AN ANALYSIS OF PROFANITY WORDS FOUND IN *BREAKING BAD SERIES:*
A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the profanity words found in Breaking Bad Series. Swear words are considered taboo in the society despite of its existence in languages to express anger and some of them are used to show solidarity in certain groups. This study aimed to answer two research questions, which are "What category of profanity found most frequently in Breaking Bad series?" and secondly, "What functions of profanity found most frequently in Breaking Bad series?" The category of profanity refers to the type of the profanity that is used while function refers to the intention of its usage. All of the episodes from the first and second season of the show were the subjects of this study and the data were the swear words found in each episode. The data were in the form of words that were uttered or displayed in the series. In order to obtain the data, the researchers watched each episode one by one from each series, input the swear words in the table that had been made and counted their occurrence and grouped their category and functions. The researchers used 12 categories of swear words. The category of swear words refers to the words uttered by the swearers, the kind of words used by the characters The researchers used 12 categories of swear words, which are sexual relation, religion, excrement, death, animal name mentioning, physically or mentally disabled, prostitution, ethnic, racial or gender slurs, ancestral allusions, substandard vulgar terms, offensive slangs, and narcotics or crime. The researchers adopted the theories of profanity category from Andersson (1985). The function of profanity refers to the intention or motive of the swearers to utter the words. In this case, the researchers used five types of function, which were dysphemistic, idiomatic, abusive emphatic, and cathartic swearing. The theory of profanity types of function was adopted from Pinker (2010). The study resulted in religion as the most frequently found category (186 data) and idiomatic swearing as the most frequently found function of profanity (173 data).

Keywords: *profanity, category of profanity, functions of profanity, swear words*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is used to express thoughts and show emotions. People express their feelings using verbal and non-verbal language. For example, when people want to express their anger, they show the angry expression and utter strong words. In some situations, people use profanity or swear words to express their feeling. According to Murphy (2012), people use profanity since it is considered as intense and powerful to express strong feeling.

Profanity is perceived as taboo by the society; however, it is still commonly found in media such as TV series, songs, vlogs (video blogs), and even social media. People express and are exposed to curse words. Although considered as unpleasant, swear words can also be uttered to show positive emotion. People often solely consider swear words as offensive or ill-mannered; however they can also be used to show solidarity (Dynel, 2012).

There are several studies related to the usage of swear words. A research done by Aji (2014) shows the use of swear words in *Four Brothers* movie. Another research about swear words in movie is Rahmadi's (2017) which is about swear words in *Blood Father* movie, while Wulandari (2017) conducted a research about the use of swear words in Pewdiepie Youtube videos. What differs this research with the previous ones is instead of analyzing a movie; this research studied a Netflix series, *Breaking Bad*. The researchers chose the series as the subject because the researchers believed that the setting, characters, and the plot of the story support swearing-related research.

This study intends to see the functions and categories of profanity words in *Breaking Bad series.* The research questions of this study are as follow "What category of profanity found most frequently in *Breaking Bad series*? and "What functions of profanity found most frequently in *Breaking Bad series*?". Hopefully, the result of this study will enrich the linguistic study of swear words used in movie series.

Profanity

Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines profanity as "language that is offensive or disrespectful". Laboreiro and Oliveira (2014) define profanity as words which are vulgar and intended to offend someone. Wene and Ena (2020) summarize the definition of profanity as the expression to denigrate God and other religious affairs. From these definitions, we can conclude that profanity is an expression that has offensive function

towards religion and people. In this study, the term profanity also includes obscenity, epithet and vulgarity.

Profanity is often found in media and real-life situations. It sometimes occurs in workplaces in which many millennials work. Nowadays, it also occurs in online text such as messages and tweets from Twitter (Laboreiro and Oliveira, 2014). Profanity can also be found in other media such as movies, games, and even Youtube videos. It also occurs in books and informal social situation. Not only in media and informal social situation, soldiers and sailors are also famous to use swear words to express anger (Shakiba, 2014).

As mentioned by Pinker (2007), as cited in Finn (2017), profanity is sometimes used when it is chosen rather than a neutral term. There have been researches about the purpose of swearing. Rothwel (1971), as cited in De Frank and Kahlbaugh (2018), explained the use of profanity into four purposes: to create attention, to provoke, to discredit, and for identification. This implies that profanity is used by someone to create attention by expressing strong language. Then, people also use it to show provoke confrontation when they encounter something or someone that they dislike. Profanity is also used to show social dominance and acceptance in a group. In addition, it is also used to provide a common bond. Irwin and Trevethan (2019) investigated the positive aspects of rudeness. This includes swearing and insult; professional development, enhancing resilience, building relationships, forming groups, humor. Despite of the fact that profanities are judged negatively and causing discomfort for some people, Vingerhoets, Bylsma, and Vlam (2013) claimed that swear words produce catharsis-effect. It means that when somebody utters swear words, it relieves stress. Also, swearing gives both positive and negative impacts towards inter individual and intra individual function. However, they pointed out that it gives more positive impact. In other words, swear words are used not only to humiliate others, but also to relieve tension, and promote social harmony.

Category of Profanity

Category of profanity focuses on the kind of words uttered by the swearer. In this study the researchers analyzed the profanities based on theories written by Andersson (1985) and Jay (2009) who added more categories. Based on Andersson (1985), as cited in Karjalainen (2002), profanity is categorized into seven; sexual organs and sexual relations, religion and church, excrement, death, the physically or mentally disabled, prostitution, and narcotics or crime. While Jay (2009), as cited in Jdetawy (2019), categorized swear words into eight categories, which are sexual references, profane or blasphemous words, scatological or disgusting objects, animal names mentioning, ethnic/racial/gender slurs, ancestral allusions, substandard vulgar terms, and offensive slang. There are similarities in the two theories. For example, Andersson (1985) used the term 'sexual organs and sexual relations' while Jay (2009) used the term 'sexual references'. On the other hand, there are categories that are not available in Andersson (1985) but available in Jay (2009) and vice versa. Therefore, the researchers decided to combine the two theories.

Function of Profanity

Functions of profanity focus on the intention or motives of the swearer to utter the words. It means that in functions of profanity, this study focuses on why the swear words were used by the characters in *Breaking Bad the series.*

Pinker (2007), as cited in Wulandari (2017, mentioned five functions of swearing, which are dysphemistic swearing, idiomatic swearing, abusive swearing, emphatic swearing, cathartic swearing. Pinker (2007) used the term 'types of profanity'. However, in this study the researchers decided to use the term 'functions' to make a clear distinction with the term category. Dysphemistic swearing refers to the kind of swearing that is used to provoke someone by replacing the appropriate word with an inappropriate one. Idiomatical swearing refers to the one used to arouse interest or to show off, while abusive swearing is meant to harass someone. People use emphatic swearing when they want to emphasize something and cathartic swearing to relieve tension when they feel agony or discomfort.

METHODOLOGY

The theoretical framework of this study is adapted from three previous studies that have conducted research regarding swear words in movies. Those researches are by Karjalainen (2002), Wulandari and Firmawan (2019) and also a study by Jdetawy (2019). Each study focuses on the usage of swear words.

The researchers applied the theories that are used in those studies. From those theories, the researchers adapted them to make the tables for the research instrument.

The researchers took the theory of functions of profanity from Pinker (2010), which was also used by Wulandari and Firmawan (2019). Both Pinker (2007) and (2010) himself uses the term 'types' however the researchers decided to use the term 'function' so that the term 'type' and 'category' will not be confused. All of the previous studies that have been mentioned used Pinker (2007) and (2010) as the theory for swear words functions. The researchers used Pinker (2010) cited by Wulandari and Firmawan (2019) since it is the closest research to this study.

For the category of profanity, the researchers took the theory from Andersson (1985), which was also used by Karjalainen (2002). Also, the researchers used additional categories from Jay (2009), which were also cited by Jdetawy (2019). From those theories, the researchers obtained broader and more detailed data regarding the category of profanity. The categories are sexual relation, religion, excrement, death, animal name mentioning, physically or mentally disabled, prostitution, ethnic, racial or gender slurs, ancestral allusions, substandard vulgar terms, offensive slangs, and narcotics or crime. The researchers made a table to classify the functions and category of the swear words in *Breaking Bad series* for each episode. The table contains the category and the function of the swear words. The functions are dysphemistic, idiomatic, abusive, emphatic, cathartic.

The researchers chose Netflix TV series, *Breaking Bad series*, as the subject of the research. There are five seasons in the show. The researchers used two seasons, which were the first and second season as the samples. The data of this research were not only the swear words produced by the characters, but also objects such as text messages, advertisements in the show, and any other written objects.

ANALYSIS

The category of profanity found most frequently in *Breaking Bad series* is religion. From the highest to lowest was religion, excrement, death, substandard vulgar terms, sexual relations, animal name mentioning, physically or mentally disabled, narcotics or crime, ancestral allusions, prostitution, and ethnic or racial or gender slurs. In terms of total, ancestral allusions and prostitution resulted in the same number. The researchers would provide the tables to show the number of profanity category from the first and second season of the show altogether.

Table 1 The Category of Profanity in *Breaking Bad Series*.

No	Category of Profanity	Examples	Frequency
1	Sexual relations	*Hank: "Nasty, skeevy meth-heads... who'd sell their grandma's **coochie** for a hit."*	49
2	**Religion**	*Walter: "Cathode. Anode. **Damn**, that is good. That is very good. Okay. Here we go."*	**186**
3	Excrement	*Jesse: "Okay, this is my house. I don't **shit** where I eat."*	100
4	Death	*Jesse: "Where the **hell** were you? I called, like, 20 times."*	64
5	Animal Name Mentioning	*Jesse:" Yo, yo, yo, 1, 4, 8, 3 to the 3 to the 6 to the 9, representing the ABQ. What up, **beyotch**? Leave it at the tone."*	40
6	Physically or Mentally Disabled	*Jesse: "Now, all right? We're stuck out here. You got a pen for directions? Look, pencil's fine, **retard**. Just something to write with. It doesn't matter.*	35
7	Prostitution	*Hank: "Sure. Your commercials? They suck ass. I've seen better acting in an epileptic **whorehouse**."*	23
8	Ethnic or Racial or Gender Slurs	*Hank: "Yeah? I'll tell you what. I got you 20 bucks that says he's a **beaner."***	12
9	Ancestral Allusions	*Emilio: "You rata snitch **motherfucker."***	23
10	Substandard Vulgar Terms	*Hank: "You telling me you buy that **lame-ass** story?"*	62
11	Offensive Slang	*Jesse: "I'm sorry. Let's just say it starts with my parents being greedy kleptomaniac **douchebags**."*	22
12	Narcotics or Crime	*Hank: "Tuco Salamanca. For those of you who were not with us this morning. We raided his headquarters. Also his last-known address, even the little den of iniquity he keeps for his **meth-hag** girlfriend."*	26
		Total	642

The function of profanity found most frequently in *Breaking Bad series* is idiomatical swearing. Table 2 in the following shows the number of profanity functions from the first and second season of the show as well as the example of each function. The function of profanity found most frequently in *Breaking Bad series* is idiomatical swearing. From the highest to lowest was idiomatical swearing, dysphemistic swearing, cathartic swearing, abusive swearing, and last is emphatic swearing.

Table 2 The Functions of Profanity in Breaking Bad Series.

No	Functions of Profanity	Example	Frequency
1	Dysphemistic	Stew: "**Jesus.** We were all so sorry to hear."	151
2	**Idiomatic**	Jesse: "After school. Are you **shitting** me?"	**173**
3	Abusive	Mr. Spooge: "I am in the middle of some very important work. I am on the verge here, all right? So shut your **skank ass pie hole** and assist me and shut up."	101
4	Emphatic	Hank: "Done. I'll meet you **morons** downstairs. Try not to get lost on the way."	66
5	Cathartic	Badger: "Just think about it, all right? **Oh, shit.** I gotta go."	131
	Total		622

It could be said that religion became the most frequently found category and idiomatical swearing as the most frequently found function of profanity in *Breaking Bad series* because those kinds of swearing are considered as common and have lower level of offensiveness. This statement is supported by Fägersten (2007) who conducted a research to see the relationship between swear words usage and social context. The study shows that profanities that are categorized in religion category such as 'damn' and 'hell' are considered as not offensive. The study also resulted in metaphorical use of swear words, which definition is closely related to idiomatical function of swear words. They are considered least to not offensive at all. Also in public media such as television or radio, words such as 'oh my God' or 'Jesus' are not censored and can be aired. This implies that although they are regarded as profanity, they are deemed to be common and not offensive. This also supports Irwin and Trevethan (2019) about how swear words are used to show solidarity. It is shown in table 2 in emphatical swearing where Hank called his fellow colleagues *'morons'* without actually meaning to insult them.

The researchers also believe that the plot and background of the story indirectly impacted the implication and ambience of profanity function expressed in the series. The first and second season of the show showed the beginning of Walter White and Jesse Pinkman's business in methamphetamine industry. As someone who was previously a chemist and chemistry teacher, White did not have any clear picture of how intense a drug business can be. Whereas Pinkman, even though he had the background, he was not considered as having a big name. They faced struggles and challenges. Also, many of the characters including White and Pinkman wanted to emphasize their points to other characters. Therefore, idiomatical swearing is used by the character.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the use of profanity in *Breaking Bad series* to answer two research questions, first. what category of profanity found most frequently in *Breaking Bad series*?, and second, what functions of profanity found most frequently in *Breaking Bad series*? The result of the study showed that the category of profanity found most frequently in *Breaking Bad series* was religion (186 data) followed by excrement, death, substandard vulgar terms, sexual relations, animal name mentioning, physically or mentally disabled, narcotics or crime, ancestral allusions, prostitution, and ethnic or racial or gender slurs. While the answer to the second question for profanity function, the most frequently found one was idiomatical swearing (173 data) followed by dysphemistic, cathartic , abusive, and the last is emphatic swearing.

There are several suggestions that the researchers proposed based on this research. For further research, it is suggested to investigate the use of profanity in more ideal realistic settings such as podcasts or social groups. It is also suggested to conduct a profanity-related research that is based on aspects such as cultures or other psychological aspects. For education, profanity can also be the aspect of study for linguistic students. For EFL teachers, awareness of swear words can be raised to know possible situations or motivation profanity is uttered and educate the appropriateness of its use.

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