

Taboo Words in the TV Series *Stranger Things*

Theresia Ria Anjani Kurniawati*, Tofan Dwi Hardjanto
English Department, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

*Email: theresia.ria.a@mail.ugm.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study investigates taboo words produced by teenagers in the TV series entitled *Stranger Things* Season 2. It classifies taboo words into five referents, that is, mental, physical, religious, scatological, and sexual terms, and also categorizes them based on their functions. The data were taken from the subtitles of this TV series. The results show that the most frequently used taboo words are related to scatological terms with 55 (43%) occurrences. However, the teenage characters in the TV series rarely uttered taboo words which refer to mental and physical terms. Taboo words in the TV series were used for two main purposes, swearing and insulting. Swearing serves as a means to only relieve emotions, while insults are uttered to verbally attack the interlocutors. The findings suggest that the teenage characters use taboo words mostly for expressing their emotions rather than causing harm on their interlocutors.

Keywords: *appropriate language; insult; swearing; taboo words; TV program.*

INTRODUCTION

The use of taboo words is not limited to specific age range (Jay, 2009). According to Jay (1992) and Thelwall (2008) teenage years are the peak stage where they use taboo words to express their anger or unpleasant feelings.

Kaye and Sapolsky (2009) stated that approximately 85% of the US households subscribing to cable television are exposed to harsh dialogues which may not be suitable for younger viewers. Therefore, this research analyzes the use of taboo words in one of the shows on cable television, *Stranger Things* Season 2. It is chosen because the characters are dominated by teenagers, which are in the peak stage where they use taboo words to relieve their emotions.

The varieties of taboo words are interesting to study because they may differ from culture to culture. This research deals with the use of taboo words by teenagers in the U.S. culture, because the TV series is produced in the U.S. Although the

study belongs to fictional discourse, in which the results of the research cannot be considered as equal from the actual practice, it gives a glimpse of how U.S. teenagers behave in terms of the use of taboo words.

This research aims to investigate the varieties of taboo words used by the teenage characters in the TV series and the reason why they uttered those taboo words. It addresses the following two research questions:

1. What taboo words are used in the series?
2. What functions do the taboo words in the TV series serve?

LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been various studies related to the use of taboo words in reality and media, like television and social networks. Thelwall (2008) examines gender swearing in U.K. and U.S. and its occurrences in MySpace pages. The research analyzes if there is any

gender difference in the proportion of male and female MySpace profiles which contained strong swear words. Thelwall (2008) gathers a corpus of MySpace home pages, and then check for the occurrences of a set known and common strong and moderate swear words and then compare it with the user's gender, age, and nationality. The results show that male MySpaces users had slightly higher proportion of swearwords than female MySpaces users, both in the U.K. and U.S.

Kaye and Sapolsky (2009) investigate offensive language on prime-time broadcast and cable programming. The data were collected from all U.S. broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC, PAX, UPN, WB) and the seven high-rated cable networks (Lifetime, MTV, Nick AtNite, SciFi, Spike, TNT, USA) in 2005. They classified the offensive language based on the "seven dirty words", sexual words, excretory words, mild-other words, and strong-other words. The results show that 9 out of 10 programs contained at least one profanity, and the viewers are exposed to 12.58 cuss words per hour in 2005. There are more mild-other words with 53.4% of all offensive words found than any other words. The most rarely used offensive words are sexual words (8.1%).

Oliver (2011) examines the act of swearing among students from preschool until lower secondary education in EFL/ESL classrooms in Iceland. She also investigates teacher's approach in handling swearing. The data were collected through observation in the classrooms and interviewing the EFL teacher. The results show that swearing happens at all educational levels being investigated, except in preschool. Most of the taboo words are used among themselves, but there were some occasions at the secondary level when a student calls the teacher *bitch*. The word *fuck* is the most uttered by the students. There are various reactions from the teachers found in the observations. Some were ignorant and others were being hyper-sensitive about this. The behaviors are based on their background, culture, values, beliefs, religion, style of teaching, and moods.

Gao (2013) investigates all the major varieties of English taboo words, such as bodily excretions, death and disease, sex, four-letter words, privacy and discriminatory language, income, salary, age of

ladies, and so on. She compares the English taboos with Chinese taboos. She also explains that euphemisms are introduced to relieve the harshness of taboo words. The result of the study shows that the English-speaking countries share the same point of view about the taboo subjects mentioned before, but some of those are openly talked about in China. Each social group has different way to use taboo words.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The word taboo means "a social or religious custom prohibiting or restricting a particular practice or forbidding association with a particular person, place, or thing" (Taboo, n.d.). Hence, a taboo word is a restricted word resulting from social or religious prohibition. Jay (2009) defines a taboo word as a word which is restricted in both individual and institutional level. Taboo words are prohibited because they are expected to cause some harm if they are spoken.

The prohibition arises from the powerful institutions, such as courts of law, religion, educator, and mass media, which have ultimate authority to restrict speech and are capable of functioning as a controller of harmful speech. However, at the individual level, the use of taboo words is prohibited by caregivers.

Azzaro (2005, p. 2) suggests that taboo words refer to semantic, social, and psychological areas of meaning connected to cultural taboos proposed by Jay (1992, 2000). Cultural taboos mean that the idea of taboo areas varies from society to society. However, the most frequent areas of cultural taboos refer to religion, (im)morality, scatological functions, physical features, sex, and illness.

Based on those ideas above, Azzaro (2005) classifies taboo words semantically into five classes: mental, physical, religious, scatological, and sexual terms. She does not explain each of the terms in detail. However, she gives various examples of each term to define them. Based on the examples given, each term can be explained below:

1. Mental term: This term is related to the illness of someone's mind or mental retardation, such as *idiot*, *stupid*, and *fool*.
2. Physical term: It is related to the genital part of human or animal body and physical illness, like *ass*, *dick*, *tits*, and *nasty-ass-rash*.
3. Religious term: The words are used to refer to certain religion or belief, like *God*, *Jesus*, and *damn*.
4. Scatological term: The speaker uses a word which refers to excretion process and products of a human or animal, like *shit* and *piss*.
5. Sexual term: The words are related to intimate physical contact between individual and it is also related to gender or sexes, for example *fuck*, *bitch*, and *jerk*.

Azzaro (2005) classifies taboo language in a simpler way than folk taxonomy by Andersson and Hirsch (1985). Azzaro (2005) categorizes taboo words based on their functions, such as swearing and insult.

Swearing is uttered as a tool to generate the emotion of anger, frustration, surprise, and fear from particular situations. Swearing is not always intended to attack deity or fate. It covers several terms which can be used to swear. Thus, Azzaro (2005) applies three of the five terms mentioned above, such as religious swearing (profanity and blasphemy), scatological swearing, and sexual swearing. However, this research will add mental and physical swearing into consideration to see whether those two terms occur in swearing or not.

On the other hand, insult is a more negative act than swearing because insult often causes harm to the hearer. Contrary to swearing, insult is used to express the speaker's frustration, annoyance, and anger to the hearer. Therefore, insult always has a specific target when it is uttered (Azzaro, 2005, p. 3). He applies four out of five terms in insults, that is, mental insult, physical insult, scatological insult, and sexual insult. However, religious terms are also added into insult to see the occurrences in the TV series.

METHODS

The data of this research were utterances containing taboo words produced by teenage characters in the TV series *Stranger Things* Season 2 (Duffer & Duffer, 2016). The data of this research were taken from the dialogues of the TV series. The subtitles of the second season were chosen as the main data source.

The TV series is comprised of nine episodes. The table below lists the running time of each episode.

Table 1. The running time of each episode of the series

Episode	Running time
1	47 minutes
2	55 minutes
3	50 minutes
4	46 minutes
5	57 minutes
6	51 minutes
7	45 minutes
8	47 minutes
9	62 minutes
Total	460 minutes

Table 1 shows the total length of the whole TV series is 460 minutes. This total length is used to count the density of taboo words which are uttered by the teenage characters in the TV series.

In order to collect the data, an observation was conducted by watching the series to identify the taboo words and their use in context to understand their functions. This research adopts Azzaro's (2005) classification of taboo words according to their referents. Taboo words are accordingly classified into five different classes, that is, mental, physical, religious, scatological, and sexual terms.

Azzaro (2005) argues that according to their functions, taboo words can be categorized into two categories, that is, swearing and insult. Swearing responds to emotion of anger or frustration of the speaker from a particular situation. The speaker

does not attack particular person when the taboo word is uttered.

On the other hand, insult is directed toward specific addressees and responds to emotional reactions both from the speaker and the hearer (Azzaro, 2005). Therefore, insults are often used in a situation where two or more people are having conversation.

After all the data were collected, they were categorized according to their referents based on Azzaro (2005). Afterwards, they were classified into two types of taboo words based on the function, swearing or insults (Azzaro, 2005). To make the analysis easier, each data was coded according to:

1. The time stamp when the dialogue occurred.
2. The abbreviation of the episode number, E01 for Episode 1, E02 for Episode 2, and so on.
3. The abbreviation of the two types of taboo words, S for swearing and I for insults.
4. The referents of the taboo words found in the series: 1 for *religious terms*, 1A for *profanity*, 1B for *blasphemy*, 2 for *sexual terms*, 3 for *scatological terms*, 4 for *mental terms*, 5 for *physical terms*.
5. The number of occurrence of each type of taboo words.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Referents of Taboo Words

In this research, overall 128 taboo words were found from the total duration of the nine episodes, i.e., 460 minutes. This means that on average one taboo word was used every 3.6 minutes in the TV series. This suggests that taboo words seem to be highly frequent in the utterances of the teenage characters in the series.

As mentioned previously, the taboo words found in the TV series were categorized semantically according to their referents. Table 2 below shows the frequency and distribution of the taboo words in the TV series *Stranger Things* Season 2. The most common taboo words used by the

teenage characters in the TV series belong to scatological terms with 55 (43.0%) occurrences. The second frequently used taboo words are religious terms with 43 (33.6%) occurrences, then, it is followed by sexual terms with 12 (9.4%) occurrences. The rarely used terms in the TV series are mental and physical terms with 9 (7.0%) occurrences. It shows that there is a large difference of numbers between the most used and the least used taboo words. Each class of the taboo words is discussed in detail below.

Table 2. The frequency and distribution of taboo words in the TV series

No.	Referents	Number	%
1.	Mental Terms	9	7.0
2.	Physical Terms	9	7.0
3.	Religious Terms	43	33.6
4.	Scatological Terms	55	43.0
5.	Sexual Terms	12	9.4
Total		128	100.0

Mental Terms

Mental terms are related to mental retardation and the lack of intelligence. Hughes (2006) states that these terms are the richest source of words which are used for personal insult and abuse. However, the terms are also used to attack someone's intelligence. The words found in the series are *stupid* with 6 occurrences, *idiot* with 2 occurrences, and *sucker* with 1 occurrence. These terms are the least used term in the series with just 9 (7.0%) occurrences. One of them is shown below:

(1) 00:38:34,770 - 000:38:43,279(E02.I4.6)

Context: *Mike, Lucas, Dustin, Will, and Max go to Loch Nora area, where rich people live. Dustin says that rich people are easy to fool, so they give them so many candies.*

Dustin: Another full-size. Like, seriously, rich people are such **suckers**. Wait. You're not rich, right?

Max: No, I live up Old Cherry Road.

The speaker uses the word *sucker* to insult the rich people in his neighborhood. *Sucker*, according

to *Lexico* online dictionary, has an informal meaning, which is “a gullible or easily deceived person” (Sucker, n.d.) to do something. This shows that the rich people in Dustin’s neighborhood are easily tricked to give a lot of candies to the kids.

Physical Terms

These terms use words or phrases which refer to parts of human and animal body and their physical illness. The terms are also related to the human and animal genitals. The words which appear in the series are *asshole* with 5 occurrences, *ass* with 2 occurrences, and *dickhead* and *shithole*, each of which only occurs only once. These words and the derivations are uttered 9 (7.0%) times by the teenagers. Below is an example illustrating the use of a physical term:

(2) 00:26:14,030 - 00:26:18,827(E04.I5.13)

Context: *Jonathan and Nancy are caught by lab agents. They are locked in one room and not allowed to get out. Therefore, Nancy shouts angrily at the CCTV, asking to be released.*

Nancy: Hey! Hey, **assholes!** Let us out of here!

The word *asshole* is “a person’s anus” (Asshole, n.d.), part of the body where solid waste matter leaves the body. It is considered as offensive if the word is used to put down or name-call somebody. It is the informal version of the word “buttocks.” Another word which has the same meaning but is considered offensive is *shithole*, which was also found in one of the dialogues in the series.

Religious Terms

Religious terms are related to religious associations. The speaker uses the words which refer to belief, the afterlife, and the creator of the world, such as *God*, *Hell*, *Christ* (for Christians). Furthermore, Jay (1992) distinguishes two kinds of religious taboo, that is, profanity and blasphemy. Profanity is the form of religious taboo used like the words mentioned above without being concerned about the actual religious purpose of those words. On the other hand, blasphemy is a conscious and stronger attack on religious respect. All 43 (33.6%) occurrences which the speakers use in the series

belong to profanity. The speakers use words like *God* which occurs 16 times, *Jesus* occurs 13 times, *Hell* occurs 12 times, and *Damn*, as well as *Christ*, which occur only once. They use those words not to underrate the religious aspect of it. Here is an example of the use of religious terms in the dialogue:

(3) 00:06:52,495 - 00:06:54,956(E01.S1A.5)

Context: *Mike, Lucas, Will, and Dustin go to Hawkins arcade. Dustin is playing one of the arcade game called Dragon’s Lair. He should get the magic sword to slay the dragon, which he has never been doing before. Hence, he feels nervous.*

Dustin: Oh, **Jesus!** I’m in uncharted territory here, guys.

The word *Jesus* is used to refer to the creator of the world for Christians. Nonetheless, Dustin does not utter the word to attack Christ who is believed to create this world or the Christian community.

Scatological Terms

Scatological terms have to do with the activity of excrement and excretion functions of an entity. Scatological term is the most used term in the series with 55 occurrences (43.0%). In this TV series there is only one word related to this term, that is, *shit* with 40 occurrences. The word comes with various kind of phrases, such as *holy shit* with 8 occurrences, *bullshit* with 6 occurrences, *shithead* with 2 occurrences, and *dipshit*, as well as *jack shit*, *shitting*, *shitbird*, and *shitty*, each of which occurs only once.

According to Jay (1992, p. 9), scatological terms are “among the early words that children hear and use when they are toilet trained.” They learn the word *poo*, and then develop it to the more offensive word like *shit*. This is part of the reason why these terms are often used by the teenagers in *Stranger Things* Season 2. Here is an example from a conversation in the series:

(4) 0:09:07,338 - 00:09:24,397(E08.I3.24)

Context: *Lucas and Dustin have another fight because Lucas finds out that Dustin was keeping Dart, a creature which Dustin found in his trash can, in his house when they failed at searching for it*

in the school. Lucas does not accept any reasons on why Dustin kept Dart in his house.

Lucas I knew it! You kept him!

Dustin: No! No. No, I... No, I... He missed me. He wanted to come home.

Lucas: **Bullshit!**

Dustin: I didn't know he was a Demogorgon, okay?

Lucas: Oh, so now you admit it?

Steve: Guys, who cares? We have to go.

Lucas: I care! You put the party in jeopardy! You broke the rule of law!

Above is one example of the derived form of *shit*. The word itself means “faeces” (Shit, n.d.), waste matter remaining after food has been digested or discharge from the bowels. The word is used to show that the speaker is angry or annoyed. In the example above, the speaker is angry at the hearer because he makes a made up reason to avoid being accused of his wrongdoing.

Sexual Terms

These terms are associated with copulation or intimate physical contact between individuals. According to Hughes (2006), historically, English words which are related to copulation are regarded as highly taboo. Therefore, the use of the words in public are still considered unacceptable and highly controversial among all speech communities. In the series, the speakers use the word *bitch* 9 times, and *bastard* along with *screw* and *jerk* only once, to express their anger and annoyance. There are 12 (9.4%) occurrences of sexual terms in the TV series. One example of the use of sexual terms is shown below:

(5) 00:34:55,134 - 00:35:11,567(E05.I2.17)

Context: *Dustin is looking for Nancy because Mike is not at home. Like Mike, Nancy is also not at home and stays overnight at her friend’s house. Mr. Wheeler, Mike and Nancy’s father, is joking that his children are not living in their house anymore, which make Dustin annoyed because he is in a hurry and Mr. Wheeler is not helping at all.*

Dustin: Nancy. What about Nancy?

Mr. Wheeler: Karen, where's Nancy?

Mrs. Wheeler: Ally's!

Mr. Wheeler: Ally's. Our children don't live here anymore. You didn't know that?

Dustin: Seriously?

Mr. Wheeler: Am I done here?

Dustin: **Son of a bitch.** You know you're really no help at all, you know that?

Mr. Wheeler: Hey! Language.

The word *bitch* means a female dog, but it is experiencing meaning degradation which is a promiscuous or sensual woman, “a metaphorical extension of the behavior of a bitch in heat” (Hughes, 2006, p. 24). It refers to the gender characteristic of a female whose behavior likes to have a sexual intercourse with different people in a short period of time. It is offensive when the speaker uses it whether to insult or just to release tension. In the dialogue above, Dustin, as the speaker, says *son of a bitch* which is addressed to Mr. Wheeler to release his anger at him. He verbally assaults him by saying that he is in the position as a child of a promiscuous woman.

The Functions of Taboo Words

Taboo words used in the series were analyzed pragmatically in order to classify them based on their primary functions. There are two primary functions according to Azzaro (2005) which are swearing and insults. The frequency and the distribution of the functions of taboo words found in the series are shown in the table below:

Table 3. The frequency and distribution of the functions of taboo words in the series

No.	Function	Number	%
1	Swearing	91	71
2	Insults	37	29
Total		128	100

Table 3 shows the two types of the primary functions of taboo words. The table also reveals that taboo words were more commonly used for swearing by the teenage characters in the series with 91 (71%) occurrences than for insult (29%).

Swearing

Swearing is an expression in which the speaker uses taboo words to show their emotion of anger or frustration. It is not used to attack someone verbally. Its function is limited to generate the emotions of the speaker. The words used in swearing are not limited to a certain religious terms.

From 128 occurrences, 43 (33.6%) swearing are related to religious terms. The second most frequently used in swearing is scatological swearing; it contributes 40 (31.3%) occurrences. Then, it is followed by sexual terms with 5 (3.9%) occurrences, and mental terms with 2 (1.6%) occurrences. Physical terms are rarely used in swearing. They occur just once (0.8%) in the series. Here is an example of the most used swearing:

According to Azzaro (2005), swearing is a way to express emotional feeling of the speaker, whether it is anger, frustration, annoyance, surprise, fear and another emotion, mainly the negative emotion like anger and frustration, which is needed to be expressed using taboo words. Taboo words help the speaker to convey these certain emotions accurately than the non-taboo words do. There are some characteristics which define the act of swearing:

- a) Swearing often does not require an answer or non-reciprocal.

The speaker does not expect the hearer to react to what the speaker says. Swearing is just a tool to generate the emotion of the speaker. Here is an example of swearing which is non-reciprocal:

(6) 00:34:40,620 - 00:34:52,215(E09.S1A.87)

Context: Steve and the kids want to set fire in the hub of the tunnel. After Steve throws the lighter, they run away. They have to run as fast as they can before the demodogs could chase them.

Steve: Go, go, go! Let's go, let's go!

Dustin: **Oh, my God. Oh, my God.**

The speaker, in this case Dustin, does not seek for an answer from the others. He is just expressing his fear of *demodog*, a creature from the Upside Down world which resembles a dog, and the fact that they have to run as fast as they can to avoid being chased by that creature.

- b) Swearing is a reflexive act.

The speaker's act is automatic. The speaker does not have time to think what they are going to say. It is like an unconscious reflex of the speaker. As soon as the speakers undergoing a certain emotion as mentioned above, they will express it through swearing without think it further. Below is an example of the reflexive act from the series:

(7) 00:05:24,574 - 00:05:31,539(E01.S3.3)

Context: Dustin tells Mike that he and Lucas have collected six bucks to go to the arcade, then he asks Mike how much money he has collected. Mike is troubled because he forgets that he has to collect money and go to the arcade.

Dustin: Lucas and I have six bucks total. What's your haul?

Mike: **Shit!** I don't know yet.

Dustin: What do you mean you don't know yet?

Mike: Hold on. Call Will.

Mike, as the speaker, forgets to collect some money to go to the arcade. As soon as he remembers it, he swears in front of the hearer. Mike does not hesitate to use the word *shit* to express his frustration that he forgets to get some money. It does not need some times for him to say the taboo word.

- c) Swearing is often untargeted.

The speaker often says the taboo words without specific addressee to a certain living being. Therefore, swearing often happens when the speaker talks to him/herself. Sometimes, there is no hearer when the speaker talks, so there are no other people to answer, to begin with. Here is an example:

(8) 00:14:32,705 - 00:14:37,792(E05.S3.44)

Context: Dart, a demodog that Dustin kept, comes out from Dustin's room and eat hams that Dustin left on the floor. The hams lead Dart to the root cellar so that it is trapped there. When it reaches the door, it looks behind and stares at Dustin who peeks from the door. It scares and surprises Dustin.

Dustin: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. **Shit!**

Dustin is doing a solo mission to trap the *demodog* named Dart. He is doing it alone and there is nobody in his house at that moment. Therefore, he is talking to himself. He expresses his fear and surprise when Dart is looking at his direction by swearing, even though there is no one near him to hear it. Therefore, he also does not need an answer after he said it.

d) Swearing is neurologically motivated.

Neurologically motivated means swearing is working as an emotional outlet, which means an act to relieve psychological stress. In simpler words, swearing becomes media to relieve any negative emotions in someone's mind. The speaker will generate their emotions through some taboo words to relieve it. This conversation below is one of the examples:

(12) 00:43:46,540 - 00:43:56,258(E06.S1A.60)

Context: In the middle of demodogs' attack, Dustin tries to contact anyone using his walkie-talkie, but there is no response.

Dustin: Is anyone there? Mike? Will? **God!** Anyone! Shit! We're at the old junkyard, and we are going to die!

Dustin is in the middle of life-and-death situation. He tries to contact other people to help him. He undergoes a few negative emotions at once because there are some creatures attack him but no one answers his call. Thus, he swears to express his frustration and fear.

Insults

Unlike swearing, insult is used to express the speaker's frustration, annoyance, and anger to the hearer. Therefore, insult always has a specific target when it is uttered (Azzaro, 2005, p. 3).

Insults were used less often than swearing. From 128 occurrences, only 37 (29%) utterances were found in the dialogue between the characters in the series. The gap between swearing and insult is more than half the swearing. Hence, there is a large gap between these two types. Furthermore, scatological insult contributes the most frequent in this type with 15 (11.7%) occurrences. Then, it is followed by physical insult with 8 (6.3%)

occurrences. The least used insults are sexual and mental insult. These two referents are uttered 7 (5.5%) times by the teenage characters in *Stranger Things* Season 2. Meanwhile, there is no religious insult found when the teenagers are having conversation in the series. This is an example of the most used insult by the teenage characters of the TV series:

According to Azzaro (2005), insult is the opposite of swearing. The characteristics of these two types are slightly different. The function of swearing is limited to relieve some emotional feelings of the speaker for particular situation, while insult is used to verbally assault a person or group of people because the speaker undergoes some certain emotions, like anger, frustration, stress, and annoyance, towards those people. Insult has the following characteristics.

a) Insult has a specific addressee.

Unlike swearing, an insult has always a certain addressee. The target of the insult is usually living beings, because the speaker expects an emotional reaction from the hearer. Therefore, insults happen when two or more people are having conversation in the series.

The speaker needs to express the emotional feelings towards the addressee directly or indirectly. A direct insult occurs when the speaker utters taboo words to the addressee while facing each other. Here is an example of a direct insult:

(13) 00:21:08,308 - 00:21:09,893(E03.I3.10)

Context: Steve and Nancy have another fight at the back of the school. Nancy does not remember she said everything was bullshit including her relationship with Steve, and saying that she did it out of her drunk state. Then, Steve wants proof that she does not mean what she said by saying she loves him, but Nancy falls silent. Then, Steve is angry at her and goes back to his basketball match, leaving Nancy behind.

Steve: I think that you're **bullshit**.

On the other hand, an indirect insult happens when the speaker uses taboo words to insult another person who does not participate in the conversation. Even though it is indirect insult, the hearer still

gives certain reaction at what the speaker mentioned. This is an example of indirect insult:

(14) 00:39:48,886 - 00:40:31,053(E06.I2.23)

Context: Max is telling Lucas her story why she moved to Hawkins while waiting for Dart. She is being open to Lucas about how Billy is a bad stepbrother and it becomes worse when they move to Hawkins, he is always angry all the time. And she is telling Lucas she does not want to become like her brother, even though sometimes she can be annoying to her friends. After finishing her story, she is surprised why she bothers telling him her story.

Max: I don't even know why I'm telling you this.
It's just... I know that I can be a **jerk** like him sometimes, and I do not want to be like him.
Ever. I guess I'm angry, too, and I'm sorry.
Jesus! What's wrong with me?

Lucas: Hey. You're nothing like your brother, okay?
You're cool and different. And you're super smart. And you're, like, totally tubular

Max, as the speaker, mentions that his brother is a *jerk*, even though he is not present at the moment. Then, Lucas, as the hearer, responds to it by saying that Max is not like his brother at all, she is far from being a *jerk*. It is the same as he confirms that her brother is indeed an annoying person.

b) Insult requires a response or reciprocal.

When people insult someone, they must be expecting someone to react to what they say, because they know what they have said will trigger an emotional impact on both parties. Therefore, an insult is usually followed by response from the hearer. The following conversation is an example of it:

(15) 00:08:35,765 - 00:08:50,321(E03.I3.8)

Context: Dustin wants to borrow some books for his research on the creature he found at his trash can. The maximum limit of book lending is five books. Dustin still has another five books he borrowed at home, so the librarian will not allow him to borrow another one. Therefore, he is annoyed with the librarian.

Dustin: I am on a curiosity voyage, and I need my paddles to travel. These books... These books are my paddles.

Librarian: Five at a time.

Dustin: Are you **shitting** me?

Librarian: Excuse me?

The speaker, Dustin, is using the word *shitting* as a replacement for *kidding*. In this conversation, he talks with a librarian whose age is much older than him, but he is still using the taboo words to express his frustration. Therefore, the hearer feels humiliated. She has to response to what Dustin says, because it is uttered towards her, and it is not only used to relieve his emotional feeling from particular situation, but to insult her.

c) Insult is not always a reflexive act.

Swearing is often a reflexive act. It is uttered by the speaker without thinking about it further. Meanwhile, insult is not always an automatic and unconscious reflex of the speaker. However, it does not rule out the possibility that sometimes, insult is also an automatic reaction. Here is an example of an insult which requires some times to utter:

(16) 00:08:31,761 - 00:08:42,438(E06.I5.18)

Context: Bauman is teasing Jonathan and Nancy for not having a romantic relationship. He guesses that it has something to do with Jonathan's trust issue which comes from his father. Then, Nancy approves it, saying that his father is an irritating person.

Bauman: Trust issues, am I right? Something to do with your dad.

Jonathan: What? No, I mean, my dad's...

Nancy: An **asshole**.

Bauman: Hmm. It is a curse to see so clearly.

Jonathan is hesitating to say a bad word regarding his father. Therefore, Nancy says it instead. It shows that, sometimes, insult needs couple of times to be said. He cannot say it freely even though his father is not present at the moment.

d) Insult is neurologically motivated.

Neurologically motivated means swearing is working as an emotional outlet, which means an act

to relieve psychological stress. In other words, insult works as a device to release emotional tension. The speakers express their emotions of anger, annoyance, frustration, surprise, and fear through some taboo words which are targeted at certain people. An example is shown below:

(17) 00:20:34,233 - 00:20:39,154(E05.I3.16)

Context: Billy drives Max to the arcade. He just gives her one hour to play at the arcade. She knows if she is late, he will leave her there and she has to go home on foot. Billy is annoyed at his sister because she cuts his words.

Billy: If you're not out in an hour...

Max: Walking home. Yeah, yeah, I know.

Billy: Hey! Watch the attitude, **shitbird**.

The speaker, Billy, calls his sister *shitbird* because he is annoyed by her. As he addresses her sister by that name, he releases his emotional tension and targets it at his sister.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that the teenage characters in TV series *Stranger Things* Season 2 utter taboo words which refer to five referents, that is, mental terms, physical terms, religious terms, scatological terms, and sexual terms. There are 128 utterances of teenage characters in the TV series which contain taboo words. The most common taboo words used is scatological terms with 55 (43.0%) utterances. Religious terms were found to be the second frequently used by the teenagers in the series with 43 (33.6%) occurrences. Sexual terms follow those terms with 12 (9.4%) occurrences. The least frequently used referents in the TV series, with only 9 (7.0%) occurrences, belong to mental terms and physical terms.

The high frequency of taboo words found in this study is related to the level of offensiveness. Scatological and religious terms are considered as not very offensive. That is probably the reason why those terms are often used by the teenage characters in the TV series. The use of scatological terms, which occurs one every 8.4 minutes, and that of

religious terms, which occurs one every 10.7 minutes, prove that these terms are favored by the teenage characters. Meanwhile, sexual, mental, and physical terms are considered as more offensive. Hence, that is the most likely reason those terms are rarely used by the teenagers in the TV series. Sexual terms, which occur one every 38.3 minutes, and mental along with physical terms, which occur one every 51.1 minutes, show that these terms are only occasionally used by the teenagers in the TV series.

This study also classifies taboo words which are uttered by teenage characters in the TV series based on their functions, swearing and insult. Both functions are related to the five referents mentioned before, that is, mental, physical, religious, scatological, and sexual terms.

Out of a total of 128 utterances of taboo words in the TV series, 91 (71%) utterances are swearing. Moreover, religious swearing is the most frequently used by the teenage characters with 43 (33.6%) occurrences. Then, it is followed by scatological swearing with 40 (31.3%) occurrences. Sexual swearing contributes 5 (3.9%) occurrences, and mental swearing follows with 2 (1.6%) occurrences. The least frequently used is physical swearing with only 1 (0.8%) occurrences.

Swearing is used by the teenage characters only to express their emotion of anger, frustration, annoyance, fear, and surprise resulting from particular situation. Contrary to swearing, insult is uttered by the characters to relieve the characters' frustration, annoyance, and anger to the hearer. It always has specific addressee when it is uttered. From 128 occurrences, only 37 (29%) utterances belong to insult. Scatological insult is favored by the teenage characters in the TV series to insult someone. It occurs 15 (11.7%) times in the TV series. The second frequently used is physical insult which contributes 8 (6.3%) utterances. Then, the least used insults are sexual and mental insult, which occur only 7 (5.5%) times.

In conclusion, the teenage characters in TV series *Stranger Things* Season 2 use taboo words mostly for swearing rather than for insulting other characters. Most of the time, they just want to express their emotions through taboo words because those words can represent their emotional state to a degree that non-taboo words cannot. Therefore,

they frequently use the terms which considered mildly taboo when they are used in the public, such as religious and scatological terms. In other words, they do not cause serious harm on other characters when they utter taboo words, but they can still convey their emotional feelings through those words.

This study is limited to the investigation of taboo words which are uttered by teenage characters in the TV series. There are still other characters in the TV series who can be analyzed. The subject of this study is only limited on analyzing the referents and the functions of taboo words. Further studies can still analyze other subjects, such as analyzing the relationship between the characters in terms of power and distance. It is also possible to compare the referents and functions of taboo words between the male and female characters in the TV series.

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