

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Taboo Words in *Deadpool 2*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to describe the types and functions of taboo words uttered by the characters and describe the social background that affect the main character's utterances in Deadpool 2. The data are utterances containing taboo words. The analysis focuses on the types and functions of taboo words by applying Azzaro's (2005) theory. The finding shows, 1) there are five types of taboo words in use. The most frequently used taboo is sexual term with 70 occurrences (52.2%), followed by physical term with 23 occurrences (17.2%), religious term with 21 occurrences (15.7%), scatological term with 17 occurrences (12.7%), and mental term with three occurrences (2.2%). 2) There are two functions of taboo words: swearing with 82 occurrences (64%) and insult with 46 occurrences (36%). 3). Two social variables affect the main character's use of taboo words: occupational hierarchy and social status.

Keywords: Deadpool 2 Movie, social background, taboo words, type and function.

INTRODUCTION

The word *taboo* is borrowed from Tongan, a language spoken by Polynesians in the Pacific archipelago where any sacred or humble things are forbidden to touch or even talk about (Gu, 2002). It was first introduced in the late 18th century by Captain Cook. According to Wardhaugh (2000), a taboo is a prohibition or avoidance in any society of behavior believed to be harmful to its members in that it would cause anxiety, embarrassment, or shame. It usually refers to sex, the body, or people's race.

Taboo words are sometimes used in social interaction. They are used to convey thoughts or messages and also express feelings. Goldsmith (2013) believes that people need to express their feelings, especially pain, anger, and sadness. By expressing

their anger and sadness, people let out what hurts and make more room in their hearts for positive thoughts and feelings (Goldsmith, 2013). Moreover, one of the effective ways people express their feelings is by producing taboo words which have a more substantial impact than any other words.

The use of taboo words in social interaction has its benefits. Edmons (2017) stated that recent studies suggest that people who use taboo words to swear are perceived as more trustworthy than others who are less potty-mouthed. It also improves psychological and physical health. According to Burton (2012), "the health benefits of swearing include increased circulation, elevated endorphins, and an overall sense of calm, control, and well-being". Stephens, Atkins and Kingston (2009) argue that unleashing expletives might raise people's pain threshold. It raises people's heart rate and pumps more adrenaline through their bodies. Those two psychological responses make people more tolerant of pain.

The linguistics of taboo words is interesting to study because they may vary depending on the culture and period of time. Azzaro (2005) explains the difference of British taboo according to its period of time. In the Middle Ages, swearing was a form of crying out to God for help, so the linguistic taboo mainly concerned the words of religion. However, in Charles II and the Restoration era, sexual taboos appeared, such as *fuck*, *prick*, and *penis*, which emerged during the course of the 1600s.

This research deals with the use of taboo words by the society in the U.S. culture. It investigates taboo words used by the characters in the movie *Deadpool 2*. The focus is on the types, functions of taboo words and the social factors affecting the use of taboo words.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have been carried out using the theory of taboo words. Anggita (2015) examined taboo words in the *Bad Teacher* Movie to identify the types and functions of taboo words uttered by the characters in the movie. The data were in the form of utterances, and the context of the data was the dialogues uttered by the characters in the movie. 32 taboo words were found, with obscenity as the most frequently used. They are used mostly for showing contempt.

Febrianuswantoro & Iragiliati (2008) study the use of taboo words by the main characters in *Conviction* movies. Their study uses Ekstrom's theory to identify the types, Brown and Levinson's Face Threatening Act (FTA) and Culpeper's theory of positive impoliteness super strategy to analyze the functions. The finding reveals that obscenity is the most frequently used type.

Rahmayani (2018) studies the types and functions of taboo words in *The Wolf of Wall Street* movie. The findings show three types of taboo words with the following percentages: Obscenity (64,8%), Epithets (13,1%), and Vulgarity (8,2%); 3 functions with the following percentages: to create strong

interpersonal relations (35,6%), to provide catharsis (24,5%), and to draw attention to oneself (17,8%).

Wahyudi (2008) investigates the types and functions of taboo words in Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story*. The findings show that sexual terms were most frequently used as terms of endearment.

Cipto (2006) investigates swear words in the movie *Jackass*. It focuses on the reasons why the characters in the movie swear. The findings reveal that the only reason the characters in the movie swear is to express their emotions.

All of the previous studies investigate taboo words used in movies, focusing on their semantic types and functions. The study reported here also examines the types and functions of taboo words in an American movie, i.e., *Deadpool 2.* However, It also investigates the social factors affecting the use of taboo words in the movie.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Azzaro (2005) argues that taboo words apply to social, semantic, and psychological areas of meaning related to cultural taboo proposed by Jay (1992). He classifies taboo words semantically into five classes: mental terms, physical terms, religious terms, scatological terms, and sexual terms.

Mental terms refer to words related to a mental disability, illness, or intelligence deficiency such as *stupid* and *idiot*. Physical terms are words related to genital or other parts of a human and animal's body, physical appearance, or physical disability such as *dick* and *asshole*. Religious terms can be defined as words that refer to things considered sacred in specific beliefs or religions, such as *Jesus Christ, hell,* and *damn*. Scatological terms are words related to human and animal excrement. Words that belong to this term include *piss, poo,* and *shit*. Sexual terms are words related to sexuality or physical intimacy and also gender. Such words as *fuck, bitch,* and *motherfucker* belong to this category.

Further, Azzaro (2005) categorizes taboo words in terms of their functions into swearing and insulting. Swearing is mainly characterized as a

result of a situation in generating the emotion of anger or frustration (Azzaro, 2005). It could also become a tool to express surprise or amazement. Azzaro (2005) relates swearing to previously mentioned religious, sexual, and scatological religious terms. However, there is a possibility that the other two terms could also appear in this function.

Insults are believed to cause more harm than swearing because those words are targeted to a specific addressee (Azzaro, 2005). It is used to express the speaker's anger or frustration to the addressee. It could also be used to show their arrogance and superiority towards the addressee. Mental, physical, scatological, and sexual terms are believed to be related to this function.

Furthermore, Wardhaugh (2000) proposes seven social factors that affect the use of taboo words: social status, age, gender, family relationship, occupational hierarchy, and race. This theory was applied in the analysis of taboo words used in the movie Deadpool 2.

METHODS

The data for this research were obtained from the movie script Deadpool 2 downloaded from https://www.scripts.com/. The movie was released by 20th Century Fox on May 15, 2018, and was accessible offline on a DVD format. The movie runs for 1 hour and 59 minutes.

The data analysis went through three steps. The first step was classifying all utterances containing taboo words using Azzaro's (2005) semantic taxonomy of taboo word into mental terms, physical terms, religious terms, scatological terms, and sexual terms.

The second step involved analyzing the taboo words in terms of their functions of taboo words. The analysis was done by applying Azzaro's (2005) categorization of the functions of taboo words into two functions of taboo words: swearing and insult.

The last step was analyzing the social factors that affect the use of taboo words by applying Wardhaugh's (2000) theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section consists of three parts. The first part discusses types of taboo words. The second part discusses the functions of taboo words, and the last part explains the social factors that affect the main character in using taboo words.

Types of Taboo Words

Sexual terms are the most frequently used taboo words in the movie (70 times). The second most frequently used type of taboo words is physical terms (23 times). Religious terms are the thirdfrequently used taboo words (21 times), followed by scatological terms with 17 occurrences and mental terms four occurrences.

Table 1. Frequency of taboo words in *Deadpool 2*

No.	Taboo Terms	Token	%
1	Mental	3	2.24
2	Physical	23	17.16
3	Religious	21	15.67
4	Scatological	17	12.69
5	Sexual	70	52.24
	Total	134	100.00

Mental Terms

Mental terms are the least frequently used taboo words in the movie with just 3 (2.24 %) occurrences. The words found in the movie are stupid with one occurrence, dumb with one occurrence, and idiot with two occurrences. The following example illustrates the use of *idiot* as a taboo word.

 $[01:01:58 \rightarrow 01:02:04]$ (1)

Context: Wade and other X-force members were landed one by one using a parachute. He was directing Shatterstar to avoid landing in the helipad after landing safely in front of a billboard.

Wade: "Left! Left! No, stage left, you idiots! Well, I guess we found something you're not better at. Vanisher."

In this dialogue, Wade is giving his team directions to land properly. However, everyone on his team is an amateur, so they could not follow his instructions and land in chaos. He is extremely dejected, so he calls one of his team *idiot*. The word *idiot* itself has the same meaning as foolish or stupid. It describes someone's intellectual disabilities.

Physical Terms

Physical terms relate to human physical appearances and disabilities, or genital parts of the human and animal body. They are the second most frequently used words with 23 (17.16%) occurrences in the movie. The words found in the movie are *dick* with eight occurrences, *ass* four occurrences, *asshole*, *cock* and *shithole* two occurrences each, *butt*, *cunt* and *pussy* one occurrence each. The following is an example.

$$(2) \quad [01:23:01 \rightarrow 01:23:14]$$

Context: Wade was in front of the X-men's house asking for apologies after what he had done on the day when he killed a nurse in the Essex House. He was also convincing Colossus to come to the Essex House and help them to stop Russell from killing the Headmaster

Wade: "He's teamed up with Juggernaut! The Juggernaut! That's like my favorite Marvel character ever, but you should never meet your heroes. Because, honestly, he's a bit of a dick! And like a lot of a dick, he's as hard as a rock. And causes nothing but problems."

This dialogue happens in front of the X-men house. Wade and his new team, Cable, Domino, and Dopinder ask for Colossus's help to stop Russell from killing the headmaster. He convinces Colossus to face the Juggernaut as Russell is teamed up with the Juggernaut to kill the headmaster. He uses the word dick to refer to the Juggernaut. It refers to sexual anatomy as it means a man's genitals. However, in this dialogue, it is used to refer to the Juggernaut's behavior which always causes problems wherever he is.

Religious Terms

Religious terms are the third frequently used terms with 21 (15.67%) occurrences in the movie. It contains religious-related words such as *Jesus Christ, hell,* and *goddamn*. The words found in the movie are *Jesus Christ* with six occurrences, *Jesus* five occurrences, *goddamn* four occurrences, *hell* with three occurrences, and *Christ, damn* and *Mary - mother of Joseph* one occurrence each. Below is an example.

(3)
$$[01:12:37 \rightarrow 01:12:44]$$

Context: Wade and Domino were finally meeting Russell and the Juggernaut. They were in the middle of the street arguing about what they should or should not do after escaping the Ice Box

Wade: "I care about you?' cause **goddamn** it, I care about you, Russell. What's Juggernaut got that I don't have? Don't you say legs! I know you're gonna say legs!"

This dialogue happens when Wade forms an X-force to help Russell escape from the convoy. He tries his best to save Russell from taking revenge on the headmaster. However, that was too late because Russell befriended the Juggernaut. He manages to stop the convoy himself together with the Juggernaut. After the incident, Wade apologizes to Russell for leaving him in the Ice Box. Russell feels disappointed and thinks that Wade does not care about him. Therefore, he decides to befriend the Juggernaut and takes his revenge on the headmaster together.

In this dialogue, Wade uses the word *goddamn* to show his sincerity. Esterika (2016) argues that the word *goddamn* is usually used in Church when the priest explains the condemnation to someone who is not following God's way of life.

Scatological Term

A scatological term relates to human and animal excrement. This term is common among children (Jay, 1992) because it is one of the early words that

they use and hear during their toilet training, although there are a lot of adults who use it in the movie. The word found in the movie is shit with 17 occurrences. The following is one example.

 $[00:10:18 \rightarrow 00:10:47]$ (4)

Context: Wade was back home late to celebrate their first anniversary. He and Vanessa were in the living room watching a movie and discussing what their future would be.

Wade "So weird. Family was always an F-word to me. My pile of shit father took off and bailed. I mean, it's not like I have a lot of strong models to draw off for Todd."

Vanessa: "Hey, look at me. You are not your father. Besides, I will never, ever let our child be named Todd."

This conversation takes place in their house. Wade and Vanessa are spending their anniversary watching and talking in the living room. They are planning to build a family together and are talking about having a child. They happily argue about some names for their future child. However, suddenly, Wade is afraid of being a father. He is looking back to his painful childhood when his father ran away and left him and his mother behind. He is explaining how he has no idea what a father means and what he should do as a father. Therefore, Vanessa convinces him that he is not his father and that he will not do the same as what his father did to him and his mother.

The dialogue above shows the use of a scatological term when Wade uses the word shit which relates to excretory terms. According to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, the word shit (sht, n.d.) itself is a vulgar or slang word that means feces. However, in this dialogue, it is more likely to be interpreted as a bad father.

Sexual Term

A sexual term refers to sexuality, physical intimacy, and genders such as fuck, bitch, and motherfucker. Jay (1992) reports that it refers to a sex act and related imagery that have been deemed to be so offending by the court that it could not be pronounced freely. Jay also states that the word fuck, although it might be restricted in the media, is still one of the sexual words most frequently used in public. The words found in the movie are fuck with 55 occurrences, which comes with various forms such as fucker and fucking. The word bitch was used four times, motherfucker seven times, and *sex* three times. Below is an example illustrating the use of the word *fuck* in the movie.

 $[00:33:31 \rightarrow 00:33:39]$ (5)

Context: A crowd was gathering in front of the Essex House when Russell threw tantrums. After calming Russell down, Wade killed two of the nurses there. Colossus rushed and pushed him to the ground then scolded him.

Colossus: "We have rules! You are not a judge, jury or executioner!"

Wade: "Fuck your rules! I fight for what's right! And sometimes you gotta fight dirty!"

The dialogue happens when Wade and other X-men help the Essex House. As a trainee, Wade is trying to solve the problem between Russell and the Essex House. It takes some time for Wade to stop him and still he manages to calm Russell down. But then he asked Wade to bring him to the Ice Box. Hearing his request, Wade assumes that the Essex House is torturing Russell during his medication. Wade decides to kill Essex's headmaster and nurses. He is arrested by Colossus before he kills the headmaster. The fact that he kills people makes Colossus mad and disappointed. Colossus hits him hard and reminds him of the rules they have.

In the dialogue, Wade uses the word fuck which is categorized as a sexual term. In literally, fuck refers to sexual activity between individuals. However, Wade uses it to declare that he does not care about the rule that Colossus made.

The Functions of Taboo Words

The study also found two functions of taboo words used in the movie. Based on the data, swearing is the more frequently used than insult. Swearing was used 86 times (64.18%) in the movie while insult 48 times (35.82%).

Swearing

Swearing is mostly characterized as a result of a situation in generating the emotion of anger and frustration or a tool to express surprise, amazement, annoyance, or fear (Azzaro, 2005). It is a reflective act that usually does not have a target so that it does not need an answer. This function is commonly realized by religious, scatological, and sexual terms (Azzaro, 2005). From 82 data found, 45 swears are related to sexual terms. The second frequently used taboo words in swearing belong to religious terms with 19 occurrences followed by scatological terms which were used 14 times. In addition, in this study, physical terms were also used four times to express this function. Below are two examples.

(6) $[01:17:25 \rightarrow 01:17:46]$

Context: Domino, Weasel, and Dopinder were visiting Wade and Althea in their apartment when Cable came. He came to ask for help and make an agreement with them to stop Russell from killing the Headmaster.

Cable: Your boy's gonna kill the headmaster of the orphanage tonight. After that, he gets a real taste for it.

Dopinder: Like 10-year-old Kirsten Dust, motherfucker!

Cable: So he keeps killing, killing, killing and killing. Until one day, he kills the wrong **fucking** people.

Wade is in his apartment waiting for his legs to grow after the Juggernaut tore them apart. Dopinder, Weasel, and Domino were there too to visit him. Curious about what has happened, Althea asks them for an explanation. In the middle of arguing about the incident, Cable visits them. As someone from the future, he knows exactly what will happen after Rusell runs away from the Ice Box. He tells them all the plans that Russell made with the Juggernaut and that they should also make a plan to stop them.

As a taxi driver and the only one who does not have a superpower, Dopinder is not included in the conversation. He is there only because he has been a good friend of Wade for a long time. However, after being friends with superheroes, he also has a dream to be one of them. So he tries to be in the plans that

they are made. He tries to join the conversation and respond to every single word as much as possible. He also uses the word *motherfucker* to express his excitement and amazement thinking that he might be one of them.

(7) $[00:36:18 \rightarrow 00:36:30]$

Context: Wade and Russell were dragged into their cell in the Ice Box after the incident in front of the Essex House. They were forced to use a power-dampening collar.

Russell: You're a long way from your superpowers.

Wade: Yeah, fuck!

After killing two nurses in the Essex House, Wade is dragged to the Ice Box to get his punishment together with Russell. As soon as they arrive, a lot of criminals and gangsters welcome and pay attention to them as if they are judging them. After that, they are locked in cell number 7. However, Wade loses his superpower as he is forced to wear a power-dampening collar to avoid a fight in the cell. As a result, cancer that he suffered for years is uncontrollable along with the loss of his superpower. He starts to feel pain all over his body.

In this scene, Wade is pissed off after he is forced to enter the cell while wearing a power-dampening collar when he is dying because of his cancer. He fully disagrees with the idea of superheroes forced to use a power-dampening collar when they are already imprisoned somewhere far and completely guarded.

Insult

Azzaro (2005) argues that insult causes more harm than swearing because it a specific addressee. Speakers often use it to express their anger or frustration towards the addressee. It may also provoke or assault the addressee. Azzaro (2005) puts four terms in this function: mental, physical, scatological, and sexual terms. From 46 data, the research found there are 3 insults related to mental terms, 16 insults of physical terms, 3 insults of scatological terms, and 23 insults of sexual terms. However, this research also found 1 religious term used to insult. Below are two examples illustrating the use of taboo words to insult.

(8) $[01:26:10 \rightarrow 01:26:17]$

Context: Russell and the Juggernaut were in front of the Essex house. They were about to kill the headmaster and burn the entire house. The Juggernaut frightened them so that they would not intervene in his business.

Juggernaut: I'm gonna shove that cab driver right up your **ass**.

Dopinder: My body and my hands are so soft.

To stop Russell from killing the headmaster, Wade and the X-force agree on a plan and seek help from the X-men. So Dopinder drives them to the X-men house. Wade plays an audible song to gain their attention in front of the house. Then he gives a long speech persuading them to support their plans. He also apologizes for what he had done before. After that, they directly go to the Essex House as they are already late chasing Russell and the Juggernaut. As soon as they arrive, they meet the Juggernaut who is in charge of the front door. Aware of the condition, the Juggernaut provokes them as soon as he sees them and finishes things up quickly so that he could join Russell as soon as possible.

(9) $[00:22:11 \rightarrow 00:22:24]$

Context: Wade was resting in the living room and thinking about his suicidal plan. Colossus was trying to make Deadpool become the X-men member. However, he strongly opposed that idea.

Colossus: Take your mask off, Wade. we need to talk. You need a fresh start. With training, you can be X-man.

Wade: You're wasting your time, Shiny Jesus. I'm not X-man material. Understatement of the year.

The dialogue above takes place in the X-men house. Hearing Wade burnt himself inside his house, Colossus came by to take good care of him. He collects parts of Wade's body one at a time and brings it to the X-men house. He let him rest as long as he wanted in the living room. After he gets some rest, Colossus enters the living room and finds him lying on the sofa talking nonsense. Then he talks to Wade seriously about how he needs a fresh start. However,

as expected Wade makes so many excuses to refuse it

In this dialogue, Wade verbally assaults Colossus by calling him Shiny Jesus. He mocks Colossus as someone who is extremely kind so that he is bothered to help him get his new start. It is supported by his facial expression which shows that he is angrily looking down on Colossus.

Social Factors Affecting the Use of Taboo Words

Some social factors influence the characters of the movie in using certain kinds of taboo words such as age, gender role, social status, race, family relationship, intimacy, and occupational hierarchy. All of those factors influence the way they use taboo words in their daily communication. However, this research found two main factors that influence the characters of the movie using taboo words.

Occupational Hieararchy

The most dominant factor that influences the characters in using taboo words in their daily communication is the occupational hierarchy. Because of the circumstances in their field of work, they have to deal with a lot of mass murderers, gangsters, and other criminals. The main character himself was a mercenary-for-hire living in New York who turns into a superhero after many incidents happened. Then he becomes a contract killer. Because their job requires violence, Wade and the other characters tend to use taboo words that have a strong impact on their communication. They usually use it to scare or intimidate their enemy or simply to annoy their addressee.

Social Status

Social status is also the main factor that influences the characters' uses of taboo. Most of the characters in the movie are from middle to lower class communities. It can be seen from their houses and the neighborhood. The main character, Wade, and his spouse, Vanessa, lived in a small ordinary studio apartment. None of his furnishings looks expensive or luxurious. After Vanessa dies, he moves to a sharing house kind of apartment with similar conditions to his apartment before. But his new

apartment looks dirtier than his old apartment. The furnishings are old and a thick layer of dust has built upon them. All of them clearly show that his house and the neighborhood belongs to the middle to lower class community.

The characters also rarely interact with well-educated middle to upper-class communities. They and the people surrounding them are workers whose jobs are known for middle to lower class communities. Wade, the main character of this movie, has been living around gangsters and criminals because of his job. His spouse, Vanessa, was a prostitute who shared the same workplace as Weasel, a bartender and also Wade's best friend. His other best friend, Dopinder, is a taxi driver. Those jobs are mostly done by people who are not highly educated.

CONCLUSION

The characters in the movie *Deadpool 2* produce 134 utterances containing taboo words: 3 occurrences of mental terms, 23 occurrences of physical terms, 21 occurrences of religious terms, 17 occurrences of scatological terms and 70 occurrences of sexual terms. The results of the research show that sexual terms are the most frequently used type of taboo words with 70 occurrences or 52.24%. The least-frequently used type of taboo is mental terms with only 3 occurrences or 2.24%. This implies that the characters in the movie believe that sexual terms are more effective taboo words to use in a conversation than mental terms or other terms.

In terms of the functions of taboo words in *Deadpool 2*, the study found that taboo words were used for two different functions: swearing and insult. The results show that taboo words were used more frequently to express swearing (64.18%) than insult (35.82%). This suggests that the characters in the movie generally use taboo words to swear instead of to insult or assault people.

Finally, in terms of the social factors that affect the characters' use of taboo words, two main factors were identified: occupational hierarchy, and social status. These social factors affect the use of especially sexual terms which the characters consider the most effective words to swear.

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