ANGLO SAXONICA

Swearing in the Movies: Intratextual and Extratextual Functions of Taboo

RESEARCH

CATARINA XAVIER

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ABSTRACT

Audiovisual media reflect language use in the community and the context of attitudes and stereotypes regarding different language varieties. Against this backdrop, taboo language has become a frequent resource for linguistic characterisation in cinema. Studies related to taboo language in audiovisual contexts suggest some functions of these words in films, though not systematically nor layered. Based on the work of Allan and Burridge ("Swearing") on the functions of taboo language in its authentic use and Delabastita ("Great Feast of Languages") on the extratextual functions of multilingualism in Shakespearean work, this article offers an empirical, multidisciplinary, systematic approach to the use of taboo language in films. We propose a typology of four intratextual and three extratextual functions of taboo language in audiovisual contexts. This typology will then be tested on a corpus of films via a detailed multimodal quantitative and qualitative analysis.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:
Catarina Xavier
University of Lisbon, School of Arts and Humanities, Portugal
cxavier@campus.ul.pt

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1. INTRODUCTION

Through direct and indirect characterisation, screenwriters and directors provide identifiable clues so that viewers can frame a sociocultural and situational profile of the characters. Notwithstanding the importance of direct characterisation, through which authors explicitly describe the physical appearance, feelings, or behaviour, the indirect clues are also substantial when inferring specific characteristics with communicative and social importance. The manipulation of the characters' speech that indirectly characterises the person on the screen is relevant, given that audiences recognise and evaluate lexical choices, pronunciation, and grammar within the speech of the characters, therefore framing them in a specific space, time, situation, education, schooling, or social group.

The presence of taboo language in the media testified to a change in the language community's attitudes toward these words (Slotkin 220). Sapolsky and Kaye ("[U]se of offensive language" 293) add, "Music, films and television have pushed the boundaries of expletive use. Words once considered taboo are now commonplace". Consequently, the increased frequency of taboo language in the media, in addition to reflecting its use in the linguistic community, influences it by reducing its offensiveness and the perception of its (in)adequacy in specific contexts.

Given this, some studies on taboo language in audiovisual media have provided relevant data to confirm the increased frequency of these words (e.g., Jay; Slotkin; Kaye and Sapolsky, "Watch Your Mouth!" and "Taboo"; Cressman et al.; Sapolsky et al.). In a study on North American TV analysing taboo language in prime time, Kaye and Sapolsky ("Watch Your Mouth!" and "Taboo") emphasise that taboo language has become increasingly frequent and that this frequency has been relevant even in free-to-air channels. Sapolsky and colleagues also indicate an average of 9,8 occurrences of taboo words per hour on free-to-air channels and 15 per hour on cable television channels during prime time on North American television. Additionally, a study on the frequency of taboo words in the entertainment programs of the most popular free-to-air television channels in the USA (Parents Television Council) refers that there was a 69% increase of taboo words in prime time, along with a 2400% increase of silenced or "beeped" "f-words" (2005 to 2010).

Regarding the time and type of programs with a higher frequency of taboo language, Kaye and Sapolsky ("Watch Your Mouth!") also emphasise that taboo language has increased, particularly in the time slot 9–10 pm, mostly in sitcoms. Therefore, the highest frequency of taboo language occurs in prime-time television and family programs, influencing the reception of these words.

Regarding reception, Sapolsky and colleagues highlight the fact that audiences have shown some rejection of taboo language in the media. They cite two studies on North America: the first mentions that 97% of respondents confirm their concern with taboo language on television (USA Today, 1995); and the second indicates that 58% of respondents say there is too much taboo language on television (Time, 2005). However, some disparity regarding reception on television is also to be noted. Sapolsky and colleagues attempted to clarify the degree of offensiveness of twenty taboo words depending on channel typology (open signal, cable or satellite, and premium). They concluded that respondents consider the same words to be more offensive on free-to-air channels, less offensive on the cable channel, and much less offensive on the premium channel.

Literature has thus confirmed that taboo language is a frequent resource in audiovisual media today. Although researchers have indeed explored the frequency of taboo, much less research has paid attention to the functions of these words within audiovisual contexts. This necessity is illustrated by Norrick (26), "Little discussion concerns the actual forms, the distribution and functions of swearing in prose fiction, which words and phrases recur, how offensive they are, [or] where the swearing appears". Despite focusing on the scarcity of studies on the presence and role of taboo language in Literature, this observation can also be extended to audiovisual contexts, as there is a lack of studies on the specific objectives of screenwriters and directors when including taboo words in characters' speech. Because taboo in films is "neither gratuitous nor arbitrary" (27), the purpose of this article is to analyze taboo words in films and to provide a systematic typology of functions of these words, both within the film (i.e., between characters) and between the film and its audience.

The article first provides a theoretical framework on taboo language as a way of characterisation in films, to then address its functions. The article is based on corpus analysis which will ideally allow for the proposal of a typology of intratextual and extratextual functions of taboo language. In terms of structure, after the theoretical framework the article explores a case study to then put forward the results and discussion of corpus analysis, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Finally, the concluding remarks highlight the conclusions, future research, and limitations of the study.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. TABOO LANGUAGE

Researchers have underlined the (very often inconclusive) variety of terms that refer to taboo language—swear words, offensive language, slurs, insults, curse words, bad language, profanity, expletives, or taboo words (e.g., Allan and Burridge, *Forbidden Words*; Beers Fägersten; Goddard; Bednarek). Taboo language is an umbrella term for the latter denoting forbidden words and expressions related to taboo imagery, such as sex-related organs and acts, scatology, the body and its effluvia, sacred beings, food, and death (Allan and Burridge, *Forbidden Words* 1). Taboo words stem from censored topics defined not by language but rather by culture and are perceived as offensive due to the context in which they are uttered. Consequently, taboos are culture-specific but also universal in that all cultures identify taboo behaviours, actions, objects, and related words (11).

According to Allan and Burridge ("Swearing" 365), taboo words are used in everyday speech with four functions, which we will discuss thoroughly in the following sections.

2.2. TABOO LANGUAGE AND CHARACTERISATION

Norrick (32) refers to how "Swearing appears (only) in dialogue (set off in recognisable ways) to delineate certain types of characters or to signify emotion". Therefore, the recreation of taboo language is carried out so that the receiver recognises it.

Regarding the stereotyping process, Kristiansen (137) clarifies: "Stereotyping, then, is a functional cognitive device by means of which we systematise our social environment, creating distinct and apparently homogeneous categories". We associate certain characteristics that we recognise in other speakers with specific groups. Writers similarly resort to this association to typify characters with recognisable speaking styles. Then, the fictional use of taboo is based on the community's linguistic stereotype about the profile of those who typically use these words. Norrick (32) highlights that "Traditionally, these [characters who swear] were lower class characters and always men, while they have increasingly become middle and higher class and increasingly women as well as men". Therefore, the stereotype of taboo language in fiction traditionally retrieved the image of the uneducated male speaker of low social strata.[1] The tradition of the fictional text is a stereotype linked to lower-class men, so this would be an unmarked characterisation. However, the surprising use of these words would be a marked characterisation, i.e., taboo is used by characters who, due to their social position, education, or communicative situation, would not be expected to use taboo.

However, as Norrick (32) mentions, the tradition of using taboo language in a fictional context has been changing, and the character who typically uses these words may now be female, of high social class, and educated. Contrary to this suggestion though, studies have noted the maintenance of this tradition (Xavier, *Esbatendo o tabu* and *Tabu e Tradução Audiovisual*; Soler Pardo; Ávila-Cabrera, *Subtitling*), i.e., the negative linguistic stereotype and the social exclusion of characters who frequently use taboo words.

2.3. TABOO LANGUAGE IN FILMS

Different linguistic features have been included in characters' discourse in films to give the character a sociolinguistic profile that the audiences recognise and evaluate:

1 Soler Pardo also alludes to the fact that, in the cinema, taboo language is historically associated with the villain and negatively evaluated by the audiences.

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> In everyday life, the way in which someone speaks provides clues about where they come from, what social group they belong to, what kind of education they received, and so forth. This is something that authors and filmmakers make use of in various ways, not the least of which is to provide information about characters and location. (Hodson 3)

On another note, Lippi-Green studied the discrimination of certain accents of English in the USA and the power relations that motivate it to conclude that these ideological issues are reflected in films:

> Characters with strongly positive actions and motivations are overwhelming speakers of socially mainstream varieties of English. Conversely, characters with strongly negative actions and motivations often speak varieties of English linked to specific geographical regions and marginalised social groups. (101)

In this regard, Xavier (*Esbatendo o tabu* and *Tabu e Tradução Audiovisual*) also stresses that taboo language often corresponds to the marginal, peripheral status of the sociocultural group of the characters who use taboo. On the other hand, along with the social periphery, taboo language is also a mark of solidarity between speakers, who recognise each other not only by their similar behaviour but also by the type of non-standard language they use. Relatedly, Soler Pardo and Ávila-Cabrera (*Subtitling*) analyse films by director Quentin Tarantino and conclude that taboo entails the stereotyping of the characters. Soler Pardo (141) mentions that "cursing in films, for example, is a way of representing anti-heroes: the thief, the gangster, the bank-robber who do not succeed in his/her mission. This is not an example to follow; children would not like to look like them". The taboo language used in audiovisual fiction tends to then represent the villain, the outcast.

However, characterisation using taboo language also has positive aspects, which are part of the audiovisual tradition. First, the comic effect of taboo words in unexpected situations triggers humour and laughter. Second, in addition to representing the unification of peripheral groups, taboo words can generate empathy with the audiences who positively evaluate the use of taboo language.

Additionally, two characteristics of films are worth considering due to their effects on the transmission and reception of meanings beyond words. The first is the immediacy and ephemerality of the audiovisual product, and the second is its multimodality.

In literary contexts, the receiver has time to assimilate the transmission of meanings associated with non-standard linguistic varieties. However, in the audiovisual context, this time is shortened to the limited period of a film (cf. Lippi-Green; Azad; Xavier, *Esbatendo o tabu*). Therefore, the time available for extracting information about the speakers and the relations established between them is short, and this information has to be unveiled as quickly as possible. The frequency of non-standard linguistic features, such as taboo language, tends to be adapted to the immediacy of films, driven by an immediate need to interpret the character's sociolinguistic profile (Xavier, *Esbatendo o tabu* 74).

Furthermore, the importance of the multimodality of films has been highlighted due to the multiple productions of meanings on different codes (verbal and non-verbal) channels (visual and acoustic). As put forward extensively in related literature (e.g., Taylor, "Multimodal transcription" and "Multimodality"; Chaume Varela; Chuang; Gambier; Zabalbeascoa; Sokoli; Burczynska), the audiovisual text produces meanings via different signs (visual-verbal; audio-verbal; visual-non-verbal; and audio non-verbal). Consequently, characterisation in audiovisual contexts through taboo language must be understood as a whole since the audiovisual text is the result of the various semiotic modes that create an autonomous semiotic product.

In films, the physical configuration of characters is made through clothing, actions, attitudes, gestures, shouts, or facial expressions. The use of taboo language must, therefore, be analysed together with the non-verbal elements of films. This allows for analysing the (in)adequacy of the taboo word. On the one hand, it may suggest the complementarity between the taboo and the image (i.e., the outlaw or the villain). On the other, it may hint a conflict between taboo and the image when the situation is formal. For instance, a scene in which a doctor, a lawyer, or an academic, in a professional environment, utters a taboo word is unexpected.

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The taboo word cuts with the previous characterisation and disrupts audiences' expectations regarding what is expected from this character and the tradition of the use of taboo. On the other hand, a character represented as part of marginalised groups, who commonly use non-standard language, does not create any conflict between the visual component and the verbal component because expectations are not defrauded. The examples illustrate the latter:

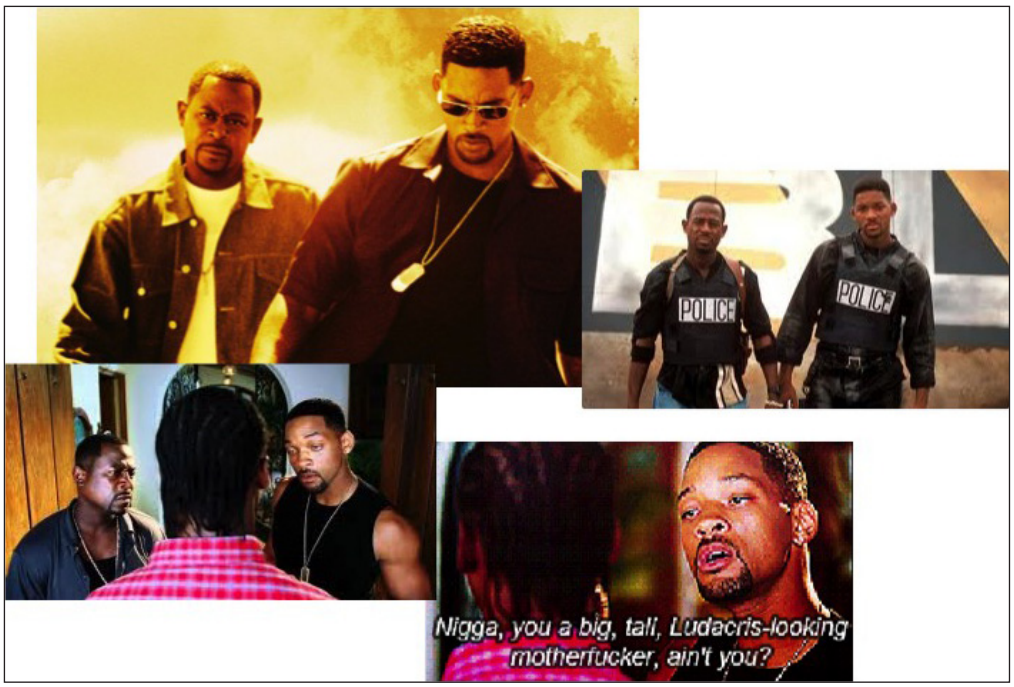

Figure 1 Screenshots from film *Bad Boys II*.

Figure 2 Screenshots from film *Intolerable Cruelty*.

The 2003 action-comedy film *Bad Boys II* (2003) (See Figure 1) spins around two Miami police officers investigating ecstasy trafficking. Most characters are part of the mafias specialising in drug trafficking, and taboo language is so frequent that it is included in the lists of American films with the most taboo words. On the other hand, the film *Intolerable Cruelty* (2003) (See Figure 2) is a comedy about a divorce where a woman aims at financial independence after learning about her rich and older husband's infidelity. Most characters are high class, revealed in their physical appearance and the type of (standard) language used. Despite various incidents throughout the film, the language is always standardised, so there is an unexpected turn when,

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in a restaurant scene, the waitress replies, "What the fuck colour would it be?" to the question, "Do you have a green salad?". Consequently, there is a cut with the formal situation.

2.4. INTRATEXTUAL AND EXTRATEXTUAL FUNCTIONS OF TABOO LANGUAGE IN FILMS

Related literature on the study of taboo language in fiction highlights the role played by these words in literature and films. Díaz Cintas, Norrick, and Ávila-Cabrera ("Propuesta") suggest that taboo language in fiction is a vehicle of information about the personality and social group of the character or about the situation (Díaz Cintas; Ávila-Cabrera, *Subtitling* and "Propuesta"). Studies also refer that taboo makes the dialogue more realistic or that it portrays the characters' emotions (e.g., Norrick). Additionally, it also has the purpose of inciting reactions in the audience. Though relevant, related bibliography fails to present a specific typology of the functions of taboo language in fiction. Also, it does not differentiate between the intratextual level (i.e., the relationships established between the characters) and the extratextual level (i.e., the relationships established between the characters, the fictional text and its receiver).

Some authors (e.g., Kozloff; Rosa; Hodson) have already suggested that non-standard varieties have intra- and extratextual functions. About dialect characterisation in an audiovisual context, Hodson proposes:

> I have offered two reasons for studying dialect in film and literature: that it can tell us about individual characters and locations, and that it can tell us about relationships between characters, and so highlight broader thematic concerns. Both of these motivations might be characterised as text-internal … Text-external reasons for studying the representation of dialects of English in film and literature focus on the way in which such representations interact with the society within which they appear. (10)

Accordingly, to establish a typology of functions of taboo language in films, literature on the use of non-standard varieties in fiction was found relevant (e.g., Blake; Leech and Short; Kozloff; Delabastita; Rosa; Hodson), because they discriminate between different layers of functions. Given this, Allan and Burridge's study ("Swearing") on the functions of taboo language in everyday speech will be adapted to taboo in films between the story's characters. Also, Delabastita's study ("Great Feast of Languages") on the functions of multilingualism in Shakespeare's plays will be adapted to the role of taboo language in the relationship between the fictional text and its receiver.

2.4.1. Intratextual functions of taboo language in audiovisual fiction

These intratextual functions of taboo language in audiovisual fiction follow Allan and Burridge's study ("Swearing") concerning the everyday use of taboo language. Accordingly, we propose that taboo language in a fictional context has four possible functions at the intratextual level, namely.[2]

Expletive function

Sporadic taboo words are a way of portraying the frustration of the character. In a specific situation, and without an intention to offend anyone, the character can express anger or an exclamation towards an external element that bothers him, physically or psychologically.

EXAMPLES	**FILM**
Are you fucking kidding me?	*American Pie: Beta House*
Oh shit! Fucking no!	*Another Day in Paradise*
Don't fucking die on me, Mia.	*Pulp Fiction*

Abusive function

This function of taboo language is intended to insult and offend the other speaker or depreciate the object spoken about and evaluated negatively.

2 Examples are taken from the corpus.

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EXAMPLES	FILM
Nigger fell through that.	*Pulp Fiction*
This cocksucker is an arch criminal.	*Goodfellas*
Shoot that motherfucker!	*Jarhead*

Social function

Allan and Burridge ("Swearing") refer to the importance of the social function of taboo language that can, on the one hand, support bonds of intimacy and solidarity and, on the other hand, generate conflict between speakers. Relatedly, Norrick (27) mentions: "it [swearing in literary fiction] predictably offends some (other characters in the story-world and perhaps some readers as well), but for others, it will ratify membership in the group and create/sustain rapport". Consequently, in films, this type of language can 1) create distance between characters, as the taboo word can shock the other speaker; or 2) generate solidarity between characters because the taboo words may be the identity of a group, thus creating bonds of intimacy and identification.

EXAMPLES	FILM
You are fucking with traditions, Edgar.	*American Pie: Beta House*
Give him his money and we'll get the fuck out.	*Goodfellas*
You my nigga?	*Pulp Fiction*

Stylistic function

On everyday use, taboo language can stimulate and increase the liveliness of discourse (Allan and Burridge, "Swearing" 373). Also, in its fictional use, taboo may convey emotion to discourse, i.e., greater expressiveness.

EXAMPLES	FILM
Your ass ain't talking your way out of this shit.	*Pulp Fiction*
I'm scared shitless.	*Another Day in Paradise*
They are busting my balls over it.	*Goodfellas*

As such, taboo words are not arbitrary in films because they may portray 1) sporadic moments of frustration or anger of the character; 2) tense communicative situations where the character insults the other person; 3) relationships of solidarity or distance between two or more characters; or, finally, 4) moments when the character resorts to taboo to make the speech more emotional. This classification will allow for analysing and quantifying the functions of taboo words in a corpus.

2.4.2. The extratextual functions of taboo language in audiovisual fiction

In addition to references to intratextual functions, some authors have suggested that non-standard varieties fulfil functions beyond the story, that is, between the fictional text and its receivers. Related literature has provided data on the different functions of non-standard words in fiction at an extratextual level (e.g., Blake; Leech and Short; Dimitrova; Delabastita; Rosa; Ramos Pinto; Norrick).[3] These authors emphasise the importance of non-standard varieties in indirect characterisation, 1) in the realistic portrayal of the characters' voices; 2) in the identification of their status and social group; 3) in the understanding of their attitudes towards others and situations; 4) in the temporal and geographical localisation of the character; and 5) in the formulation of the characters' profile so the audiences can create ties or distance towards the characters.

Related literature also refers to the fact that the recreation of non-standard language in fiction is based on the values shared by the community. Consequently, in the fictional use of taboo,

3 Despite the relevance of these proposals, only Norrick highlights the functions of taboo, even if not a typology, while the remaining studies are related to dialect variation.

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audiences recognise these words and evaluate their meaning according to their prestige in the linguistic community. Audiences assign a profile to the character, with the sociocultural characteristics they associate with using taboo language. Norrick mentions the following:

> Swearing serves to characterise fictional persons because it evokes standard associations in readers: as a character trait, swearing signifies (male) toughness, (lower) working class; as a situational factor, swearing means pain, and strong emotion. (32)

Despite the latter's relevance, Norrick only considers the mimetic function of the use of taboo language in fiction. On the other hand, Delabastita distinguishes the comic function and the ideological function in addition to the mimetic function. Though proposed for studying the functions of linguistic variation in Shakespeare, Delabastita's framework is particularly relevant for categorising the extratextual functions of taboo language in films.

Mimetic function

Theorising about the mimetic function in literature dates back to ancient times when Plato and Aristotle discussed the imitation of natural things in fiction. Since then, several authors have mentioned verisimilitude as one of the characteristics of fictional discourse. Blake, Leech and Short, and Delabastita highlight the use of non-standard varieties to portray characters' dialects and idiolects and how they confer credibility, verisimilitude and authenticity to speech (Leech and Short 185).

Delabastita clarifies that the mimetic function of fictional discourse corresponds to the attempt to represent real discourse by giving credibility and substance to the characters (306). Based on sociolinguistic facts, even if potentially stereotyped (306), this recreation needs to be shared and identified by the audiences, who recognise the linguistic norms implicit in the speech:

> The mimetic function can only make individual characters and their personal verbal idiosyncrasies come to life against the background of more collective linguistic norms, defined in terms of social, regional or national identities. When characters … resort to 'foreign' languages or 'funny' accents, this adds further strokes to their individual portraits in the play, but not without simultaneously giving them a position and an identity in a wider spatio-temporal setting … (Delabastita 306)

Awarding a specific identity to the character allows the audience to position him on a continuum of prestige and a social hierarchy, creating expectations about his actions and the story's unfolding. Taboo language is frequently valued negatively, which may indicate that the audiences will recognise the stigma associated with this type of language and, consequently, antagonise the character. However, the notion of covert prestige is also relevant (cf., Labov, *Social Stratification*, *Sociolinguistic Patterns*, and *Principles*) because the audiences can positively evaluate these non-standard expressions and attribute social prestige to the character, generating empathy towards the character (Rosa 178).

EXAMPLES	**FILM**
Twenty-five fucking years.	*Goodfellas*
Don't spoil the joke, asshole.	*Jarhead*
We are done with this psychiatry bullshit.	*The Departed*

Comic function

Delabastita and other authors (e.g., Leech and Short; Rosa; Ramos Pinto) emphasise the importance of the comic function of dialect varieties, highlighting their purpose of generating humour. Relatedly, screenwriters and directors use linguistic mechanisms to provoke laughter, with taboo language often used to produce comic moments or satire. Delabastita (310), for example, associates the comic function with humour based on taboo words alluding to sex through jokes or misunderstandings. In addition, humour can result from the unexpected use of taboo in specific situations in which its inadequacy is recognised, as mentioned before.

Although relative to dialect variation, Rosa alludes to a relevant aspect of this function, also applicable to the study of taboo language:

> The recreation of the literary variety can have a parodic, comic or satirical function and therefore generate a distance to the character, which it marginalises; on the contrary, it can generate closeness and empathy, for example, when it is valued as a mark of authenticity. (178)

Accordingly, taboo words can also create empathy with the character due to the frequency of laughter in different situations, such as humorous insults, the character's catharsis in a specific situation, or puns.

EXAMPLES	**FILM**
He'll be a pussy magnet, baby.	*American Pie: Beta House*
– Fuck yourself. *– I'm tired from fucking your wife.* *– How's your mother?* *– Tired from fucking my father.*	*The Departed*
You are going to make a fucking cake.	*Goodfellas*

Ideological function

Delabastita (314) also suggests that the linguistic manipulation of characters' speech in literature can be motivated by ideological interests. Through the examples of the Shakespearean play *Henry V*, Delabastita (314) mentions that the character and his characteristic speech satirise countries based on beliefs and stereotypes. In the play, the broken English of some characters serves the purpose of demonstrating the superiority of the English characters. In this ideologically-motivated satire of the French, Welsh, and Scottish characters, English nationalism portrays the existing tension with France and the rest of the UK, mirroring the linguistic deviations of the characters, their inferiority and the inferiority of their country (335). The audiences also share this feeling of supremacy and nationalist pride and, consequently, feel part of a group that does not speak this way and is not the object of satire.

Thus, the ideological function of taboo in fiction is based on the linguistic stereotype of the speakers' marginality. As already mentioned, Xavier (*Esbatendo o tabu*), Soler Pardo, and Ávila-Cabrera (*Subtitling*) confirm the use of taboo words by the villain, or villains, of the story, thus highlighting the marginality of characters. Also ideologically motivated, the frequent insertion of taboo words in the speech of villains, such as criminals, mobsters, and murderers, among others, immediately implicates values related to low prestige. In the case of taboo, the audiences feel that they belong to another group, i.e., a group that does not use these words and, therefore, does not identify with the (wrong) actions associated with the character who often uses taboo.

EXAMPLES	**FILM**
Come here, you piece of shit.	*Goodfellas*
You don't fucking hit him.	*The Departed*
Let's not start sucking each other's dicks quite yet.	*Pulp Fiction*

Given the above, the typology of intra- and extratextual functions of taboo language in a fictional audiovisual context is resumed as follows (see Table 1):

Intratextual function	**Expletive function**
	Abusive function
	Social function
	Stylistic function
Extratextual function	Mimetic function
	Comic function
	Ideological function

Table 1 Intratextual and extratextual functions of taboo language in films. A typology.

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3. CASE STUDY

A corpus of films was created to analyse this typology, both qualitatively and quantitatively. First, films needed to have many taboo words to have a large sample of taboo language. In order to identify the films with a high frequency of taboo words, titles were crosschecked in different sources.[4] From these different sources, the films chosen to make up the corpus are *Goodfellas* (1990), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Another Day in Paradise* (1998), *Jarhead* (2005), *The Departed* (2006) and *American Pie: Beta House* (2007). Also, to ensure non-biased results, no sampling was implemented. Analysis was done on Excel where each taboo entry was contextualized with the lines and functions were individually accessed in the columns "Intratextual function" and "Extratextual function".

All in all, in the 761 minutes of the films comprising the corpus, 2069 taboo words were identified (an average of 2,71 taboo words per minute) (see Table 2).

Table 2 Total number and frequency per minute of taboo words in the source texts.

FILM	NUMBER OF TABOO WORDS	FREQUENCY OF TABOO WORDS PER MINUTE
Another Day in Paradise	400	3.9
Jarhead	432	3.2
Pulp Fiction	437	2.8
The Departed	378	2.5
Goodfellas	341	2.3
American Pie: Beta House	81	1

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. CORPUS ANALYSIS

4.1.1. Intratextual functions of taboo words

Regarding the role played by taboo language in the text and the relationships established between the characters in films, four intratextual functions of taboo language were proposed (cf., Allan and Burridge, "Swearing"): 1) the expletive function, corresponding to the sporadic use of taboo words, portraying the character's frustration or anger; 2) the abusive function, to offend another character or denigrate an object; 3) the social function, according to which taboo language creates distance or solidarity amongst characters; and, finally, 4) the stylistic function, which corresponds to the use of taboo to grant emotion and expressiveness to the speech.

Given this, to identify the distribution patterns of intratextual functions, each taboo word in the films was classified according to the four categories and then quantified. The distribution of intratextual functions of the 2069 taboo words in the films shows some variation, though there is no clear predominance of any category (see Table 3).

Table 3 Absolute and relative frequencies of intratextual functions in the corpus.

INTRATEXTUAL FUNCTIONS	ABSOLUTE FREQUENCY	RELATIVE FREQUENCY
Social function	749	36%
Stylistic function	698	34%
Abusive function	334	16%
Expletive function	288	14%

Data shows a balanced distribution of the intratextual functions of taboo language, with a tenuous predominance of the social function (36%), i.e., establishing bonds of solidarity and distance between the characters, and the stylist function (34%). The use of taboo words in

4 "List of films that most frequently use the word fuck" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of _films_that_most_frequently_use_the_word_%22fuck%22); IMDb lists "Films with the most frequent use of the F-word" and "Movies with the most f-words" (https://www.imdb.com/list/ls058940402/; https://www.imdb.com/list/ls064002140/); "restricted" movies according to The Classification and Rating Administration (USA) (https://www.carafilmratings.com).

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these films is mainly related to fictional situations in which a character uses taboo language to generate solidarity and to identify a specific (outlaw) group. In most of the films in the corpus (i.e., *Pulp Fiction*; *Goodfellas*; *Another Day in Paradise*; *The Departed*), the characters are marginals, robbers, mobsters and murderers, who use taboo language as a way of establishing close relationships and strengthening the group. However, there are also cases where taboo language is used to create distance towards other characters in conflicting situations. For example, in one of the scenes with the highest frequency of taboo words in *Another Day in Paradise*, Bobbie, the main character, and Jewels, another member of the marginal group, continually use taboo words as a way of breaking up a previously supportive relationship, and now broken. The scene culminates with Jewels being killed by Bobbie:

JEWELS. Thanks for the **fuckin**g back up!
You believe this **piece-of-shit** pulled a gun on me!
BOBBIE. Hit him again, and I'll kill you!
JEWELS. Get the **fucking** thing off me; this is business!
BOBBIE. **Fuck** you, this ain't business, this is **bullshit**!
JEWELS. **Motherfucker**, I'll kill you! (01:22:26–01:22:40)

4.1.2. The extratextual functions of taboo words

To identify the distribution of the extratextual functions of taboo words in the films, the three proposed functions (based on Delabastita) were quantified: 1) mimetic function, according to which the taboo word confers realism to the discourse fictional portraying its authentic use; 2) comic function, according to which there is a production of humour; and 3) ideological function, according to which we associate taboo with the way the villains in the stories speak. Accordingly, Table 4 shows how these functions are unevenly distributed in the films.

Table 4 Absolute and relative frequencies of extratextual functions in the corpus.

EXTRATEXTUAL FUNCTIONS	ABSOLUTE FREQUENCY	RELATIVE FREQUENCY
Ideological function	1213	59%
Mimetic function	786	38%
Comic function	70	3%

Data shows the predominance of the ideological function of taboo language (59%) and the mimetic function (39%). The comic function is restricted to 70 taboo words (3%). In this corpus, the predominance of taboo is based on the linguistic stereotype of the villain and the outlaw. Most characters in *Pulp Fiction*, *Goodfellas*, *Another Day in Paradise*, and *The Departed* match this gangster and anti-hero reality.[5] In these stories, the main characters are mobsters, drug dealers, criminals, and murderers, who often use taboo words that the audiences recognise, thus creating expectations about the role of these characters in the storyline.

In addition, the frequency of taboo words with a mimetic function (38%) is also relevant. The audiences are here led to recognise these words as a portrait of the discursive reality, which confers credibility to the character. The film *Jarhead* has the highest percentage of taboo words with a mimetic function (99%). In this film, taboo language is frequent (439 words) and is used to portray the way of speaking of the United States Army Marine Corps. The audiences, therefore, recognise the relations of solidarity between the marines, a young and violent social group about to move to the Gulf War. Simultaneously, those taboo words set the hierarchical predominance of superior officers straight, as the latter use offensive taboo to create fear.

Finally, the instances of comic taboo in the corpus refer predominantly to *American Pie: Beta House*. In this film, most of the taboo words and expressions stimulate laughter in satirical situations of the wild life of university students. In addition, these taboo words motivate a relationship of empathy between the audiences and the characters, who evaluate them positively for their humour production.

5 C.f. Soler Pardo (141) for a detailed description of the anti-hero and taboo.

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4.2. TABOO: THE TRADITION OF THE LINGUISTIC STEREOTYPE IN FILMS

Norrick mentions that the profile of the character who frequently resorts to taboo words was traditionally related to a linguistic stereotype of the male speaker, low social stratum, low schooling and poor education. He also highlights that this panorama has been changing; now, these characters can be female, of high social class and educated. However, this changing scenario was not confirmed in the studies of Lippi-Green, Dobrow and Gidney, Kozloff, Azad, and Hodson concerning the use of dialectal features in audiovisual fiction, nor in the studies of Xavier (*Esbatendo o tabu*), Soler Pardo, and Ávila-Cabrera (*Subtitling*) concerning the use of taboo language in the audiovisual context, associated with the use of taboo by the villain(s) of the story.

Accordingly, taboo in most films of the corpus maintains the linguistic stereotype referred to by Norrick. In *Pulp Fiction*, *Goodfellas*, *Another Day in Paradise*, and *The Departed*, the main characters who often use taboo are, in fact, men from low social strata, marginalised in society, living illegally, and resorting to drug trafficking, assaults and murders. By portraying the villain and their typical way of speaking, the films point towards the audiovisual tradition, which is then recognised by the audiences.

Nonetheless, stereotypes related to taboo, other than outlaw groups, were also identified in the films. In *Jarhead*, the linguistic stereotype of the taboo language is related to the usual way of speaking of the troops, which the audiences easily recognise and create expectations regarding the story. In this film, taboo language is generalised to all ranks of American troops, by young soldiers or by higher ranks towards lower ranks. Consequently, there is not an association of negative values with this stereotype, but rather an empathy for groups of young teenagers deployed to War. Additionally, taboo language is related to young people, a generation that (pro)typically uses taboo words.

In *American Pie: Beta House*, university students are characterised by the use of taboo and the audiences recognise the adequacy of this language in the dialogue of upper-class young people. For this reason, the audiences establish expectations regarding the story's unfolding based on this (positive) stereotype because most situations in which taboo is used are comic. In both films, the linguistic stereotype of taboo language goes beyond the low social stratum, uneducated speaker, to other specific groups, i.e., young people. Relatedly, Norrick's suggestion (32) regarding the change in the panorama of taboo in fiction is confirmed in part of the corpus.

Also, the exaggeration in producing taboo words is typical to the six films (over 3 per minute). Therefore, this feature is exaggerated to facilitate the group's identification and immediate recognition of the linguistic stereotype.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study empirically validated a typology of functions of taboo language in films. Previous research offered several suggestions for the role taboo plays in audiovisual characterisation but did not provide a systematic, empirical-based analysis of the different layers of these functions.

We proposed that taboo language can have different functions within and outside of the film in the relationships established between characters and between the film and its audience. The typology arising from this suggestion was then tested in a corpus and analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. However, this typology should be considered as work in progress as a different corpus could add extra functions not discovered here. In fact, the choice of films (led by the criterium of the high frequency of taboo words) presents one of the main limitations of this study, as the majority of films studied here are mainly related to the Mafia and crime, which could bias the results. Also, even though the corpus size was considered adequate, a larger sample could allow for more comprehensive conclusions.

Regarding avenues of research, future studies could focus on testing this typology in a different corpus, covering several genres. A future study could also comparatively analyse this typology of functions in films and in everyday use to explore how mimetic the cinema is.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Catarina Xavier orcid.org/0000-0002-2687-1782
University of Lisbon, School of Arts and Humanities, Portugal

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