

Profanity In Pulp Fiction

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Abstract

This study used Qualitative Content Analysis research as its design. The purpose of this study are: (1) to find out the types of profanity that are uttered in Pulp Fiction; (2) to find out the purposes of the profanity that are uttered in Pulp Fiction. In analysing the data, the researcher used Creswell and Poth's (2018) qualitative data analysis procedure. The researcher analysed the profanity in Quentin Tarantino's film Pulp Fiction by using Bergen (2016) and Pinker (2007) profanity theory. The result of this study shows that in Pulp Fiction there are four types of profanity, namely religious, sex, bodily function, and discriminative language. As for the purpose, there are four purpose of profanity in Pulp Fiction, namely dysphemistic, emphatic, idiomatic, cathartic, and abusive. Sex profanity are the most used type of profanity, while religious profanity are the least used type. Emphatic purpose is the most used profanity purpose, while idiomatic purpose are the least used purpose. The suggestion from the researcher were students and teachers should learn profanity as the means to understand and expand their knowledge in profanity language so that students who freely use the words would become more responsible when using profanity. For the next researchers, it would be useful if they investigate profanity based on medias that portray more realistic social interaction or even goes far as focusing on real life human interaction in society.

Keywords: Profanity types, Profanity purposes, Profanity meaning, Pulp Fiction Film

1. Introduction

Among all words, there is an expressive word category that widely considered as taboo, or inappropriate when used. Those words are known as profanity. Bergen (2016) stated that Profanity used to referred only to bad religious language (known as blasphemy). But, profanity has developed to the point that it's not just refers to blasphemy, but also many bad words that involves sexual act, bodily function, discriminative language, etc. Profane words are usually used when one's emotion is strong or unstable; when said person is furious or angry. A good example for that is given in Jay & Janschewitz (2008); "You fucking asshole!" (p. 270), but profane words are not only used in bad occasion as some of the words functions is not just related negative context. It can also be used in a stable or good emotion. An example also given by Jay & Janschewitz (2008); "This pie is pretty fucking good!" (p. 270). Profanity exists regardless the fact that they are considered as offensive language. According to Andang, Kristina and Bram, Barli (2018), in countries such as Indonesia, profanity language is not taught. Other than it is considered as taboo or inappropriate, profanity was seen as would not be important for English language teaching and feared because it might bring negative impacts on student's language and behaviour. Andang, Kristina and Bram, Barli (2018), stated that learning the culture of English language is needed to improve English proficiency and to understand more about cultural aspects of the language. He also stated that when teaching rude or impolite language would never mean giving negative influences to the students.

From English Education stand point, by learning English profanity language means having the knowledge and understanding in profanity, students are expected to be more responsible and be more careful with words that they are using and at the same time improve their English proficiency. While it could help the students to maintain their politeness should they engaged in a conversation with native speaker, it could help them to understand more about English Language, because learning a language means learning its culture, no matter if it's positive or negative.

Profanity existed in literatures, songs, films and many more. But the researcher choose film as the object of the research. The film that the writer choose is Pulp Fiction by Quentin Tarantino. The reason why Pulp Fiction Film is chosen as the object of this research because the story revolves around criminal life. Crime genre involves sex, blood, violence, accurate depiction of the life of criminals, cops, gangs and morally questionable characters that use bad languages more freely on their life.

Based on the background study above, the researcher determined the research question as follows:

1. What are the types of profanity that are uttered in Pulp Fiction?
2. What are the purposes of the profanity that are uttered in Pulp Fiction?

2. Literature review

2.1 Profanity

The word profanity originate from Latin language profanes, that has the meaning "outside the temple". There are many terms and definitions arose from different researchers. They are frequently named as "swearwords", "obscene language", "curse word or cussing", "dirty language" and "blasphemy". Mabry (1974) said that profanity is a raunchy language that includes swear words and taboo, which usually when used in daily conversation are considered indecent and in some situations unacceptable, like words that contains sexual references, blasphemy, object that reflect disgust, slurs, vulgar terms, or offensive slang.

When looking at profanity definition above, it's obvious that there are similarities with them; they describe profanity as obscene, offensive, taboo, and vulgar language that shows the speaker's feelings. Thus, profanity can be concluded as "bad languages and that frequently used to convey human emotion"

2.2 Profanity types

According to Bergen (2016), there are four types of profanity. They are bodily function, sex, religious, and discriminative language (section 1, para. 22).

a. Religious

Bergen (2016) reveals that when those holy term sacred meaning is taken away; it could act as profane word by denote the holy or acts that desecrate the holy in the process. Religious term or blasphemy can also be used as curse word, such as for god sake, Jesus Christ, oh my god, and oh lord.

b. Sex

Sex profanity is related to sex and sexual acts. Bergen (2016) stated that acts like fuck, sex organs like cock, person who performs it like cocksucker and motherfucker, and tools related to those acts like dildo are the examples of sex category of profanity.

c. Bodily function

According to Bergen (2016), everything that comes or a part of our body urine or even the process of getting those out of our body shit could be used as profane words. He gave examples of bodily function such as shit, urine, and vomit. Also douchebag,

while not related to bodily part, is also part of bodily function of profanity because it's associated or usually used with female organ.

d. Discriminative language

Discriminative language according to Bergen (2016), are offensive words that denote or belittle people based on groups where they considered belong. Words such as nigger, faggot, and retard are the examples.

2.3 Profanity purposes

According to Pinker (2007), there are five purposes of profanity (p. 219):

a. Dysphemistic

Dysphemistic function as a provocative matter. It encourages the listener to think negative and to act provocatively. It is the opposite of emphatic. For example, "Oh, but to dorks like him!"

b. Emphatic

Emphatic is the opposite of dysphemistic where in emphatic, it is used to give emphasise something using profane word. For example, "Fucking cool!"

c. Idiomatic

Idiomatic is when the word itself does not correlate to the actual matter, where using this word just for the sake of uttering profane words. It is commonly found in circle of friends. For example; "Pain in the ass"

d. Cathartic

Cathartic is when something out of control is happening so suddenly as a spontaneous act. For example, "Oh, shit!"

e. Abusive

Abusive is a when the word itself could create intimidating or belittling effect to other people. For example, "Why don't you go fuck yourself!"

3. Research method

This study belongs to qualitative content analysis research. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is a form of research that begins with assumption and using frameworks that tells the study research problems (p. 44). He added that qualitative research is a research that explore human social problem and the researcher creates an environment where the research is conducted in natural setting. This research is a content analysis because content analysis revolves around forms of human communication like books, newspapers and films in order to identify patterns and themes. In this research case, the goal is to find what types and purposes of profanity that is uttered in the film and finds the meaning behind it. The research used the Pulp Fiction film and the transcript as the source of data.

In order to collect the data, the data collecting process is inspired by Creswell and Poeth (2018) data collection activities considerations, they are obtaining data source, collecting data, record the information, minimalizing field issues, and store the data securely (p. 213). The researcher took several steps. The first one was obtaining the film and the transcript from various sources. Then, the researcher collected the data by watching the film and reading the transcript. The researcher carefully recorded and choose the data that was analysed using related theory. When the data was founded, the data was categorised based in their types and purposes. After all the data has been collected, the researcher kept the data to make sure that the data secure.

To analyse the collected data, the researcher use profanity classification by Bergen (2016). According to him there are four types of profanity, they are bodily function, sex,

religious, and discriminative language or slurs (section 1, para. 22). While to determine the purpose, a theory by Pinker (2007) is preferred, which the purpose of profane words is dysphemistic, emphatic, idiomatic, cathartic, and abusive (p. 219). Data analysis involved the identification of profanity types and purposes uttered by the characters of the film. The researcher then made lists of profanity based on their respective places.

4. Findings and discussion

This section is divided into two sub-sections: profanity types and profanity purposes.

4.1 Profanity types

The researcher collected the data from the conversation that take place in the film. The researcher found out that there are 480 Profanity words found in the film.

Table 1
Profanity Types

No.	Types	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
1	Religious	39	8%
2	Sex	278	58%
3	Bodily Function	122	25%
4	Discriminative Language	41	9%
	Total	480	100%

As seen from the table above, Sex is the most frequently used profanity in the film with total of 278 counts (58%), more than half of the profanity that are present in the film. Bodily Function is the second used with total of 122 counts (25%). The third place is owned by Discriminative Language with total of 41 counts (9%). And lastly, the least used profanity is Religious with a measly 39 counts (8%).

a. Religious

According to Bergen (2016), the main characteristic of religious profanity is the use of holy words in a secular way, it denotes the words and insulting the holy words or known as blasphemy. Using holy words like Jesus, Christ, God, damn, without meaning to use the original sacred context, the religious context is stripped and the said words can act as profane words.

(1) "I don't remember askin' you a Goddamned thing!"

(No.65/0:17:29)

The line above contains a religious profanity type. The reason for that is because the speaker utters the word Goddamned which refers to holy creator himself. This line was spoken by one of the main characters Jules Winfield, when he interrogates a person who betray his boss by stealing his boss's briefcase. Instead of the traitor answering the question, his other friend answers the question instead, which makes Jules very angry and therefore the line above is spoken.

As explained from before, the original sacred or holy contexts are completely abandoned and given a new purpose. In the example above, Goddamned is used to show that the person who uttered the word is really angry, instead the original meaning "cursed by the God".

b. Sex

According to Bergen (2016), sex profanity refers to words or expression that contains language relating to the sexual action (fucking), the organs involved in sexual act (Pussy, dick), the person who perform sexual act (Motherfucker, cocksucker), and

objects that are related to sex (dildo). Using sexual profanity is considered inappropriate or taboo because of the vulgarity that the words have.

(1) “Fuck you, Lance! Answer!”
(No.145/0:55:32)

In the line above, the sex profane word fuck was produced as a result of angry emotion and used as an insult. The line was produced by Vincent Vega who accidentally overdose his boss’s wife with heavy drugs. He intended to bring the wife to his friend named Lance, whom he bought the drugs from. Lance didn’t answer the phone and the panicked Vincent swears violently to Lance by saying the line above.

The example above contains profanity words originate from sex. The reason for that is because the word fuck relates to sexual activity. By saying “fuck you”, Vincent is saying that he is very upset with his friend because he didn’t pick up the phone while he is in grave situation.

c. Bodily function

Bergen (2016) said that profane words can originate from body parts or something inside our bodies, like ass, shit, douchebag, and so on. Using these word can be considered as inappropriate because of the tabooess the words have and thus became profane words.

(1) “I mean, they got the same shit over there they got here”
(No.24/0:07:54)

The line above was spoken by Vincent to Jules. Vincent tells his experience traveling to Europe. He told Jules that Europe have the same things as what they got here in USA but just feels different. He points out that in Amsterdam, he can buy a big glass of beer in movie theatre, in Paris he can buy a beer in McDonalds, and because the Europe uses metric system, a Quarter Pounder burger is called “Royal with Cheese”.

In the example above, the line contains the word shit that relates bodily function profanity because it belongs to body excrement. Using this kind of words are considered as bad or taboo because the implication by uttering them implied something disgusting, poor, or bad, hence become inappropriate to say.

d. Discriminative language

Bergen (2016) states that the last profanity word category is discriminative language, or also known as slurs. These words are one of the most offensive and denote or belittle people based on groups where they considered belong. Discriminative language can be originatin from a person or peoples group that they are perceived as belonging to, like sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, and many more. Bitch, faggot, nigger, and kike are some of the examples of discriminative language.

(1) “..... nigger, what the fuck you just do to his towel, man?”
(No.102/0:25:56)

The line above was spoken by Jules to Vincent. The context behind this line is Jules became angry when he saw Vincent ruining his friend’s towel by staining it with Vincent’s blood, raising the chance of them getting caught by his friend’s wife. Jules said the word nigger as a response to his surprise.

The line above contains profanity words that belongs to discriminative language. Nigger, which is a derogatory term for black people and widely regarded as offensive word.

4.2 Profanity purpose

The second research question of this research is finding the purpose of the profanity that are present in Pulp Fiction film. In this research, the researcher classifies the profanity

purpose using Pinker (2007) classification. According to Pinker (2007), there are five purposes of swearing; Dysphemistic, Idiomatic, Emphatic, Cathartic, and Abusive.

Table 2
 Profanity Purposes

No.	Purposes	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
1	Dysphemistic	116	24%
2	Emphatic	212	44%
3	Idiomatic	49	10%
4	Cathartic	51	11%
5	Abusive	52	11%
	Total	480	100%

As seen from figure above, the researcher found that there are five purpose of swearing according to Pinker (2007), that are used in the whole film. Emphatic purpose takes the number one spot as the most used purpose, with the total of 212 counts (44%). Dysphemistic Purpose is the second most used purpose with 116 counts (24%). Taking the third spot is occupied by Abusive Purpose with 52 counts (11%), followed by Cathartic Purpose with total of 51 counts (11%) and Idiomatic Purpose with the total of 49 counts (10%).

a. Dysphemistic

According to Pinker (2007), Dysphemistic function as a provocative matter. It encourages the listener to think negative and to act provocatively. This is usually done by changing a word into informal or taboo words.

- (1) "I mean, is it as bad as eatin' her pussy out?"
 (No.37/0:11:33)

The line was spoken by Vincent to Jules, who previously said to Vincent that there was a person who give Marsellus Wallace's wife a foot massage. Because of that, the person then was thrown by Marsellus men from a four story building and landed on a glass house but miraculously survive. Jules then continued and said "a foot massage is nothing, I gave my mom a foot massage". Jules and Vincent is debating whether giving a foot massage is at the same level of indecency with eating one's pussy. Vincent then replied with the line above which means "is giving a foot massage is as bad as eating with her vagina out?".

The line above contains dysphemistic purpose. The reason for that is because Vincent utters the word pussy, which is a dysphemism word for women's sexual organ or vagina. Vincent here could say vagina, but instead use the word pussy which has the same meaning but the latter impression is more negative.

b. Emphatic

According to Pinker (2007), Emphatic is used to give emphasise something using profane word. This is usually done by adding a profanity before or after a word.

- (1) "Well look at this fuckin' mess! We're on a city street in a broad daylight here!"
 (No.301:56:28)

The line was produced by Jules to Vincent, who accidently shot their friend to death who sit in the back seat of their car. Flesh and bodily fluid are scattered everywhere and there is a hot debate between Jules and Vincent. One of the things that Jules says to Vincent is that line. The line above contains emphatic purpose. The reason for that is because the word fucking is not referring to the actual act of having sex, and instead trying to tell the listener that it is "very messy".

Looking back at the example above, the word fucking does not refer to actual act of having sex. Instead, it acts as an intensifier to words that they are attached to. The word fucking acts as an intensifier for the word mess. Jules said the word fucking because he tried to emphasise that this mess is “more than usual mess” or “very messy”.

c. Idiomatic

According to Pinker (2007), Idiomatic does not refer to actual matter, as idiomatic type purposes are used just to gain attention and to show the listener that the setting that this conversation takes place is informal. This type of purpose usually not used as an insult or attack other people, and the meaning doesn't make any sense if translated literally.

(1) “Quit fucking around and give her the shot!”
(No.181/0:58:56)

The line above was spoken by Lance to Vincent. The context of this line is Vincent brought his boss's wife to Lance's house because she's dying of overdose. Lance tried to help by looking for adrenaline shot and ask Vincent to administer the syringe right away, but Vincent is terrified that he might kill her and Lance quickly replied with the line above.

The word fucking may belong to dysphemistic purpose, but in the line above, the context behind the word is that the speaker didn't try to make the listener to think badly about something, and more like act as a set up for informal setting conversation because both the speaker and the listener are close friend.

d. Cathartic

According to Pinker (2007), cathartic is used when something out of control is happening so suddenly, and act as a strong emotion expression. Cathartic also give the speaker short term psychological relief.

(1) “Jesus fucking Christ”
(No.136-138/0:54:37-0:54:38)

The line above was spoken by Vincent to himself. The context behind this line is that after He take out his boss's wife to a dinner, he brought her to her home. Before he can go, he finds out that she is overdosing from drugs that he bought at the same day from Lance. Vincent then says Jesus fucking Christ when he saw her almost lifeless body lying on the floor.

The profane words above belonged to cathartic purpose because Vincent use those words not to refer to anyone, as they are used as emotional expression and stress relief by Vincent.

e. Abusive

Pinker (2007) states that abusive purpose is used when the word itself could create intimidating or belittling effect to other people.

(1) “Ha-ha-ha. They are your clothes, motherfucker”
(No.395/02:10:57)

In this line, the abusive profanity motherfucker was produced as an insult. The line was uttered by Jules when he was cleaned from bloodstain which he got when Vincent accidentally shot their friend in the car. Jules then seeks help to a friend named Jimmy, whom gave his clothes to Jules and Vincent. The clothes however are a bit dorky, and they are mocked as a result. Jules then replied the mock by saying the line, telling Jimmy in an ironic and personal insult way that the clothes they are wearing are his.

5. Conclusion and suggestion

5.1 Conclusion

Results showed that there are various types of profanity in Pulp Fiction. All of the four profanity types from Bergen's (2016), namely Religious, Sex, Bodily Function, and Discriminative Language were found in the film. Religious is characterised by words that originate from holy term. Sex profanity are related to sexual term. Bodily Function originates from body parts or things inside body. Discriminative Language are known as slur. The researcher found 278 profanities belonged to Sex, 122 profanities belonged to Bodily Function, 41 profanities belonged to Discriminative Language, and 39 profanities belonged to Religious. From the findings it can be concluded that characters in Pulp Fiction consciously uttered Sex related profanity the most as their primary choice of profanity, while Religious profanity are the least used profanity type.

As for the purposes, all the purpose of profanity that was proposed by Pinker (2007) are used in the film, namely Dysphemistic, Emphatic, Idiomatic, Cathartic, and Abusive. Dysphemistic are used to provoke the listener to think badly, Emphatic are used to give emphasis, Idiomatic are used to show informality, Cathartic are used as spontaneous act, and Abusive are used to intimidate the listener. Emphatic are the most used profanity in the film with 212 counts. This might due the fact that the film revolves around hard criminal life, they use profanity to give emphasise or strengthen their word. Dysphemistic saw 116 counts, followed by Abusive with 52 counts, Cathartic with 51 counts, and Idiomatic with 49 counts. Thus, it can be concluded that Emphatic are the most used profanity purpose, while idiomatic are the least used profanity purpose. Profanity word also does not tie exclusively to one purposes, as they can be used on different purposes that verily depends on the context of the word.

5.2 Suggestion

The researcher realised and admitted that this research is far from perfect. Therefore, the researcher wants to give suggestion regarding the conclusion above, which are:

a. For students and teachers of English Language Study

Despite having negative connotation, profanity is like language that they cannot be separated from our life. The findings above show that profanity word could have different purposes and meaning depending on the context they were uttered. This study hopefully became beneficial for students and teacher to understand about profanity and expanding their knowledge in profanity language. The researcher believes that by learning and understanding profanity could be beneficial so that students who freely use the words would become more cautious and responsible when using those words while at the same time improve their knowledge about profanity.

b. For future researcher

This research focuses on determining the types of profanity and the purposes of profanity in Pulp Fiction film, which is an extensive research. The researcher suggests that the future researchers who are interested in the same topic to conduct researches based on medias that portray realistic social interaction. Future researcher also can go further by focusing on real life human interaction in society using phenomenology or case study qualitative research.

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