

The Use of Strong Language in Peaky Blinders Television Series: A Gender Study

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ABSTRACT

Swearing has become a prevalent aspect of language use in modern society, but it remains taboo for some individuals, particularly women who are expected to conform to traditional gender roles. Men are often perceived as normal when using strong language, while women may face negative reactions for doing so, because in a way that does not apply to males, women who swear may face unfavorable moral as well as negative social judgments. The total of strong language found on Peaky Blinders season 4 episode 1 are 42 sentences which 83,3% of it dominated by men and 16,7% are spoken by women. By employing a qualitative approach, it resulted a conclusion that most swear word dominated by men. Furthermore, the study categorized each sentence into McEnery's (2005) fifteen distinct linguistic forms of swearing, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of the findings based on relevant theoretical frameworks. Understanding the intricacies of strong language use can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of language and gender dynamics.

Keywords: Swearing, Gender, McEnery, Peaky Blinders, Language

INTRODUCTION

Peaky Blinders is a notorious gang in 1919 Birmingham, England which then made into a TV series. It portrays the life of gangster back in 1919 with the strong language that still could be happening to these days because British people do swear often on daily basis. There has been a study in a case of swear words based on a BNC (British National Corpus). McEnery (2005) examines the Spoken BNC1994DS (demographically-sampled component)'s so-called swearing words (BLWs). He uses the term "swearing" generally to refer to a group of bad language words (BLWs), which include the usage of expletives both literally and figuratively (e.g., "SHIT," "FUCK") as well as other terms that may be

objectionable but are not necessarily regarded swear words (e.g., "PIG," "TART"). The most common swear word used often in the BNC is "*fuck*." *Fuck*, which may be used to express pain, pleasure, anger, and even love (Andersson and Trudgill, 1992: 60), they added, perhaps "one of the most interesting and colorful words in the English language today." Swearing has been a part of everyday language use. Although some recent research on swearing in American English (e.g. Jay, 1992), Australian English (e.g. Kidman, 1993), and British English (e.g. McEnery et al., 2000) has addressed the issue, it has not received much attention to yet. Offensive language is a widespread phenomenon but not all swear words are offensive though it sounds like one. Swearing is a well-established field of linguistic study, motivated by the researchers' interest in the "inherent variability and subjectivity" (Beers Fägersten 2012) of the lexicon that has the capacity to insult and abuse, as well as simultaneously amuse and produce humor. Swearing is a part of taboo language or considered vulgar and strong language.

According to Andersson and Trudgill (2007: 195), swearing is the use of language in which the expression is used:

- (a) relates to an offensive or stigmatized topic
- (b) should not be taken literally
- (c) indicates strong feelings or opinions

The expression "not to be interpreted literally" while using swearing is one of Andersson and Trudgill's (2007: 195) criteria. Comparatively, in his cross-linguistic investigation of the "shape, use, and manifestations" of swearing. It was considered taboo, swearing is "forbidden" as a linguistic act and can get you into trouble. Previously, it was frequently penalized criminally or financially (see Smith 1998; Joseph 2006). These days on the other hand, despite changing social mores, society still gives its disapproval towards strong language though many has freedom to utter it regardless their gender. Though it could be changed from the context perspective. According to Janschewitz (2008: 269), cursing may be employed in any emotional state and can be either disrespectful or courteous. Regarding whether swear words are suitable, the specific context and communication circumstance matter a lot. There are several books that have been published in the society regarding the swear words. There would be the words and definition that enlighten people about the meaning of the swear words itself as if the words should be spread and known to the public. Swearing may be used to convey many psychological and emotional states, including amazement, hatred, adoration, disbelief,

irritation, and relief. (Farquharson, Forrester, 2020). Thus, it is not all entirely bad about using strong word on a daily basis.

It is always interesting topic to talk about the difference between men and women, particularly in the language they employ, and culture suggests that males curse more frequently than women. Women portrays the feelings of "Emotional, subjective, tactful, aware of the feelings of others, and as having their feelings easily hurt" are all qualities that describe the women's feelings, according to (Aries, 1996, p. 164). Since many years ago, there has been a prevalent idea that women's vocabulary is more refined and polite—in other words, more ladylike. It is likely a symbol of softness, fragile and sound like women are not able to utter any of strong language at all while men on the other hand, Men have frequently been linked to swearing, as is the case with many other verbal expressions of assertiveness (Coates, 2013; Lati & Brdarevi-eljo, 2018).

There have been many researches which use British people as the subject since it is known for strong use of language. (Gauthier, et al., 2015) examined data from a corpus of around one million tweets from individuals whose age and gender could be determined by using Twitter and text mining method in order to find out about the frequencies of swearing. This research on the other hand, takes a British TV series to enlighten about other side of people in which this was taken from a real story that happened in the past, it could represent the reality that happened during the real moments as well. A phenomenon must be recognized, identified, and evaluated as a phenomenon in order to be seen as an event and understood as such. Only their identification and acknowledgment as reality is certain; their comprehension is not (Figueiredo, Coimbra, 2017).

The concept of reflecting a fantasy and reality is applied here as the British TV series is inspired of a real-life phenomenon. (Figueiredo, Coimbra, 2017) added, any event that exists in our daily reality has to be given meaning: it is imperative in us the need to make any event detected compatible with our own universe – our world and reality notion.

In hope for this research, the result could be taken as the representative that also happened in reality as the TV series itself is a reflection of a real-life phenomenon.

a. The Language of Women

It has long been denied the equality of men and women as it concerns with educational, employment or even language. Women have the symbol that can be interpret as motherly figure who is nurturing and never speak

bad. According to Mugglestone (1995), "speaking properly" came to be connected with being feminine and, more specifically, with being a lady throughout the Victorian era. The following characteristics of women's conversation, according to Lakoff (1975):

- 1) An adequate vocabulary suited to their interests, such as terms for colors like magenta, shirr, dart (used in sewing), etc.
- 2) Adjectives with "empty" meanings, such as divine, precious, gorgeous, or cute.
- 3) Rising intonation and tag inquiries in sentence contexts: What's your name, dear? Smith Mary?
- 4) Employing hedges
- 5) Extensive use of "so"
- 6) Exaggerated grammar: Women shouldn't speak harshly
- 7) Excessive politeness
- 8) Submit additional queries

Clearly based on Lakoff's findings above, swearing is not a part of women's talk. It shown that women have the tendency to use language to create a connection. When in danger, According to Lee and Harley (2012) and Taylor et al. (2006), women most likely acquired the so-called "tend-and-befriend" reflex, which is a less aggressive reaction to stress and danger. According to Tannen (1990), women communicate a language of intimacy and connection, If do women speak strong language, it aims solely for connection which happen these days, youngster especially women call each other with '*bitch*' does not mean they hate each other, sometimes that is how they show a close connection between each other but despite of that, Coates (2004) asserts that women utilize language in a cooperative or pleasant manner which is why there is a term 'ladylike' refers to feminine woman who plays her role perfectly as a woman in the eyes of society. Women who are 'ladylike' or in general tend to have limited words as they are very preserved and limit themselves in choice of words. a study by Jespersen (1922), women frequently use unfinished sentences because they have a smaller vocabulary than males, employ simpler sentence patterns, and are more likely to speak without pausing. Lakoff (1975) made it apparent that she thought men's language was superior to women's because it was more brief, precise, and direct. According to Stapleton's 2003 research of students in Ireland, women who swear may face unfavorable moral assessments in addition to unfavorable social judgments, which may not hold true for males. Considering the study, it means that women tend to constraint

themselves from swearing because of the negative social judgement, they are keeping it themselves.

b. The Language of Men

Society describes men as tough, aggressive even in the use of language, The use of expletives can be a potent tool for establishing and reinforcing group identity for some categories of speakers, particularly for adolescents (de Klerk 1991; Stenström 1995, 2006) and for working-class males (Baruch and Jenkins 2006; Gregory 2006), frequently employ them. Swearing has historically been associated with male speakers because it is associated with both aggression and vernacular/slang (Coates 1993; Klerk 1991, 1997), and they tend to use. The use of expletive language is often avoided by some people due to the labelling of a lower degree of education, which is frequently correlated with poorer socioeconomic categories (Cheshire 1982; S. Hughes 1992; Romaine 1999). Coates claims that "Men are conditioned to have knowledge of how to swear and how to engage in and enjoy the delivery of dirty jokes" (2004:84). Due to social expectations, swearing is more appropriate when it used by men than women because otherwise, it will become a 'bad language' because how women portrayal is so preserved in terms of keeping their words in control.

The conclusions that males controlled the language because they had more sway in political, cultural, and social affairs were reinforced by O'Barr and Atkins (1980), Zimmerman and West (1975), Swacker (1975), Spender (1980), and Hultz (1990). Men were capable of controlling many things because of their strength, particularly the use of language. According to several research on brain biology (Gur et al., 2000; Jordan et al., 2002), the variations between men's and women's responsibilities had an impact on how human brains developed, leading to a bigger orbital frontal cortex in the female brain that controls amygdala-generated rage. Males tend to employ aggressive or forbidden language more frequently than females, which is a linguistic result of this phenomenon (Guvendir, 2015). Men and women can additionally formulate phrases with various semantic objectives in mind. Men tend to be more direct, thus the swear words. For example, if women use a sentence 'does anyone want to get some food?' men will be more likely to ask directly 'let's get some food'. In the research of 96 students from the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades, Mulac, Studley, and Blau (1990) discovered that males were more inclined than girls to express comments (such as, "This idea is Puritanical") in all three age groups. This result a number of men who

swear is higher than woman because they are more direct in expressing their thoughts.

METHOD

For this study, the researcher used qualitative method in analyzing the data. Data for the study were collected from a tv series *Peaky Blinders* season 4 episode 1 which contains a lot of strong language from both men and women. Picking up the strong language in some sentences would be the first thing to do before classifying them into each gender, then categorizing each sentence into McEnery's (2005) fifteen linguistically-distinct forms of swearing before analyzing every utterance of strong language from the series itself, after that categorize them into McEnery's scale of offence where it will be graded based on how strong the language is. The researcher just used 1 episode only as the representative, since it have many seasons and episodes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The total of strong language found on *Peaky Blinders* season 4 episode 1 are 42 sentences which 83,3% of it dominated by men and 16,7% are spoken by women. Women are "judged in accordance based on their gender" and are "stereotyped as cursing less, speaking fewer slang" (Hughes 1992:291). though they are still using strong language on daily basis but with less frequency while on the other hand, there is a belief that men tend to swear more than women (e.g. McEnery 2006:29). It is no doubt that it reflects men in general in terms of using strong language in a conversation no matter how they feel and men have no intention to avoid using it because they are more aggressive than woman. It does not hide the fact of the result that women do swear but it is only found during a crisis where most of them are in trouble. For example, what Polly said during Christmas where she could not find her drug and she almost lose her mind, she stated '**How can I get through *fucking* Christmas**' frustratingly. It shows that when people say *fuck* in speech, it is most likely that they want to show their anger or annoyance (McEnery, 2004). Polly was clearly annoyed because she thought that she could not live without drugs and she wanted to celebrate Christmas with it.

Graphic 3.1 Frequency of strong language by men and women

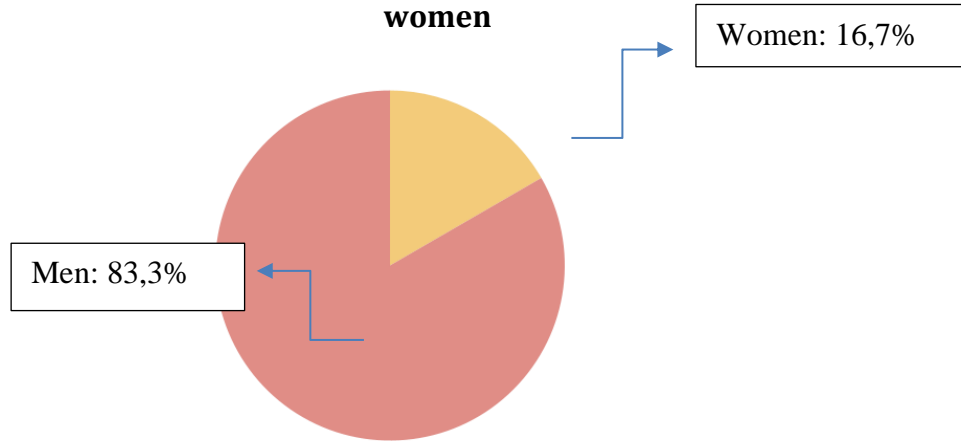


Table 3.1 Forms of swearing

Code	Description	Sentence
PredNeg	Predicative Negative Adjective	
AdvB	Adverbial Booster	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It makes no <i>fucking</i> difference (man) 2. I am emotional. I just don't know what <i>fucking</i> emotion it is (man) 3. Are you his <i>fucking</i> parrot? (woman) 4. So he can sew his <i>fucking</i> balls back on (man) 5. I need to make a <i>fucking</i> call! (man) 6. <i>Fucking</i> no Apothecary, nothing! (woman)

		7. Same <i> fucking union convener (man)</i>
Curse	Cursing Expletive	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get your hands off me, you <i> bastard!</i> (man) 2. <i> Fuck</i> Tommy, that sounded like family advice. (man) 3. <i> Fucking</i> birds (man) 4. Vaffanculo! = Fuck you in <i> Italian</i> (man) 5. He said "<i> Fuck you!</i>" (man)
Dest	Destinational Usage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i> Fucking</i> come here, yeah (man) 2. Yeah, <i> fuck off!</i> (woman) 3. <i> Fuck off!</i> (woman)
EmphAdv	Emphatic Adverb/Adjective	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. She's been on these <i> fucking</i> tablets (man) 2. And stop giving her <i> fucking</i> snow (man) 3. She won't even let me keep a <i> fucking</i> spud gun in the house (man) 4. Christ the <i> fucking</i> night (man) 5. What's gonna happen? It's

		<p><i> fucking </i> Christmas (man)</p> <p>6. And we're the Peaky <i> fucking </i> Blinders (man)</p> <p>7. How can I get through <i> fucking </i> Christmas (woman)</p> <p>8. In the <i> fucking </i> house! (man)</p> <p>9. I just served a black hand, I just got delivered a black <i> fucking </i> hand to the house. (man)</p> <p>10. The Sicilian <i> fucking </i> mafia (man)</p> <p>11. It was <i> fucking </i> Arthur pull the trigger! (man)</p> <p>12. How many came from New York? How many <i> fucking </i> came from New York?! (man)</p>
Figurtv	Figurative extension of literal meaning	
Gen	General Expletive	<p>1. Oh, utter <i> fuck </i> (man)</p> <p>2. Oh <i> fuck </i>, it's you (man)</p> <p>3. Oh <i> fuck </i> Tom! (man)</p> <p>4. <i> Fuck! </i> (woman)</p>
Idiom	Idiomatic 'set phrase'	

Literal	Literal usage denoting taboo referent:	1. <i>Shit</i> and smoke are the same everywhere (man)
Image	Imagery based on literal meaning	
PremNeg	Premodifying intensifying negative adjective	
Pron	'Pronominal' form with undefined referent	
Personal	Personal insult referring to defined entity	
Reclaimed	'Reclaimed' usage—no negative intent,	
Oath	Religious oath used for emphasis	
Unc	Unclassifiable due to insufficient context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How the <i>fuck</i> did the Birmingham racketeer get his hands on a personal letter written by King George? (man) 2. Truth is, they're all <i>fucked</i> (man) 3. How the <i>fuck</i> he knows where I live? (man) 4. Why the <i>hell</i> you didn't bring it up before! (man) 5. What the <i>fuck</i> is this? (Woman)

		<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. What did he <i>fucking</i> say? (man)7. Can you tell me what the <i>fuck</i> is this?! (woman)8. For <i>Fuck's</i> sake (man)9. Holy <i>shit</i>, it's father Christmas (man)10. It's mafia <i>shit</i> (<i>man</i>)
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In the first category of form of swearing which is adverbial booster, found 6 utterances spoken by the characters in Peaky Blinders. The example taken from the findings are, **I am emotional, I just don't know what *fucking* emotion it is**. In the scene, Arthur was confused about his own emotion and want to make it clear that he felt it too, frustratingly emphasizing the unknown of emotion, so is the sentence **Are you his *fucking* parrot?** Show Esme emphasize the parrot as the other speaker keep on repeating the boss' sentence to Esme. This kind of adverbial booster is also folded into empathic intensifier as well because McEnery and Xiao made a decision that both categories provide emphasis. The sentence **so he can sew his *fucking* balls back on** describe an emphasizing of the sentence to be braver as the characters chose to say it in a vulgar way which is a part of swearing.

As stated by Jay (1996), the term "swearing" is frequently used to refer to a variety of objectionable speech types, including name-calling, insulting, profanity, slang, vulgarity, obscene language abuse, slurs, and scatology.

Balls in the sentence refers as euphemism to testicles which categorized as vulgarity when it used as an insult. It is the proof how men cannot control their words by saying vulgar words yet insulting at the same time.

In cursing expletive form, cursing is usually found in utterance as form of anger. In some sentences found in this study are, **Get your hands off me, you *bastard!***, this is taken from the scene where Michael was taken away for execution which is why he said that stuff. It also happened to John when he failed to shoot a bird, he uttered ***Fucking* birds** as he was angry because he can not get the bird. In other example, found a word

Vaffanculo which means *fuck you* in Italian, it is taken from the scene of an Italian got caught by the house owner for trespassing.

Jay (2000: 55-60) considered anger "one of the most likely causes of cursing".

Destinational Usage means the use of this category relate to a destination, whether or not the speaker of taboo words leaves or going to the certain place. In some sentence found in the study **Fucking come here, yeah**. John told his wife to go to his place. **Yeah, fuck off!** Polly told his son to leave the place.

When swearing at home, it indicates that those who use it are in a more informal and comfortable situation because the majority of this destinational use type was stated in a calm way without wrath or impatience (Wang 2013).

General expletive on the other hand used mostly as an expression of anger or frustration. There are quite a lot of findings in Gen which the result of men whom tend to speak the language in more compulsive way even though it has no meaning at all, sometimes the strong language just come out of their mouth without they are noticing. **Oh fuck, it's you. Oh fuck Tom!. Fuck!**. The use of general expletive is more frequent in speech. This suggests that when people say fuck in speech, it is possible that they are trying to express their irritation or rage (McEnery & Xiao, 2004).

In literal type, there is no other meaning than the meaning of the word itself. Example from the data, **Shit and smoke are the same everywhere**. The majority of the forbidden concepts that make up the semantic space that the terms shit and piss entail are ultimately elements of daily life (Andersson and Trudgill 1992: 15, 56-7).

In emphatic adverb/adjective type, the use of fuck function for emphasis is the most important usage in the spoken register and both genders use this category very frequently (McEnery & Xiao, 2004). The word 'fuck' in the sentence '**and we are the Peaky fucking Blinders**' showing they want to show off their gang hence the emphasis. The word '**fuck**' that appeared on the sentence '**How many came from New York? How many fucking came from New York?!**' as the security asked the passenger, not only the repetition of the sentence is the sign of emphasis, it also can be as an alarm signal of potential threat for others, just like any other sign of anger (Vingerhoets et al., 2013.). Swearing at someone is just verbal violence in place of fists, people would likely to start a fight if they swear to stranger in public and most men do that to unleash their inner aggression. In the sentence '**I just served a black hand, I just got delivered a black fucking hand to the house.**' A repetition happened again showing Tommy emphasize the meaning, as a sign of making it clearer. Tommy said it out of anger because somebody sent him an

assassin so then he killed the man out of anger as he was frustrated as well. This finding is in line with the theory of men which given that they believed swearing was considered an indication of masculinity (Benwell, 2001), men tend to use more swear words with other men and fewer swear terms among women (Bayard and Krishnayya, 2001; Coates, 1986). thus, there are a lot of strong language found in Peaky Blinders since it is about gangster life that took a setting in 1919 precisely in Birmingham and it is a real story of what happened back then, so all of the swearing and utterances of strong language were truly happened because there was a lot of interaction between males.

Many findings appeared in this study in a form of unclassifiable due to insufficient context because there is no appropriate form to be classified based on the form of swearing from McEnery. Some show annoyance, some frustration which appeared in a sentence '**Fucking no Apothecary, nothing!**', it shows that she was actually frustrated that the drugs were taken from her, but she let her guard down and showing no aggressive attitude and just swearing instead, The female's lower degree of hostility is a result of adaptation prompted by the significance of her survival. More so than the father, the mother's existence is essential to the survival of kids (Campbell, 1999). The catharsis effect may also be the reason why profanity is often used in place of physical violence.

A decline in the likelihood of obvious, physical hostility can be achieved by expelling annoyance and resentment through cursing (Vingerhoets et al. 2013, p. 293).

Which the result of her to keep on swearing by saying '**fuck**' or '**fuck off**' to project her anger towards other people due to her frustration. It happens to men as well where they project everything to anger because women tend to be more prone than males to perceive swearing in anger as a loss of control and to understand that cursing may harm their connections with others, whereas men are more inclined to curse when irritated or furious (Bird and Harris, 1990).

Major words in the finding are mostly '**fuck**', there are not many other swear words such as '**shit**' or '**bloody**' a classic British swear words. The difference within the gendered usage of every version of "fuck" in the British National Corpus was examined by McEnery and Xiao in 2003. The findings of the research they conducted indicate that men use the term "fuck" and its derivatives twice as often as women do.

Most strong language found in the series are interaction between males because they are less likely swear around females like what happened to John when he talked to Michael about the upcoming gang fight '**She won't even let me keep a fucking spud gun in the house**', he

talked about how his wife does not let him keeping a gun in the house signaling she wanted the house to be a real home like usual home.

The results indicated that the frequency of strong language used by both of genders might not be the same and the meaning behind the strong language itself is very contrast on each other. Men tends to use strong language in a brutal way while women mostly indicate a frustration between their words.

CONCLUSION

The result on strong language found in *Peaky Blinders* is dominated by men, though some women also spoke in strong language but they did not insert swearing in every utterance unlike men whom in every single chance would use strong language to show that they are in charge and make people around them to feel their manliness while women use strong language out of frustration most of the time, if strong language is not needed in a sentence, women probably will not use it. The simplest definition of swearing is the use of terms or phrases that could be harmful, improper, or unacceptable in a certain social setting. However, other emotional states, such surprise or amusement, might result in the use of profanity in conversation.

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