

CHAPTER II

THEORY AND METHOD

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the main theories and concepts that inform this research. It covers the definition of swearing, its functions, gender differences in swearing, and the research methodology.

2.1.1 Definition of Swearing

Swearing is widely discussed in sociolinguistics. Related terms profanity, cursing, taboo words, and slang that have distinct meanings (Allan & Burrige, 2006, p. 330). This study examines "swearing," defined as the use of words deemed rude, inappropriate, or offensive in specific social contexts.

Swearing is the use of "rude" or "forbidden" words in society, typically to express strong emotions or attitudes (Andersson & Trudgill, 1992). They argue that it is a word's function in social interaction, not its form, that determines whether it is a swear word; thus, a word might offend in one context but be neutral in another. Relatedly, taboo words provoke discomfort, fear, or social disapproval, and often involve sex, bodily functions, religion, or vulgarity (Reilly et al., 2020).

Swearing itself originates in natural brain mechanisms and may occur automatically in response to pain or surprise, like a linguistic animal cry (Pinker, 2007). This spontaneous use of strong language shows that swearing is deeply tied to emotion and cognition. (Stephens & Zile, 2017).

Research shows swearing is influenced by emotional intensity rather than literal meaning (Dewaele, 2004; Ljung, 2011). Rather than always conveying literal meaning, it often reflects the speaker's emotional state or intention. (Vingerhoets et al., 2013) Consequently, context is crucial in determining whether a word acts as a swear word (Ljung, 2011).

In this study, swearing refers to words or phrases that express emotion, attitude, or meaning and are considered inappropriate or offensive depending on context and the relationship between speaker and listener.

2.1.2 Swearing in Song Lyrics Compared to Spoken Language

Swearing in song lyrics is distinct from its spontaneous use in everyday conversation, where it often responds to anger, pain, surprise, or excitement (Maisura & Moetia, 2022). In contrast, swearing in song lyrics, literature, or other scripted media is typically intentional and serves specific communicative, artistic, or social functions (Jay, 2009; Ljung, 2011).

In literature, drama, and film, creators use swearing to build character authenticity, add drama, or challenge norms (Allan & Burrige, 2006). In lyrics, swearing can intensify emotion, create rebellion, or connect with an audience (Ljung, 2011). Songwriters or performers intentionally use swear words to reinforce the message, add emphasis, or set a mood. Unlike in speech, each word is selected carefully for a desired effect. (Wiguna et al., 2024).

Music genres like hip-hop, rock, and punk often use swearing to express identity, show group membership, or provoke listeners. In these

genres, swearing is a performance tool rather than just an emotional outburst. (Ross & Rivers, 2018) Thus, swearing in song lyrics may have different functions and impacts than in daily conversation (Stapleton & Fägersten, 2023). This highlights the importance of context and intention in meaning (Stapleton, 2020).

2.1.3 Functions of Swearing

Swearing serves multiple functions in language (Pinker, 2007):

2.1.3.1. Abusive Swearing

Abusive swearing represents the most widely recognized function of swearing, as it is commonly associated with the term itself. This form of language use serves to insult, attack, or harm others, particularly in arguments. Terms such as "bitch" or "bastard" are specifically intended to offend or degrade (Pinker, 2007; Allan & Burridge, 2006).

However, abusive swearing can also serve social purposes; for example, some men employ such language among friends to foster camaraderie, a practice known as ritual insults. Despite these exceptions, abusive swearing is most often intended to cause harm (Stapleton et al, 2022).

2.1.3.2. Cathartic Swearing

Cathartic swearing is a spontaneous verbal reaction to pain, frustration, or surprise. It is not directed at others but serves as an emotional release (e.g., "shit!" after stubbing a toe) (Jay, 2009).

Research indicates that swearing can increase pain tolerance, which explains the natural tendency to swear in response to physical discomfort (Stapleton et al., 2022).

2.1.3.3. Dysphemistic swearing

Dysphemistic swearing is intended to shock or offend by employing harsh language in place of euphemisms to express disgust or anger (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Pinker, 2007).

For instance, using the phrase “*Will you please pick up your dog's shit?*” instead of “*Will you please pick up your dog's waste?*” demonstrates the deliberate choice of a more offensive term to convey stronger emotions. This type of language often appears when individuals seek to make provocative statements or signal rebellion (Eldridge, 2026).

2.1.3.4. Emphatic Swearing

The primary function of emphatic swearing is to intensify statements. Such swear words act as linguistic intensifiers, adding emphasis and emotional force without targeting or attacking any individual (Rostomyan, 2025).

Emphatic swearing intensifies a statement, such as “This is fucking amazing!” The swear word adds emotional force (Ljung, 2011; Pinker, 2007).

Handayani (2016) found that emphatic swearing is prevalent in hip-hop lyrics, contributing to the rhythm and intensity of performances. Pandiangan

and Daniela (2023) further observed that such language in Megan Thee Stallion's album helps shape the artist's branding.

2.1.3.5. Idiomatic Swearing

Idiomatic swearing is distinctive in that it signals a close and casual relationship between speakers, without conveying hostility or rudeness. This form of swearing indicates informality and marks group identity or solidarity, as seen when friends refer to each other with terms such as “bastard” or “bitch” (Coates, 2013; Kapoor, 2016).

For example, when close friends use terms such as “bitch” or “ass” with one another in a humorous manner, these words function as a style of speaking rather than genuine insults.

This usage serves a social bonding function, indicating that the speakers share a relationship close enough to bypass conventional politeness without causing offense. (Stapleton & Fägersten, 2023). Notably, the functions of swearing often overlap, and a single instance of swearing in conversation or lyrics may fulfill multiple roles.

Coates (2013) observes that idiomatic swearing is more frequent among men, who often use such language with one another to foster solidarity and signal comfort. In contrast, women employ idiomatic swearing less often.

2.2 Swearing Between Male and Female Characters

Studies indicate that gender shapes how individuals use and perceive swearing. Holmes (2013) notes that men and women differ in frequency, context, and motivation for swearing. Men frequently swear more, especially in all-male or informal settings. Women are more selective and use swearing more deliberately (Afolabi, 2025; Coates, 2013; McEnery & Xiao, 2004).

Men and women swear differently, often selecting specific words for distinct purposes. For example, men may use harsher expressions to assert dominance, demonstrate status, or bond with peers. Women might swear to convey strong feelings or personal identity, but typically avoid the most explicit language (Coates, 2013; Holmes, 2013).

Other factors that affect swearing include who is speaking, their relationship, the setting, the topic, and the purpose (Holmes, 2013). Swearing is less frequent in formal settings and more common in emotional or informal situations (Pamungkas et al., 2022).

2.2.1 Participants

Whom is talking to whom? Holmes (2013) explained that men tend to use swear words more often when talking to other men. And when women are around, they usually reduce their swearing. On the other hand, women use swearing more often in environments they consider safe or casual.

The empirical evidence from British English showed that men use the swear word fuck more often than women, both in spoken and written language. It confirms that males tend to use vulgar curses more frequently

(McEnery and Xiao, 2004) . Gender differences in perceived offensiveness among people, women tend to rate swear words as more offensive than men.

This can be a reason why women swear more or less frequently and strategically; also, it makes people more aware of the social consequences of swearing (Knrischild, 2019).

2.2.2 Setting

Where does the conversation happen? In formal places like offices or classrooms, swearing frequency drops dramatically. In informal places like bars or hangouts, swearing becomes normal because it becomes the strongest predictor of whether someone will swear. (Dewaele, 2017).

In *Hazbin Hotel* and *Helluva Boss*, the setting is Hell. Which is normalized using rude language, meaning characters swear more often than they would in a real-world setting. The writer found that this study may not apply to shows set in more formal or realistic environments (Saleh, 2024).

2.2.3 Topic

What is being talked about? Are emotional or confrontational topics, like arguments, competition, or anger, more likely to trigger swearing? Holmes (2013) explains that swearing increases when the topic is emotionally charged.

In the song the writer analyzed, the topics include conflict, frustration, excitement, and rebellion. Explained why emphatic and abusive swearing are

the most common functions, because the topics invited a strong language. (Jdetawy, 2019).

2.2.4 Function

What is the swearing used for? Men use swear words more often to show dominance, boost their social status, and build solidarity with other men (male bonding). Women use swear words more effectively to express feelings or to assert identity. (McEnery & Xiao, 2004).

Coates (2013) has a similar perspective, which says that men and women have different “*repertoires*”, which means the vocabulary of swearing they use is different. Men tend to use harder words and swear more often in competitive situations. Women use softer words or swear more strategically, for example, when they need to strengthen an argument or defend themselves.

2.3 Research Methodology

This chapter explains the research methods used in this study. It covers the type of research, the data, the population and sampling, how the data were collected, and how they were analyzed.

2.3.1 Type of Research

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. It provides a detailed description of swearing in the lyrics of *Hazbin Hotel* and *Helluva Boss*, focusing on its functions and gender differences. Qualitative content

analysis examines the lyrics and identifies patterns in swearing (Creswell, 2009).

The population of this study comprised all official songs from the adult animation series *Hazbin Hotel* and *Helluva Boss*. Based on the researcher's data collection, there are 34 songs in total.

The data for this study are the lyrics of 34 songs, which have been identified as containing 133 instances of swear words. These instances are the main unit of analysis; each includes the song title, the character who said the word, and the character's gender (male or female) (Rospocher & Eksir, 2023).

2.3.2 Data, Population, and Sampling

The sample was collected using purposive sampling, a method that selects subjects relevant to the research problem. Only songs containing explicit language were analyzed, as other songs would not provide pertinent data. There are notable differences between male and female characters (Gobelna, 2023).

Out of 133 instances, 34 songs contained explicit language (Wiguna et al., 2024). For example, in "Happy Day in Hell" and "Hell Is Forever," the character Charlie (female) stated, "Today is going to be a very happy day in hell," and expressed surprise with, "Aw, this is unfortunate!" In "2 Minute Notices," the character Blitzo (male) used repeated strong language. Appendix A provides a comprehensive list of all 133 instances.

2.3.3 Method of Collecting Data

This method of collecting data is needed for effectiveness and precision. The researcher uses document analysis (Cresswell, 2009) to observe language use in written texts. The writer does not engage with the characters or singers in the animated musical series; instead, they collect and analyze the lyrics. Close reading and note-taking are used because the writer collects, classifies, analyzes, and concludes from the findings.

The criteria and guidelines determine what to include. Swear words, in this study, are defined as words or phrases considered taboo, rude, or offensive in English. This includes words for sex (fuck), body parts (dick, ass), physical functions (shit, piss), and insults (bitch, bastard) (Allan and Burrige, 2006; Ljung, 2010). Second, every instance of a swear word in the lyrics is included, even if the same word is repeated within a song. Third, for each swear word, the writer records its context.

2.3.4 Method of Analyzing Data

Following the collection of 133 instances of swear words, data analysis was conducted in two primary stages, corresponding to the study's research questions. Each instance was first classified into one of Pinker's (2007) five swearing categories: abusive, cathartic, dysphemistic, emphatic, and idiomatic. The context surrounding each instance was examined to ascertain its specific function. Subsequently, the frequency and proportion of each function were calculated to elucidate the distribution of swearing functions within the dataset.

The data were organized by character gender to compare how often male and female characters used swear words. The analysis then focused on identifying the most common functions and highlighting differences in swearing between male and female characters.

Theories from Holmes (2013) and Coates (2013) clarify the observed differences. Holmes asserts that distinctions in language use between men and women depend on participants, context, topic, and communicative purpose. Coates maintains that men and women possess distinct swearing repertoires, highlighting differences in lexical choice.