the gear!* (Andersson and Trudgill, 1990: 61).

Ass is indeed used to refer the addressee, but the substitution of *ass* is to be humorous.

The underlying reasons for swearing are various. Stapleton (2003: 28) mentions eleven motivational factors for swearing such as emphasis, a way to shock, intimacy, anger/tension-release, story-telling, habit, normality, part of personality, and vulnerability.

First, speakers swear because they want to make a particular point more noticeable. This is what Stapleton calls as swearing as emphasis. For example, *this food is motherfucking delicious!* The incest-themed swear word is deploy to make show a high degree of pleasant or deliciousness. By swearing, the deliciousness of the food is not only delivered, but it is also intensified and becomes more noticeable.

Second, speakers swear because of a way to shock motive. Swearing is a powerful way to attract people's attention; however, this motive also covers reasons when a speaker intends to harm an interlocutor verbally. For example, *you motherfucker!* can be used to draw someone's attention.

Third, swearing is realized for promoting intimacy, showing friendliness, or signaling trust. For example, *what's up, my fella bitches?* *Bitches* are deployed to show intimacy between the speaker and the interlocutor because this expression can only be spoken by a particular addressee and a particular speaker with close social relationship.

Fourth, under anger/tension-release motive, speakers deploy swear words because anger, frustration, or tense triggering them. Swearing is, therefore, performs as a negative emotion management or emotional releases. For example, *fuck off!* This expression which is used to drive someone out aggressively is commonly performed when the speaker is raged.

Fifth, swearing occurs as a positive outcome. It is addressed to deliver a good story by making a jocular effect for the sake of entertainment. For instance,

It's not superstition; it's practically Newtonian. For every action there is an equal but opposite reaction. Leonard, for example, is being a doofus bitch;

therefore, he'll be reincarnated as a banana slug. It's elegant in its simplicity. What goes around comes around (IMDb, 2009).

The expression *bitch* is not intended to abuse the addressee, but it is aimed at making a teasing or jocular effect on the speaker's utterance by making fun of the interlocutor.

Sixth, in habit motive, speakers are usually less aware when they are performing swearing. For instance,

I come home to my fucking house after three fucking years in the fucking war, and what do I fucking-well find? My wife in bed, engaging in elicit sexual relations with a male! (Pinker, 2007: 359).

The fuck patois indicates that swearing has become the speaker's way of speaking, and as a result he is less sensitive on the existence of swearing in his utterance.

Seventh, people swear because of the social expectation. They swear to be accepted by other members of the group. Therefore, this motive is named as normality. For example, in order to be accepted by other members of a gang, a man is socially required to perform swearing.

Eight, swearing appears as an individual depiction. This is to say that swearing displays the speaker's portrayal of his or her characteristics. Furthermore, from this motive, swearing is "just something [people] know me by," (Stapleton, 2003: 28). For example, Eminem's uses of swear words in his songs is to show his identity as a rapper which always associated with foul language (Stapleton, 2010: 299).

Last, speakers deploy swear words because they are frightened. Swearing in this case serves as a fear-releasing mechanism. As a result, it is called as vulnerability. For example, *Oh, no. Fuck!* (The person has not done with calculating in an examination, whereas the time has up, and the professor tells the students to submit their papers.) This illustration depicts that the person swears to express his panic or fear because the person has not finished the examination.

RESEARCH METHODS

A qualitative research design was adopted to achieve the two research objectives because this study was intended to explain the swearing practices in a narrative manner without quantifying. This type of research was utilized because it enables the researcher to examine and explain a social phenomenon with its context descriptively (Berg, 2001: 6). Furthermore, since this study only involves data in a small number, the researcher can produce in-depth analysis on the object under study (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009: 7). Additionally, sociolinguistics was chosen as the approach of this study as it could show a link between language and society.

Because this study was concerned with language as the main object, the linguistic units were in the form of morphemes, words, and phrases indicating swearing while the context of data was in the form of utterances in a dialogue or monologue taken from *Deadpool*.

Moreover in terms of data collection technique, the data were taken from the movie version of *Deadpool* and its transcript as the secondary source which was obtained from a web annotator, <http://genius.com>. Data was collected through careful note-taking technique. It is a way of gathering data manually by writing down the utterances which are considered to be data (Thomas, 2003: 185). To do such collecting technique, a data sheet was deployed.

Data which were collected were examined through qualitative content analysis. It is a systematic method for examining meaning of textual data according to categories (Marying and Schreier in Schreier, 2014: 170).

To gain credibility of the analysis, investigator triangulation method was deployed. This kind of triangulation is a strategy for checking the credibility by using several perspectives from other investigators (Flick, 2004: 178). The researcher realized the triangulation by utilizing some investigators outside this study whom are experts in swearing and sociolinguistics to check the validity of the research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

There are six types of swearing found in Miller's *Deadpool*, i.e. emphatic swearing, abusive swearing, cathartic swearing, humorous swearing, dysphemistic swearing, and idiomatic swearing. Emphatic swearing is realized through sexual themed term. Furthermore, abusive swearing is realized through a fornication-themed insult which is aimed at vilifying or denigrating the addressee. Moreover, cathartic swearing is done through swear words in the form of interjections. In addition, humorous swearing is achieved through mocking a misfortune. Additionally, dysphemistic swearing is completed by the use of sex-themed terms. Besides, idiomatic is realized through a copulation-themed idiom.

In terms of motivational factors, there are seven out of nine reasons triggering speakers to swear such as anger/tension-release, vulnerability, emphasis, part of personality, storytelling, a way to shock, and intimacy appearing in the movie, whereas normality and habit do not occur because there is no overuse of swear words and no social expectation triggering them to swear. Even though those three do not exist, three new categories emerge during the analysis, namely aversion, pain, and surprise motive.

Discussion

Types of Swearing

Extract (1) represents how speakers swear in the form of emphatic swearing.

(1)(He lifts his mask up.)

DEADPOOL	: How about now?
FRANCIS	: Huh. Wade <i>fucking</i> Wilson. Well hello, gorgeous.

(Datum 40)

Francis finally knows the person under the red mark is after the person, Deadpool uncover his mask. Francis accordingly recognizes the person by mentioning the person's name. Francis utilizes *fucking* adjectivally to disapprove Deadpool's real name, i.e. Wade Wilson. The disapproval occurs due to the meaning with its negative sense

which shows lack of respect to the addressee, Deadpool. To put it simply, the use of *fuck* is an adjective because it modifies the name by the sense which it carries. Since *fuck* is used adjectivally, the employment of such copulation-themed term belongs to emphatic swearing.

The phenomenon of abusive swearing can be demonstrated by Extract (2).

- (2) COLOSSUS : We can't allow this
Deadpool. Please, come
quietly.
DEADPOOL : *You big, chrome, cock-
gobbler!*
COLOSSUS : That's not nice.
(Datum 51)

As seen in Extract (2), Deadpool is offended by Colossus' warning for teasing the teenage mutant, Negasonic. He, therefore, addresses the homophobic insult, *cock-gobbler* to Colossus as a response to the warning. *Cock-gobbler* itself is insulting or derogatory because it literally refers a person who enjoys sucking someone's penis; however in this context, Colossus is biologically a man. Therefore, swearing this way mocks Colossus by labelling him sexually deviant person. However, the offensiveness of the expression is not linguistically embedded; *cock-shot* is offensive because of its cultural perspective which sees homosexuality is taboo and less acceptable in the United States (Jouet, 2012).

The practice of cathartic swearing can be seen in Extract (3).

- (3) FRANCIS : *Fucking hell*. Looks like
someone lost his shot at
homecoming king.
WADE : What have you done to
me?
(Datum 70)

Francis comes to see the result of the radioactive experiment on Wade. He swears because of seeing Wade's unpleasant condition which he does not expect. In his swearing, Francis deploys sexual and religious terms, i.e. *fucking* and *hell* at the same time to produce a greater sense of unpleasantness caused by the impact of seeing Wade's disfigured skin. In terms of categorization, the use of those two different

terms which serve as one is a cathartic swearing, as the expression is brief and it is performed when the speaker faces the undesirable situation, i.e. seeing Wade's burnt skin.

Extract (4) represents a humorous swearing practice.

- (4) DEADPOOL : Oh, that's because it's
Christmas Day, Dopinder.
And I'm after someone on
my naughty list. I've been
waiting one year, three
weeks... six days and,
oh... Fourteen minutes to
make him fix what he did
to me.
DOPINDER : And what did he do to
you?
DEADPOOL : *This shit*. Boo!
(Datum 3)

In Extract (1), Deadpool reveals his spoiled face to Dopinder by uncovering it. Furthermore, he deploys *this shit* to refer to his disfigured face in sudden. The scatological term is used to draw and to represent the horrible look of his face; however, he himself does not feel bad to have such face. In this case, he tries to make fun of his unfortunate condition of having such horrible looking face for creating a jocular effect to entertain himself.

An example of dysphemistic swearing can be seen in Extract (5).

- (5) DEADPOOL : What is that?
WEASEL : That's the *shit* emoji. It's
the turd with the smiling
face and the
eyes. I thought it was
chocolate yogurt for so
long.
DEADPOOL : I need guns.
(Datum 100)

Deadpool receives a text message from Francis in which at the end of the message, there is a *shit* emoji. Since Deadpool does not understand the emoji, Weasel explains the emoji which stands for a smiling feces by using *shit* relaxingly. The meaning of both terms are basically the same, but the sense which they carry are completely different because *shit* tends to have a coarser sense than *feces*. The coarse sense characterizes

Deadpool asks Weasel to enjoy the beer for the sake of Weasel's health. Weasel accordingly swears *fuck you* relaxingly without intention to abuse Wade. The expression is designed to show degree of closeness because the swear word is highly restricted in the use. Such use implies that Weasel shares trust that he will not endanger his friend because there is no indication of offense on Wade.

Fifthly, Extract (11) shows that swearing is exercised because of vulnerability reason.

- (11) WADE : Is it bread crust?
 JEREMY : *Oh, God*, I hope not.
 MERCHANT : Woah, man, look. If this is
 about that poker game, I
 told him, I told Howie
 that
 uh... Just uh, just take
 whatever you want.

(Datum 21)

Jeremy is frightened because Wade points his gun to Jeremy's head when Wade is asking the bread crust. Jeremy consequently swears as a fear-coping strategy. In this situation, Jeremy is extremely fear that Wade will shoot him on the head so that to reduce or express his extreme fear, he uses a sacred word instead of any non-taboo expressions.

Sixth, as seen in Extract (12), swearing can also be performed as a way to shock others.

- (12) COLOSSUS : Wade, please.
 DEADPOOL : *Cock shot!*
 (With his good hand, he punches Colossus in the crotch. This does nothing but break his hand.)

(Datum 59)

Deadpool's punch to Colossus' body makes his hand damaged. Due to feeling unsatisfied that he cannot injure Colossus physically, he beats Colossus's testicles with other hand while exclaiming *cock-shot*. When he swears, he intends to shock Colossus as the expression is delivered in sudden.

Seventh, swearing can also be deployed when the speaker wants to display his or her identity. Such motive can be seen in Extract (13).

- (13) VANESSA : We can fight this.
 Besides,

I just realized something.
 You win.
 Your life is officially way
 more *fucked up* than
 mine.

WADE : I love you.

(Datum 44)

Vanessa remembers the moment when she argued with Wade at *Sister Margaret's* on whose life was worse. At that time, Vanessa and Wade were just met. Then, as seen in Extract (37), Vanessa admits that Wade wins because his life is worse than hers. In her utterance, Vanessa employs *fuck up* relaxingly to say Wade's life condition which is more spoiled. The employment of such sex-themed swearing indicates Vanessa's way or style of speaking which indirectly displays her profession as a prostitute which is associated with street language.

In contrast to the previous seven motives found in *Deadpool*, Swearing as habit motive is not found in the motion picture. The researcher argues that habit motive is uncovered because the data are limited to swearing per utterance, not per discourse. However, swearing as habit is possible to occur considering that the characters swear frequently, especially the main character.

Similar to habit motive, normality motive do not emerge. The data obtained from the movie suggest that there is no indication that a character swear because he or she is influenced by other members of a group. In other words, there is no indication that a speaker swears because he or she is influenced by others whom swear.

Although not all motives are found in this study, the findings also suggest that there are three new emerging motives such as aversion/distaste, pain, and surprise.

First, Extract (14) indicates that speaker swears because of aversion/distaste motive.

(14) (WADE is on a stretcher.)

WADE : (Narrating) The one that sent you down the road to *shitsburgh*. This, well, this was mine.

(Datum 62)

Deadpool escapes from Colossus by jumping onto a garbage truck. On the truck he says about an event which drags him into an unpleasant

place. The unpleasantness is drawn from the sense of *shit* which is seen as disgusting and smelly to disapprove the place to which he refers.

Third, pain may also trigger someone to swear. Extract (15) demonstrates such internal or reflexive motive generating someone to swear.

(15) DEADPOOL : *Damn it!* Maximum effort!

(He flings the machine with Vanessa inside it out of the way of the platform, as the platform falls down completely.)

(Datum 122)

Deadpool holds a big tube, which is about to fall, but he cannot let it fall because the tube contains Vanessa, his girlfriend. To endure the pain of holding the big cylinder, he swears using a damnation. Although the swear word involves religious term, the meaning of such sacred term is already lost because he does not aim at requesting God to punish the tube. Deadpool swears as pain-enduring strategy in order to hold the tube longer.

Last, Extract (16) indicates that speaker uses swear words because they feel surprised or astonished.

(16) WEASEL : Yeah, how about wheat grass. Excellent for the immune system.

WADE : *Jesus Christ*, you sound like Vanessa. Here, check it out. She's sending away for all these colorful clinic brochures.

(Datum 45)

Weasel tries to show his attention to Wade by giving him healthy drink. Since Weasel's treatment is similar to Vanessa's, Wade cries invoking the name of deity. The invocation occurs because he is astonished that his friend has similarity with his girlfriend. Both of whom are concerned with Wade's health condition which is getting worse and they try to help Wade to cope with his health issue.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

There are six categories of swearing practices in Miller's *Deadpool*, i.e. abusive, cathartic, emphatic, idiomatic, dysphemistic, and

humorous swearing. Each of them are expressed in various forms. Abusive swearing is done by saying an unpleasant term for naming the addressee; cathartic swearing is realized by a short expression articulated in sudden and as a consequence of uncontrollable situation; emphatic swearing is expressed to modify a particular point; idiomatic swearing is a way of saying something peculiarly because the speaker uses an expression which the meaning cannot be interpreted anyway; dysphemistic swearing is done by using coarser sense of an expression which actually can be articulated in terms which possess neutral senses, and humorous swearing is practiced through ridiculing an unpleasant situation.

Corresponding to the second objective, there are seven out of nine factors triggering swearing in the movie such as anger/tension-release, emphasis, part of personality, storytelling, intimacy, vulnerability, and a way to shock. The three motives cannot be found because there is no utterance portraying that swearing is done as the fulfillment of social expectation, overuse of swear word in one single utterance, and the reflection of the entire character's social backgrounds.

Suggestions

After conducting the study, the researcher postulates some suggestions for related parties. First for future researchers, further research on swearing in more specific topic with bigger number of data is suggested for representing the actual use and explaining the complexity of swearing. Due to the big number of data, the researcher suggests that mixed method will be used to get more representative findings to the swearing in the real life and to explain the complexity of swearing better. Furthermore, the researcher also suggests the future researchers to consider the combination of sociolinguistics and discourse of broadcasting for examining swearing with its acceptability in media because sociolinguistics is the most appropriate approach when the linguistic phenomenon is closely related to a culture; however, acceptability of such

practice in media cannot be explained through the perspective of sociolinguistics. Therefore, the future researcher may consider discourse of broadcasting to analyze swearing in media deeper. Second, the researcher suggests general readers to extent their understanding on swearing because it might help them be more aware of using swearing which the usage might harm others, and it might open their mind that swearing is not necessarily bad.

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