Swearing Produced by The Shelby Family in The Series Peaky Blinders

Aptanta Faiz[1], I Made Suastra[2], Made Detriasmita Saientisna[3]
[1,2,3]Udayana University, Indonesia
E-mail: aptantafaiz@gmail.com@gmail.com[1]

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Abstract: *Swearing is the primary notion in this study. There are two objectives of this study, which are to classify the types of swearing in the series and categorize their motive. Swearing, in all its forms, has historically been both revered and reviled. It can serve as a cathartic release of emotion, a vehicle for rebellion against societal norms, or a sharp tool for emphasis. The analysis was conducted based on the theories proposed by Pinker (2007) and Stapleton (2003). Battistela (2005) differentiated swearing into 5 categories; Dysphemistic, Abusive, Idiomatic, Emphatic, Cathartic. Stapleton (2003) formulated the motives of swearing into nine types: story-telling, emphasis, anger/tension release, habit, normality, intimacy, vulnerability, part of personality, a way to shock. The analyzed data taken from a TV series Peaky Blinders. The collected data is analyzed by using the descriptive qualitative method since it did not involve any numerical data. Through the analysis, the use of swearing in a speech is revealed that the background of the character contributes to the family characteristics, in which it can affect their verbal aptitude and attitude, whether they will be good or bad. The Shelby family mostly swear because of the need to release or express their anger caused by the problems that they are facing on a daily basis and it is almost impossible for them to not express their emotions and anger in a form of swearing.*

INTRODUCTION

The history of profanity in society is intricate, as the perception and usage of swear words have changed over time. Swearing comes naturally as our minds and emotions meet, revealing our knack for using words in creative, expressive ways, (Pinker, 2007). Different societies and cultures have different attitudes towards swearing, influenced by social, religious, and cultural factors. Swear words can be used to insult, degrade, or challenge authority figures or social norms. Therefore, the study of swearing in English literature offers an opportunity to not only analyze linguistic choices but also to delve into the intricate relationship between language, power, and identity.

The portrayal of the use of swearing can be examined through western TV series. Examining

how swear words are utilized in Western TV series facilitates an exploration of the kinds and reasons behind the explicit language used by characters, providing a perspective to delve into their emotions, relationships, and societal dynamics. This study attempted to analyze the phenomena of swearing by examining the swearing produced by the Shelby family within "Peaky Blinders," this thesis seeks to offer valuable insights into the intricate relationship between language, culture, and storytelling. "Peaky Blinders" serves not only as a gripping tale of a bygone era but also as a compelling case study of how swearing can be harnessed as a literary and cultural device in the realm of modern television.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Types of Swearing

Pinker (2007) stated that swearing is not limited to individual offensive words but, it also includes expressions and phrases that contain such words and convey strong emotions. In essence, swearing encompasses a wide range of linguistic forms, including single words, complete sentences, or longer expressions. Pinker (2007) further describes that there are five categories of swearing: dysphemistic swearing, abusive swearing, idiomatic swearing, emphatic swearing, and cathartic swearing.

Dysphemistic Swearing allows the speaker to talk about something unpleasant while using a polite expression, forces the interlocutor to think about something negative or demonstrates how unpleasant something is whether in the form of words or phrases. For example, let's fuck! (Pinker, 2007). Let's fuck is a phrase. It consists of two words, "let's" (a contraction of "let us") and "fuck," forming a complete expression. This phrase is colloquial and contains explicit language, often considered vulgar or offensive. Abusive Swearing is directed at the addressee through the use of a phrase or a specific word. For example, fuck yourself! (Pinker, 2007). It is a directive that instructs someone to have sexual relations with themself. This statement is frequently used to express anger, annoyance, or disgust for another person in an assertive and disrespectful manner. It is considered unpleasant in professional situations, but it is commonly used in informal, casual, or heated encounters where harsh language is accepted or expected.

Idiomatic swearing frequently employs idioms which also usually refer to a phrase and whose meaning cannot be understood on its own because this type of swearing employs connotative meaning. For example, fuck up (Pinker, 2007). Fuck up or in this context, to Fuck something up is a phrasal verb in this context that meaning to make a mistake, mess up, or spoil anything. It is a casual and colloquial term used to indicate irritation, disappointment, or annoyance with a situation in which an error or failure has happened. Emphatic swearing allows a speaker to express his or her emotion in an adjectival or adverbial manner using a taboo expression in the form of a word, such as damn, hell, fuck, or shit. Because the term is only used to express an individual emotion, it is not intended to hurt and is not directed at a specific addressee. For example, this is fucking incredible! Pinker (Pinker, 2007).

Last, cathartic swearing is used when something undesirable or out of control occurs. This type of swearing is usually done when someone is in a bad mood and needs to express his strong emotions (e.g. rage or frustration) in the form of both words or phrases. As a result, a taboo expression is used to express a negative emotion. Furthermore, cathartic swearing can be done in front of or without an audience. For instance, shit, damn, and fuck (Pinker, 2007).

Motives of Swearing

According to Stapleton (2003), there are nine forms of motivation for swearing, including storytelling, emphasis, anger/tension release, habit, normality, intimacy/trust, vulnerability, part of

personality, and a way to shock. The first form is story-telling, in which swearing is not necessarily for a negative orientations or negative emotions because people also swear due to a good motive, i.e. to deliver a good story to entertain others (Stapleton, 2003). The second form is emphasis, in which allows swearing to not only be used as a humor, but swearing can also help the speakers to deliver a point to the audience (Stapleton, 2003). The message which is being conveyed is not only delivered, but the message is also intensified by the act of swearing.

The third form is anger/tension-release, in which swearing is viewed as a mechanism for alleviating strong emotions such as anger, tension, or frustration (Stapleton, 2003). For expressing anger for example, fuck off! the speaker swears using the offensive expression to drive someone away because he is angry at the addressee for the addressee's act which is seen as displeasure by the speaker. Another form is habit, Stapleton (2003) states that due to a high frequency of swearing usage, people do not likely notice that they are swearing. Here, swearing is seen as an everyday talking which has become a linguistic behavior. In other words, since swearing has become a custom, its users will be less aware of what they express.

Normality is also another form of motivation for swearing. Stapleton (2003) asserts that everyone swears and it, thus, is normal when someone swears at something or someone else because if he does not, he is considered as not common nowadays. For instance, that men swear in an informal context is normal (Stapleton, 2003). Furthermore, intimacy motivates a person to swear when the swearer is socially close with other (Stapleton, 2003). Swearing is not seen negatively by the addressee, but it is viewed as a method for showing friendliness, intimacy, or solidarity between the swearer and the addressee. For instance, what's up, my fella bitches? As seen in the example, the swearer does not have any intention to abuse her friends by calling them fella bitches; she swears for showing intimacy towards her colleagues.

Vulnerability is mentioned as another form of motivation since people usually swear to articulate their fear or vulnerability. In other words, swearing serves as a linguistic mechanism for expressing extreme fear when people are in a dangerous or unwanted situation (Stapleton, 2003). Moreover, part of personality, according to Stapleton (2003), swearing can show someone's characteristics. Part of personality category displays that swearing has become someone's identity. Lastly, the last form of motivation for swearing is a way to shock. In a polite society, although people know how to swear, they avoid swearing because it can harm someone's public self-image. When people swear then, swearing becomes a powerful way to shock or to gain attention from others (Stapleton, 2003). For instance, someone says, every man is a motherfucker. The illustration shows that someone is trying to shock others by utilizing motherfucker and generalizing the label motherfucker to all men.

RESEARCH METHOD

The data used in this study can be categorized into two types: primary data and secondary data. The primary data refers to the newly obtained data specifically collected from the series "Peaky Blinders" season one. This season comprises six episodes that introduce the viewers to the Shelby family. The choice to analyze season one stems from the fact that it depicts the early development of the story, showcasing the rise of a gangster family in Birmingham. In collecting the data, the documentation and observation methods were used.

The collected data were analyzed using the content analysis method, which involves systematically examining and interpreting qualitative data from written, spoken, or visual materials. In this study, the gathered data from the previous step was classified and categorized. The frequency of each data occurrence was also counted. Finally, the data was interpreted based

on the theories of Pinker (2007) regarding types of swearing and Stapleton (2003) regarding motives behind swearing. During the data presentation phase, each line in the series that contains swearing will be meticulously outlined and categorized according to their respective types, as well as the motives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. Dysphemistic Swearing

Data 1: – Season 1 / Episode 1, (0:04:29 – 0:04:41)
Thomas Shelby: "when the boat leaves your yard, it's no longer your concern."
Uncle Charlie: "have you lost your **fucking** mind?"

Within this conversational exchange, the Shelby family frequently employs the word **fucking** to convey emotional intensity. It is used to emphasize the strength of their feelings, whether it's anger, frustration, or determination. This aligns with the nature of dysphemistic swearing, as it uses strong language to convey strong emotions. The word **fucking** adds a layer of intensity and harshness to their expressions.

The use of **fucking** in dysphemistic swearing is not uniform across all characters. Each character's specific use of this language reveals nuances in their personalities and their reactions to different situations. For instance, Thomas Shelby may use it to assert authority, while other characters may use it to express frustration or aggression. Therefore, the motivation behind swearing in this utterance is anger/tension-release.

b. Abusive Swearing

Data 2: – Season 1 / Episode 1, (0:20:05– 0:20:21)
Arthur Shelby: "Hello, Raz. How's business?"
Raz: "Argh! Ugh!"
John Shelby: "**Fuck you**... Get up!"

"Fuck" is a profanity that is often used to denote sexual intercourse, and when combined with "you," it becomes an offensive and insulting phrase intended to denigrate or offend someone. The phrase **fuck you** is an extremely offensive and vulgar expression used in English. It is considered highly impolite and offensive language and, therefore, may not be included in standard dictionaries such as the Cambridge Dictionary due to its explicit nature. It is generally not regarded as suitable for polite or formal conversation. The speaker intention in this dialogue is clear which is confrontation or emphasizing the intense emotions involved in the situation. Therefore, the motive behind this swearing is Emphasis.

c. Idiomatic Swearing

Data 3: – Season 1 / Episode 1, (0:32:31– 0:33:02)
Polly Shelby: "get up off your arse, you **mumping pig**!"
John Shelby: "Aunt Pol! What the fuck did you do that for?!"

Mumping pig is a unique and idiomatic expression, combining words in a way that isn't immediately clear from the individual meanings of the words. It's used in an idiomatic sense, meaning that its meaning isn't transparent and it's understood as a phrase. The term "mumping" is a slang word in British English that often refers to begging or mooching. "Pig" is a derogatory term used to insult someone by comparing them to a swine. When combined, **mumping pig** creates an insulting and idiosyncratic expression.

Aunt Polly, as a matriarch figure within the family, doesn't employ this phrase with the intent to belittle or abuse John. Rather, it is a reflection of her familial concern and her desire to bring him to a realization about the seriousness of the situation. Aunt Polly's choice of

words serves as a linguistic tool that emphasizes the gravity of the situation while also demonstrating her unique role within the family structure as a source of guidance and authority. Therefore, the motive behind uttering this swearing is anger/tension release.

d. Emphatic Swearing

Data 4: – Season 1 / Episode 1, (0:49:24 – 0:49:43)
Thomas Shelby: "what the **hell**, John?"
John Shelby: "I couldn't get it lit, couldn't even do that."

If **hell** is defined in a literal way, it is believed to be a place where wicked people go after death. However, the word **hell** is often used as an exclamation to convey strong feelings, usually of surprise, exasperation, or astonishment. It's a versatile term for expressing a wide range of emotions. The motivation behind Thomas's use of this language is rooted in his profound sense of vulnerability and disbelief. He finds himself thrust into a situation that he could not have foreseen, and witnessing his own brother resorting to drug use as a means of coping with his problems is a stark departure from their typical family dynamics.

The motivation behind Thomas's use of this language is rooted in his profound sense of vulnerability and disbelief. He finds himself thrust into a situation that he could not have foreseen, and witnessing his own brother resorting to drug use as a means of coping with his problems is a stark departure from their typical family dynamics. Thomas's choice of words acts as a vehicle for him to convey the intense mix of emotions he experiences in this moment — a combination of concern for his brother's well-being and a profound sense of bewilderment at the turn of events.

e. Cathartic Swearing

Ex 5: – Season 1 / Episode 4, (0:53:26– 0:53:44)
Ada Shelby: “Go on, cut him!”
Ada Shelby: “Cut him up and chuck him in the cut.”
Ada shelby: “This is **nonsense**”
Ada Shelby: “Oi! I'm a Shelby too, you know.”

While **nonsense** may not be as explicit or profane as some other swear words, it is still used to express emotional intensity. In the context of the Shelby family, this word is employed to convey frustration, irritation, or exasperation. It serves as an outlet for characters to release pent-up emotions. In this particular situation, Ada Shelby uses **nonsense** to amplify her emotional reactions. This word serves as a milder form of cathartic swearing, allowing characters to express their dissatisfaction without resorting to more explicit language.

Nonsense refers to words, statements, or actions that lack meaning, logic, or rationality. It is often used to describe something that is absurd, foolish, or irrational. To put in the context here, whilst Ada is enjoying her film in the cinema, her brother Thomas came and confront her with some important subject and since they both are Shelby family, the operator of the cinema cut off the film because he is scared, so Ada stated that the situation is nonsense because her film got cut off before it finished. Therefore, the motive behind the swearing is anger/tension release.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the examination of Pinker's theory reveals that each category does not uniformly encompass all the motives outlined by Stapleton. This discrepancy suggests that swearing is not a one-dimensional phenomenon but rather a complex interplay of various linguistic and socio-psychological factors. It is evident that a single instance of swearing may serve multiple

functions, and the motivations behind its usage can vary. This nuanced perspective adds layers of complexity to the understanding of how swearing functions within the Shelby family dynamics. In essence, the same swear word or phrase may be deployed with distinct motivations, highlighting the intricate nature of explicit language within the familial and societal context depicted in "Peaky Blinders."

The most prevalent reasons for swearing in the realm of the Shelby family encompass anger/tension release, emphasis, vulnerability, and the establishment of normality. These motivations contribute to the richness and authenticity of the characters' dialogue, offering a nuanced portrayal of their emotional states and interpersonal dynamics. Hence, the exploration of swearing in "Peaky Blinders" through the lens of Pinker's and Stapleton's theories provides a comprehensive understanding of how explicit language serves as a powerful communicative tool, shaping the nuances of character interactions and reflecting the complexities of the socio-cultural milieu depicted in the series.

As researchers embark on future investigations in this domain, a call is extended for a comprehensive and insightful exploration of the intricacies inherent in the utilization of swearing, not only in television series but within broader linguistic contexts. Future scholars are encouraged to delve deeper into the motives, cultural implications, and sociolinguistic nuances embedded in the diverse forms of swearing to contribute to a more holistic comprehension of language as a communicative and social phenomenon. Moreover, the suggestion to broaden the scope of research to alternative mediums, such as video games or classical songs. While TV series offer a rich tapestry for linguistic analysis, exploring different forms of media provides an opportunity to discern how swearing manifests and functions across various artistic and communicative platforms.

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