

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Language is a fundamental medium for communication, allowing individuals to express emotions, assert identity, and conform to social norms. Swearing exists in all languages, yet its acceptance and interpretation differ across cultures and historical periods. Although frequently labeled as "rude" (Andersson & Trudgill, 1992), the meaning and perceived offensiveness of swearing are highly context-dependent. A term may be offensive in one context but acceptable in another.

The present study examines these contextual differences. For instance, the word "damn" was historically considered highly disrespectful due to religious associations, but its impact has diminished in contemporary usage. Taboo words can provoke discomfort or offense among listeners. Certain terms, such as "fuck," remain strongly taboo in many contexts, whereas others are more accepted in informal settings (Jay, 2009; Pinker, 2007).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, swearing is not simply a matter of using "bad words." It reflects deeper social and psychological dynamics. These include identity, group membership, emotional expression, and power relations (Stapleton & Beers, 2022). Swearing often occurs in response to strong emotions like anger, frustration, or excitement. It can also be used to build solidarity or express intimacy among friends.

Research indicates that swearing is influenced by both gender and context. Coates (2013) contends that men and women possess distinct

“swearing repertoires,” employing swear words differently in terms of frequency and function. For instance, men generally swear more often and use harsher language, particularly in competitive or informal environments. In contrast, women may swear more selectively and strategically (McEnery & Xiao, 2004; Holmes, 2013). These gendered patterns are evident not only in everyday conversation but also in media representations, including films, television, and song lyrics (Cressman et al., 2009; Fägersten & Bednarek, 2022).

Although swearing has been extensively examined in speech, film, and mainstream music, its occurrence in adult animated musical series, particularly in song lyrics, remains underexplored in the literature. This study addresses this gap by systematically analyzing 133 instances of swearing across 34 songs from *Hazbin Hotel* and *Helluva Boss*, using Pinker’s (2007) functional framework. The primary objective is to classify the functions of swearing and to compare the use of swear words by male and female characters within this distinctive sociolinguistic and media studies context.

1.2 Research Question

This study uses Pinker’s (2007) five-function framework for swearing: abusive, cathartic, dysphemistic, emphatic, and idiomatic. The aim is to identify these swearing functions in the song lyrics of *Hazbin Hotel* and *Helluva Boss*. The study also examines differences in swearing between male and female characters. The study asks:

1. What are the functions of swearing found in the song lyrics from *Hazbin Hotel* and *Helluva Boss*?

2. How do characters identified as male and female differ in their use of swearing, in terms of frequency and function, in the song lyrics from *Hazbin Hotel* and *Helluva Boss*?

1.3 Objectives of the Research

This research has two primary objectives:

1. The first objective is to collect every swear word from 34 songs in *Hazbin Hotel* and *Helluva Boss*. Each will then be identified and classified as either abusive, cathartic, dysphemistic, emphatic, or idiomatic.
2. The second objective is to calculate the percentage and frequency of each swearing function in the data, separated by characters' gender. The study will compare the frequency and types of swearing among male and female characters and explain the differences in swearing patterns in the song lyrics of *Hazbin Hotel* and *Helluva Boss*.

1.4 Previous Studies

Research on swearing has been conducted from multiple perspectives. For example, Andersson and Trudgill (1992) contend that context influences the interpretation of swear words. Building on this, Allan and Burridge (2006) examine cross-cultural variation in the use of taboo language. On a different note, psycholinguistic studies, such as Pinker (2007), associate swearing with innate brain mechanisms and intense emotional responses.

The studies consistently show that swearing fulfills important social and emotional roles. Jay (2009) and Stapleton & Beers (2022) highlight that

swearing serves social and emotional purposes, such as letting off steam, building connections, and strengthening meaning. Holmes (2013) and Coates (2013) find that men tend to swear more often, while women use swear words more carefully. McEnery and Xiao (2004) show through corpus data that men use certain swear words, like "fuck," more frequently than women in British English.

Swearing serves multiple communicative functions across media. In teen movies, Cressman et al. (2009) find that male characters swear more frequently than female characters. Swearing is also increasingly used in TV catchphrases to convey emotion and build connections (Fägersten & Bednarek, 2022). In music, Pandiangan and Daniela (2023) and Handayani (2016) conclude that profanity can express identity, solidarity, and strong feelings.

Even with these studies, there is little research that examines swearing in adult animated musical series, especially in relation to character gender and the function of swearing in song lyrics. By closely analyzing swearing in the lyrics of *Hazbin Hotel* and *Helluva Boss*, this study makes a novel contribution to the field and specifically addresses these gaps, focusing on gender differences.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study analyzes song lyrics from two adult animated musical series, *Hazbin Hotel* and *Helluva Boss*. A total of 34 songs were collected, with 133 instances of swearing identified. Songs that do not contain swear words are excluded from the analysis.

To answer the first research question, this study investigates five swearing functions: abusive (to insult), cathartic (to release emotion), dysphemistic (to shock), emphatic (to add force), and idiomatic (to show closeness). To address the second question, it examines gender differences in both the frequency and function of swearing. For each instance, the researcher records one line before and after the swear word to understand context. The study does not analyze visuals, non-song dialogue, or musical elements like rhythm or melody.

For the purposes of this study, swear words are defined as those considered rude or inappropriate. These include terms related to sex (such as fuck), body parts (such as dick or ass), physical actions (such as shit or piss), and insults (such as bitch or bastard). The analysis is limited to the universes of *Hazbin Hotel* and *Helluva Boss*, both set in hell, where rude language is depicted as normal and accepted. Consequently, the findings may not be generalizable to other television shows, films, or everyday conversations.

1.6 Writing Organization

This thesis is organized into four chapters, each of which builds upon the preceding chapter to form a logical and coherent structure.

CHAPTER I: Introduction

Serving as the foundation for the thesis, this chapter outlines the study's background, research questions, objectives, a review of previous studies, the research's scope, and the thesis's organization.

CHAPTER II: Theory and Method

This chapter serves two primary purposes. First, it establishes the theoretical framework by describing swearing, identifying its five functions, and examining gender differences in swearing usage. Second, it details the research methodology, including the descriptive qualitative design, data collection from 34 songs comprising 133 instances, and the procedures for data analysis.

CHAPTER III: Results and Discussion

This chapter presents an overview of the data analysis, demonstrating how swearing is distributed across the five functional classifications: abusive, cathartic, dysphemistic, emphatic, and idiomatic. It then compares the use of swearing by male and female characters, focusing on frequency and functional patterns. Finally, the findings are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework and previous research.

CHAPTER IV: Conclusion

This chapter states the conclusions and provides suggestions for future studies.