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“Swearing across cultures: A lexical analysis of
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Sonja Renate Astrid Pühringer

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1. Introduction

Swearing – part of everyday life and language in the 21st century but still shunned by a great part of linguists, sociologists and other academic experts until recently. Largely ignored by linguist investigation for decades, it only became a topic of interest a short time ago. For this reason, previous research is relatively scarce. However, in my opinion there is no need to omit this subject for it is part of human nature.

Reinhold Aman (1996: 153-156) describes swearing as a verbal-aggressive act which is caused by some kind of offense and usually happens during a state of arousal. It is the last link in a tripartite chain of cause and effect following frustration and affect. First one is affected by some kind of offense which can be caused by anything justifiable (or not), including another person or persons, objects, animals and also oneself. The offense leads to the first stage in our chain of reaction, namely frustration.

Frustration then results in affect, which is a state of arousal that can be both physical and physiological. Depending on the agitation cause we can experience a number of emotions including fear, jealousy, hatred, envy, resentment, impatience, or rage. Physical manifestations of affect include changes in blood pressure, breathing, sweating, or shaking.

Whenever we are not able to or do not want to control our affect, it results in the third stage: aggression. Sometimes physical aggression is expressed via corporeal violence and in other cases the offender attacks with his or her words, i.e. via swearing. Of course, the two reactions can also be combined. Corporeal aggression which may accompany swearing can be facial expressions (such as frowning, baring one's teeth, or poking out one's tongue), gesticulations (like stamping one's foot, shaking one's fist at somebody, or giving someone the finger), or assault.

Thus, swearing happens in situations when we are overpowered by emotion and feel the need to articulate our feelings with aggression. In other words, it is a way of calming our agitated affect. This raises the question why something that is part of human nature is avoided so much. The answer lies within the concept of taboo. Swearing is an act rooted in the idea of taboo, inseparably linked with it, and therefore avoided by many.

Subsequently, I will explore the link between taboo and swearing further. Following this I will also look at previous linguistic research on swearing and more recent conceptions about offensive language. This includes the distinction between mode and content, different functions of swearing, major lexical categories, and various disguise mechanisms.

However, the aim of this thesis is not to look at theoretic concepts of swearing. These will merely serve as foundation for my actual goal, namely an empirical analysis of swearing across cultures. I have long been interested in this topic and what sparked my interest many years ago were two different versions of the movie *Pulp Fiction*, the original version in English and its German dubbing. I soon noticed that there are huge differences between the two scripts and it has long been my desire to analyze these. For this reason I chose *Pulp Fiction* as basis for my analysis.

I will analyze the two different movie scripts of *Pulp Fiction* and compare and contrast the use of offensive language in both. Since the original version of the text is English, my focus will be on English swearwords and how they are translated into German. I want to stress that I write this thesis from a linguistic perspective and therefore translation techniques will not be considered in the analysis. The focus will be on lexical aspects of swearwords in English and German. Furthermore, I want to declare that the examples cited throughout this thesis are expressions of slang and for the most part transcriptions of spoken language. Therefore they do not follow the rules of traditional grammar.

My hypothesis is that there are considerably more swearwords in English than in German and that the former are also more strikingly offensive than the latter. I also expect that there are some lexical similarities since both are Germanic languages. Moreover, English has had a strong influence on German due to globalization and I have previously noticed that this is also reflected in the German dubbing of *Pulp Fiction*.

I. Theoretical background: Swearing

2. Swearword evolution

Swearing has a long and interesting history and over the centuries it has undergone several changes. Nowadays, the first association most people have when hearing the verb *to swear* has to do with insulting or cursing. However, the oldest form of the verb, namely Old English *swerian* (Pearson 2005: 1782), had no connection to offensive language at all, but merely expressed the linguistic functions of taking oaths or pledging. These functions – now called ‘asseveration’ or ‘attestation’ – were the only meaning ascribed to the word from about 900 to 1400 (Hughes 2006: xvi).

Over time, more meanings and uses were added to the word. For instance, during the Renaissance, swearing often was a means of expressing importance and significance. Therefore, the definition of the word was widened and instances of swearing in Shakespearean plays could be both “the calling to witness of something, divine or otherwise, to seal vows of allegiance and promises of love or to attest the truth of a statement; and (...) to add emphasis to one’s speech” (Shirley 1979: xi). Furthermore, around 1600 it was already used synonymously to *cursing* in England. The term *swearing* in the sense of offensive language has first been cited in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1430. The lexeme *swearword* was an American invention and it was first mentioned in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1883 (Macaulay 2006: 99).

While a number of other meanings have been added to the term in the last centuries, the original one is still in use today in formal settings (Hughes 2006: and Macaulay 2006: 98). For instance, when a witness takes an oath in court by pronouncing the following words (Hughes 2006: xvii):

- (1) *I solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, (so help me God).*

Nevertheless, there are also less formal occurrences as found in sayings such as:

- (2) *I swear that ... (I’m telling the truth).*

(3) *I swear by everything holy.*

(4) *I swear on my mother's grave.*

In those expressions that include objects, the entities referred to (God, the mother and 'everything holy') have important personal significance to the speaker. The object of the vow found in (3), the mother, seems to be a common European reference in vowing because several European languages contain similar sayings. In Spanish for instance, there is a literal equivalent to the English oath referring to the mother's grave:

(5) *Lo juro por la tumba de mi madre* ('I swear on my mother's grave')

Also, there is a similar saying in German in which people vow something on their mother. While it has the same semantic meaning as the English and Spanish examples above, there is a slight linguistic difference: instead of mentioning the mother's grave, they swear on her life:

(6) *Ich schwöre beim Leben meiner Mutter.* ('I swear on my mother's life')

In the German as well as the Spanish case, the mother can be exchanged by anyone or anything the person regards as sacred. Since the objects are regarded as holy, the statements obtain a special, more powerful meaning.

Though newer functions of swearing – including name-giving and cursing – differ in meaning from the original one, they are similar in respect to the intrinsic power words possess. This power is rooted in the ancient practice of magic which regards certain words and/or uses of words as sacred and ascribes world-changing forces to them. Hughes claims that "swearing is governed by 'sacral' notions of word magic" (2006: xvi). What he meant by this assumption and how '**word magic**' is connected to swearing, will be dealt with in more detail in this section. Subsequently, I want to give an overview of how swearing has developed from magical rites to everyday language and how attitudes towards swearing have altered too.

2.1 Word magic

Word magic is the ancient assumption that words create realities. Put differently, it is the “belief that words have the power to change the world” (Hughes 2006: xvi), i.e. they have the power to interfere with our lives when used in certain ways – especially during rituals and incantations. Word magic goes back a long time in the history of the human kind and though the belief in word magic loses in potency as societies develop, swearing can still be very potent these days (Hughes 1991: 7, Hughes 2006: 512-513 and Hirsch & Andersson 1985: 65-81).

Here, I would like to mention Giambattista Vico’s three stages in language evolution, namely ‘sacred’, ‘poetic’, and ‘conventional’ (Vico 1948: 306-307 as cited in Hughes 1991: 6). At sacred stages of language evolution words are very powerful – and therefore swearing is too. In ancient magic practices the divine were evoked as an aid and comfort in one’s crises. People wanted their deity (or deities) to intervene in the world on behalf of the human will. In the context of sorcery, word magic takes the form of charms, spells, invocations, and last but not least, curses (Hughes 2006: 512-513). The common belief among primeval tribes is that words – especially when used in magic rites – can come true and therefore people respect and often also fear them (Crystal 1997: 8).

In the past, the object of a curse was meant to become what it was named. This concept is closely linked to the name-giving power of humans: we presume that for everything in the world there is a ‘real’ or ‘true’ name and that this name classifies what the thing really and truly is (Hirsch & Andersson 1985: 76 and Holden 2000: 187-189). This is related to the man’s world-creating function which is explained by Hirsch and Andersson as follows:

A further implication of this theory of true names is that the use of the real and true names in a description, in a sense *creates* a real and true world. Therefore, if one thinks that one has the true names for things in the world, the mere act of mentioning these names has a kind of world-creating function. (Hirsch & Andersson 1985: 76)

An example for the belief in the world-creating function of words – aka. word magic – is the subsequent English saying which is employed when whoever or whatever is talked about suddenly appears during the conversation (Hirsch & Andersson 1985: 76):

(7) *Speak of the devil (and he doth/will appear).*

Referring to the devil also seems to be a general European phenomenon. As a matter of fact, there is an almost literal equivalent of this phrase in German:

(8) *Wenn man vom Teufel spricht (kommt er gerannt).* ('If one talks of the devil (he comes running').)

Further, there is another related German proverb referring to a pessimistic statement that goes as follows:

(9) *Wenn man den Teufel an die Wand malt (ist er schon da)* ('If one paints the devil on the wall, he is already there').

But this last expression is rather archaic and hardly used nowadays. Occasionally a similar version is still used when saying:

(10) *Mal den Teufel nicht an die Wand!* ('Don't paint the devil on the wall').

Hirsch and Anderson point out a parallel between old magic rites and modern swearing: they claim that when we curse others today – as in *Go to hell!* – it is like an “act of black magic” (1985: 74). As mentioned in the beginning of this section, word magic is related to the belief that words can influence the world. When we are confronted with a situation that seems impossible to deal with in normal ways, we turn to magical rites (without being aware of it) in taking symbolic actions like uttering curses, oaths, etc. We use language to gain power over someone or something, maybe even over ourselves, hoping to change the world (Hirsch & Andersson 1985: 74-77).

But nowadays swearwords are usually employed in a merely metaphorical sense. For instance, when a swearer tells another person to

(11) *Go to hell!*

the receiver is not literally condemned to burn in hell, but should simply go away. Another example is the meaning of *shithead*: when we use this word we certainly do not have a head full of excrement in mind, but rather a ‘fool’ or ‘idiot’ (Hirsch & Andersson

1985: 79-80). And when we call a woman *bitch*, we usually do not mean to point out her resemblance to a female dog, but we merely want to insult her.

Apart from words, other factors play an important role both in the practice of magic and in swearing. For once, **emotion** is an essential element in the performance of magical rites and the same holds true for swearing. As a matter of fact, Hirsch and Andersson (1985: 67, 79) state that in any kind of swearing, in any particular case of name-calling, the swearer finds himself or herself influenced by emotion and the two linguists equate this everyday situation with the pronouncing of a spell in a magical rite.

Furthermore, according to Reinhold Aman (1996: 153-156) and Ashley Montague (1942: 193) swearing arises from a feeling of frustration. This in turn leads to a number of 'primary emotions' such as anger, joy, surprise, fear, disgust, jealousy, hatred, envy, resentment, impatience, rage, or grief (Aman 1996: 155 and Hirsch & Andersson: 66). Swearing as an expression of emotion usually takes the form of utterances that are typically heavily stressed and clearly emphatic as in the following expletives exemplify:

(12) *Hell!*

(13) *Shit!*

Further, they are always used in connection with marked non-verbal communication such as a tense facial expressions and body language (Hirsch & Andersson 1985: 67, 79).

Swearing as expression of joy and surprise may be less habitual than their contrary emotions anger, fear, grief, and disgust. While the latter function similarly to frustration, the former present a very different scenario. Swearing out of joy can be seen as an act similar to praising powers that have presumably helped in a (difficult) situation, whereas surprise is expressed when goals are achieved which the speaker had not anticipated. Thus, both scenarios seem to have been solved as if by magic. In many cases the expletive may be a combination of both emotions (Hirsch & Andersson 1985: 74-75). Examples for both joy and surprise might be expletives such as the following:

(14) *Fuck!*

(15) *Oh my God!*

Here the speaker's intonation and non-verbal behavior will mark the difference to swearing out of emotions such as frustration.

Aman (1996: 156-157) claims that swearing is healthy up to a certain point since it reduces stress. When someone feels frustrated and keeps those negative feelings to himself or herself, it can lead to a number of health hazards. Physical affections include gastric trouble, bilious complaint, and heart conditions. Moreover, pent-up frustration can lead to many different mental illnesses such as neurosis and manic depression. Swearing functions as a mechanism to abreact frustration and thus keeps the mental equilibrium intact (Montague 1942: 193). David Crystal (2003: 173) supports the idea of swearing as a stress releaser and he suggests that people who swear may even lead less stressful lives than non-swearers.

Another category related to the previous one, which I would like to add to the list of emotion as a source of swearing, is that of cursing as a response to pain. It is very common that people use foul language when they are physically hurt. Moreover, it has been proven that swearing lowers pain perception¹ because it “produces a hypoalgesic (pain lessening) effect” (Stephens et al 2009: 4). Nevertheless it is not clear so far, which emotion plays a role in the pain soothing effect, but fear and aggression have been suggested by Stephens et al (2009: 1059-1060).

As mentioned above, apart from the words used and the emotions expressed, there is another important element of swearing which can be traced back to magic rituals, namely **non-verbal behavior**. Due to the high degree of ambiguity in the dysphemistic vocabulary, an addressee or listener has to rely on the speaker's body language and intonation in order to understand the swearer's intention (Burridge 2004: 199-200). Curses such as

(16) *You son of a bitch!*

can be used to express anger or disgust with someone, but also surprise and admiration. To fully understand what is meant, we need to know the context and also the personal relationship between the interlocutors. Therefore, the swearer's intonation, facial expression, gestures, etc. play an important role. As a matter of fact, people can even swear without saying a single word when they form the word(s) with their lips without

¹ See Stephens et al 2009: 1056-1060 and Dong 2010: 6

actually pronouncing them. This special act of swearing is usually accompanied by strong non-verbal behavior (Hirsch & Andersson 1985: 66).

Also, swearing can serve as a joke or as an ironic statement. In those special cases, the speaker says one thing while meaning another, often being the antipode of what he is saying (Hirsch & Andersson 1985: 72). For example, one friend may say to another:

(17) *You fucking son of a bitch!*

when actually she or he is expressing gratitude for something the other has done for them. This example also implies that there is sympathy among the two interlocutors. Hence, another way in which swearing is (paradoxically) used is to express affection (Burridge 2004: 200).

Nevertheless, there is another major type of cursing which is non-emotional, namely **swearing as a way of speaking**. Such expressions are usually non-emphatic and in many cases non-stressed. Actually, instances of this kind can be heavily stressed, but here the distinctive emphasis lies in the word ‘can’ because they need not necessarily be stressed (Hirsch & Andersson 1985: 67). The following example can be both stress and non-stressed:

(18) *I don’t give a fuck about your stupid friends.*

According to old belief, if word magic is used in an offensive way, it may result in dangerous consequences for the speaker. In order to avoid such negative consequences, taboos and prohibitions were created. Evidently, “certain objects are *unnameable* (taboo objects) and [...] certain words are *unmentionable* (taboo words)” (Hirsch & Andersson 1985: 76). Thus, swearing is a violation of **taboos**. Although, over time, most swearwords lost their dangerous context and some became merely fashionable, Hughes suggested that at base they are “profoundly serious” (1991: 4) and they may result in grave ramifications (Hughes 1991: 4-5).

As a result, in the past many words and expressions have been prohibited because they refer to taboo objects. Although less strict, swearword censorship is still customary today. One way of censoring the ‘true’ names of things which is still employed those days is the use of various euphemisms.² The existence of linguistic

² I will return to concept of euphemism in section 6.1.

taboos and euphemisms serves as proof for the theory that respect and fear of word magic is still an issue in modern days (Hughes 2006: 513).

Moreover, not only censorship but also the common attitude towards swearwords attests to that fact. Here, it should be mentioned that this is an ambiguous attitude since swearwords are used widely, while they are still looked down upon and considered inappropriate for public display and polite conversation in most parts of the world (Hughes 1991: vii, McEnery 2006: 2 and Macaulay 2006: 98). Also, we try to avoid using foul language because whoever hears us swear may make inferences about our education, class, emotions, religious beliefs, etc. (McEnery 2006: 1). All this can be traced back to the idea of taboos. Therefore, let us now have a closer look at the concept of taboo.

2.2 Taboo and censorship

The 2005 edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines the term *taboo* as “a social or religious custom prohibiting or restricting a particular practice or forbidding association with a particular person, place, or thing” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2005: 1793). Taboo and its restricting concepts are decisive elements of all of human civilizations and they influence the laws of the world – including legal, religious, societal and personal restrictions. Although prohibitions have been part of human society since its beginnings, the word *taboo* is fairly young in comparison. In this section, I want to look at the history of the term and how its crucial characteristics define the censorship of swearing till this day.

Captain James Cook was the first person to use the word ‘taboo’ when he mentioned it in one of his journals in 1777 describing the life and costumes of indigenous peoples in Polynesia. The origins of the word lie in the Tongan *tabu* or *tapu* denoting ‘set apart, forbidden’ (Hughes 1991: 8 and *Oxford English Dictionary* 2005: 1793). The original Asian word was probably a combination of *ta*, meaning ‘to mark off’, and *pu*, being translated into English as ‘intensive’ or ‘strong’. Thus, the literal meaning of the word was simply ‘strongly marked off’ or ‘off-limits’ (Holden 2000: ix).

Cook thus ‘imported’ the term into the English language in the late 18th century. It was then translated into other European languages such as German (*Tabu*) and Spanish (*tabú*). It has been used as a noun, verb or adjective.

The aboriginal tabu was a religious system of prohibitions. Unfortunately, it was initially interpreted as a form of superstition or magic by the Western explorers and was used to account for everything inexplicable in preliterate cultures. Later anthropologists showed that taboos were just as prevalent in our Western world and thus the word was adapted into a number of languages and scientific branches such as psychology, sociology and finally also into linguistic research (Holden 2000: ix, Burridge 2004: 200, and Rada 2001: 15-17).

In its original meaning, ‘tabu’ referred to prohibited behavior. Violating a taboo was believed to be dangerous to the individual or even the whole group, leading to consequences as far as death. However, verbal taboos in our Western societies usually have had to do with “sex, the supernatural, excretion, and death” (Crystal: 1997: 8) and also traditions of etiquette and social parameters like age, sex, race, education, and social status. For instance, names used in name-calling are typically taken from taboo areas such as religion, sex, excrement, physical and mental disorders, and so on. Taboo topics are avoided because their use is regarded as distasteful and not because we fear physical or metaphysical consequences (Holden 2000: ix, Burridge 2004: 200). Furthermore, social context plays an important role: because of using taboo language people may be judged by other members of their society, i.e. ‘lose face’ (Allan & Burridge 1991: 12).

Swearing and taboo are inseparably connected because whatever happens to be taboo in a society at the specific time is used for swearing. The more a type of word is tabooed in a specific culture, the stronger it will be when used as a swearword and the stronger the taboo, the more swearwords it will produce (Aman 1996: 161). Often, speakers and hearers behave as if the tabooed terms reflected the essential nature of the topics they refer to (Burridge 2004: 200) and this fact reflects the role word magic plays in swearing. A swearword is like a stigma to the offended person because it allows others to make assumptions about them. It is this process of stigmatization, which feeds taboo language with power (McEnery 2006: 1).

Historically, there are two major varieties of taboos in swearing: **high** and **low** (Hughes 1991: 4-5, Hughes 2006: xvi). High taboos are concerned with the belief system of the community in question. According to Hughes it is “language in its most highly charged state” (1991: 4) because of its origins in magical rites where higher powers were called upon and beseeched to change the world. Low taboos are of sexual nature and refer to sex, defecation and urination. Many terms and phrases of the low variety deal with literally and practically impossible concepts and actions and therefore are different from the high variety in their “literal potential” (Hughes 1991: 5).

Nevertheless, taboos are not static. They can change, vanish and reappear according to the community’s customs, attitudes and history. Piers Gray (1993: 314) asserts:

[...] [I]f linguistic taboo is a category of the mind, it is a protean one which allows itself – so far as language is concerned – to appear and reappear and reidentify itself constantly.

In the past swearing mainly consisted of high taboos, but now the low kind is more dominant. For example, in the Middle Ages profanity and blasphemy used to be the most upsetting topics in occidental speech communities and although they are still considered taboo, they are a lot less potent now in most Western societies due to growing secularization. While taboos such as the last example are diminishing, new ones replace them. In the last century obscenities have increasingly superseded profanities (Baudhuin 1973: 399-401) and more recent taboos include race, ethnicity and gender. One prominent example which bans these topics is the ‘political correctness’ (or ‘PC’) movement and people who do not adhere to the rules of political correctness may be called racist or sexist (Burridge 2004: 200-204, Gray 1993: 313, Steiner 1980: 29-30).

Nevertheless, it is often difficult to interpret how literal an utterance is meant because swearing depends very much on the swearer. Additionally, some expressions have been integrated into our language use and are now not considered offensive by most speakers in many speech communities. Examples include the following expletive which is prevalent in a number of European languages including German and Spanish:

(19) *Oh my God!*

(20) *Oh (mein) Gott!* (German)

(21) *Dios (mio)* (Spanish)

But there are still some religions – including Judaism and Islam – in which mentioning the deity’s name is strictly forbidden. This shows that in those cultures, the belief in word-magic is more prominent (Hughes 1991: 5, 8).

The change in taboo topics is also reflected in dictionary censorship. For instance, early versions of the *Oxford English Dictionary* contained swearwords referring to religion and race but excluded sexually obscene terms (Burridge 2004: 201). From 1884-1929 the *Oxford English Dictionary* omitted the two terms considered most taboo:

(22) *fuck*

(23) *cunt*

In 1811 Captain Francis Grose’s revised *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* listed the latter as

(24) *c**t*

and defined it as “a nasty word for a nasty thing” (cited in Hughes 1991: 176). More recently, dictionary writing has been prejudiced by political correctness and though the terms in question are less likely to be excluded, editors have to be careful how they present them (Burridge 2004: 201). Labeling for ethnic slurs include ‘substandard’, ‘colloquial’, ‘informal’, ‘not the preferred term’, ‘vulgar’, ‘(racially) offensive’, ‘derisive’, ‘contemptuous’, ‘derogatory’, ‘disparaging’, and last but not least ‘taboo’. Obscene terms are now increasingly featured in dictionaries, but their taboo nature is indicated by labels such as ‘vulgar’, ‘offensive’, ‘coarse slang’, ‘rude’, ‘not in decent use’, ‘obscene’ and finally ‘taboo’ (Wachal 2002: 197-198). Hence, dictionaries not only function as objects of utility where words are defined, but they also contribute to telling people which uses are appropriate and which not. As Geoffrey Hughes argues:

The simple statement that a particular word is or is not “in the dictionary” is often advanced as an argument for acceptability in itself. (Hughes 2006: 123)

Therefore, dictionaries have always been important means of language regulations and censorship. As noted above, this is particularly true for swearwords. To this day many swearwords are omitted or altered by dictionary editors. For instance, the commonly used terms and expressions are rarely found in modern dictionaries (Wachal 2002: 199):

(25) *butthead*

- (26) *dickhead*
- (27) *take a dump*
- (28) *poop*
- (29) *go potty*
- (30) *weenie*

Apart from decreasing, old taboos can also disappear, meaning they become obsolescent or obsolete. One taboo area which is not used in English swearing anymore is that of deadly and disfiguring diseases. While people considered the expletive

- (31) *pox!*

to be among the worst examples of foul language in the seventeenth century, the word is not used in this way anymore today (Hughes 2006: 393 and Burridge 2004: 205).

Similarly, some words have lost their original, non-offensive signification because of their 'indecent' senses. Examples of this category include animal names such as

- (32) *cock*
- (33) *ass*

which therefore had to be replaced by new and neutral terms (*rooster* and *donkey*). Prior to the mid-eighteenth century *ass* merely denominated a donkey, but it was considered to be inappropriate because of its similarity to

- (34) *arse*

As a result, the term *donkey* was coined in order to replace it (Hughes 1991: vii-viii, 19). But *ass* was not completely lost and has been used like a synonym of *arse* until today. As a matter of fact, nowadays *ass* seems to be more frequently used as a swearword than its phonetically similar predecessor which seems to have acquired a somewhat more formal character. The fact that it is not used in its original denomination for the animal anymore is best expressed in Kate Burridges words: "Taboo senses never fail to dominate, and eventually kill off all the other senses" (Burridge 2004: 213).

Moreover, words which never even had an offensive connotation but bear resemblance with swearwords, have also been deleted from general language usage and in some cases even been deleted entirely from the vocabulary. One example that has completely disappeared due to its phonetic proximity to *cunt* is

(35) *coney* (later *cunny*)

The term was replaced by *rabbit*. These processes of reduction and degradation of meaning are widespread phenomena in language development (Burridge 2004: 212-213).

Finally, taboos can be either **universal** or **societal**. An example of a universal taboo is the reference to feces. In most speech communities the mention of excrement is regarded inappropriate and thus words referring to excrement are considered indecent:

(36) *shit*

(37) *Scheiße* (German)

(38) *mierda* (Spanish).

Other taboos are culture-specific, i.e. societal. They can vary from culture to culture and also differ within the same society depending on class, position, gender and age (Hughes 1991: 10-11). Societal taboos reflect evolving social mores and often refer to life-threatening forces. Societal taboos usually involve the deity, death, madness, sex, excretion, and strangers. For instance, the way in which sex is used varies from one speech community to the next. Whereas in English one of the strongest insults, namely *motherfucker*, refers to incest with the mother, in German and Spanish there is no literal equivalent. However, in Slavic languages insulting the mother is among the gravest taboos. Expressions such as the following are highly offensive and looked down upon:

(39) *ёб твою мать* / *job twoju mat* (Russian meaning ‘fuck your mother’)

(40) *kurwa mać* (Polish ‘mother whore’)

In many cultures, taboos are used to preserve social order by controlling individuals within the group. Therefore, people often avoid using swearwords in order to evade public shame and/or punishment. This in turn gives taboos more power. Regarding the use of taboo words Trudgill (1985: 29) has observed the following:

Many people will never employ words of this type, and most others will use them in a restricted set of situations. For those who do use taboo words, however, ‘breaking the rules’ may have connotations of strength or freedom which they find desirable.

Nevertheless, taboos have often led to the exact opposite of freedom. In the past, cursers and authors who used improper language were sentenced to paying high fines and/or imprisonment. As a matter of fact, there are also modern cases in which people have to

pay high sums of money due to their ‘foul’ language.³ Book censorship is another example of restricted freedom (of speech). In order to portray what forms censorship can take within a speech community and what consequences linguistic taboos may have, I am going to discuss the history of swearing in English in the following section.

2.3 A history of swearing in English⁴

As mentioned above, the first instances of swearing were a mere expression of oaths and pledges and swearword usage was part of magical rites in which the divine were invoked in charms, spells, invocations, and curses. Geoffrey Hughes (1991: 38) describes Old English uses of language as follows:

[...] in the form of the spell and the charm, [...] language becomes a repository of mystic force, a god-like code which man seeks to fathom and control. Socially it is the welder of bonds of almost sacred significance between warriors. The corollary is that those who break oaths or fail to live up to them are subjected to the severest obloquy.

Unfortunately, not many written records of the **Old English** period remain, but when looking at the few surviving literary documents it can be inferred that religion was not yet the moving power in swearing at that time. Though God is mentioned thirty times in *Beowulf* he is never called upon nor is his name used abusively. This may be explained by the fact that breaking oaths was regarded as a big disgrace and honor was a virtue to be aimed for. Oaths were made among warriors and taken very seriously. Language was a serious matter for Anglo-Saxons and insulting was a verbal offence which was punishable by law.

The first recorded cases of insulting can be found in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of **flyting**. These were swearing battles among warriors and the insults were a means of provoking the opponent into action. Examples thereof were recorded in *Beowulf*. However, not all cases of flyting consisted in interpersonal exchanges between men, but

³ See the case of the ‘Cussing Canoeist’ in the documentary movie *Fuck* (2005) by Steve Anderson.

⁴ The main references used for this section were two works by Geoffrey Hughes, namely his book entitled ‘Swearing’ (1991) and his ‘An encyclopedia of swearing’ (2006). Any further references are indicated in the text.

they were also manifested in literature. As a matter of fact, earlier flyting was mainly an oral practice, while later occurrences were predominantly literary (Arnovick 1999: 28). One famous example of the latter is *The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy* which was composed ca. 1503. This work actually “constitutes a sophisticated mix of oral and written traditions” (Arnovick 1999:29) as was typical for sixteenth century flyting. The flyting language is described as “often gross, even grotesque and astonishingly scatological [and] there is also a certain element of play” (Hughes 1991: 47) and the texts are governed by strict rules (Jucker & Taavitsainen 2000: 75, 77). Flyting continued throughout the Middle Ages and was used until the Renaissance. Last instances of flyting continued until after 1600 in the North of British Isle due to the Norse influence (Burridge 2004: 208).

With the beginning of the **Middle Ages** and the installment of Christianity, **religion** became the main inducement in taking oaths in Middle English. Also, Black Magic – which was a reaction to orthodox religion – became popular in England. Charms, spells and exorcisms were being performed in which the belief in word magic played a driving role. As a matter of fact, the latter categories were among the first written words in English. Most of them were of Christian reference though some were pagan too. Charm incantations could be quite long and complex and were performed in hope of healing diseases, stopping natural catastrophes, ensuring safe journeys, and so forth.

God and Christ were the main referents in Middle English oath taking. But apart from that, this period also saw the first instances of God’s name taken in vain. Thus, the sacred was made profane. New, religious expletives included:

- (41) *by my faith!*
- (42) *by God that sits above*
- (43) *by Goddes corpus!*

Referents other than God included non-Christian religions like Judaism, Islam (due to the Crusades) and rivaling Christian sects.

Furthermore, swearing became a means of expressing anger (Arnovick 199: 85-86) and there was a shift from ‘swearing **by**’ to ‘swearing **at**’ with additional personal and secular referents such as age, intellect, class, poverty and uncleanness. Many words

were degraded and in some cases were used in ways very different from their original semantic meaning. Degraded terms and new swearwords were:

- (44) *old*
- (45) *foul*
- (46) *lousy*
- (47) *swine*
- (48) *churl*
- (49) *knave* (originally merely the name for a male child)
- (50) *beggar*
- (51) *rascal*

Although these words may seem tame to us now, they were quite shocking to a medieval audience. Nevertheless, the most wounding term in the Middle Ages was considered to be

- (52) *horson* or *Whoreson*

which is semantically equivalent to the modern '*son of a bitch*'.

Medieval swearing had severe consequences. Judicial punishment and religious disapproval were reactions to the increase in swearing. For instance, under Henry I fines for swearing within the royal residence were installed, ranging from 40 shillings for dukes to a whipping for a page. Dan Michel (Folio 19a: 64, cited in Hughes 1991: 60), a contemporary witness calls swearing a sin of the tongue, equally bad as lying:

In this sin, the Christians are worse than the pagan or infidel. They are worse than the Jews, who crucified Christ, but did not break any of his bones. But these mince him smaller than men do swine in a butchery. These people do not even respect Our Lady, but are villainously destructive of her and of the saints to the point that it is a wonder that Christendom suffers it.

But the more opposition there was, the more swearwords seemed to flourish. Towards the end of the Middle Ages, religious swearing got a great deal more violent and thus lead to the installment of terms of authority such as 'heresy', 'enormity', and 'superstition'. Also, secular swearwords grew in numbers. By the end of the Middle

Ages, profanities are used to express emotions (rather their literal sense) and the subsequent examples were used widely (Arnovick 199: 87):

- (53) *Go to hell!*
- (54) *Blast you!*
- (55) *God rot your soul!*
- (56) *Curse you!*
- (57) *Damn your eyes!*
- (58) *God damn you!*

Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is probably the most important and famous medieval literary work and – like all of Chaucer's texts – contains “unexpected volumes of blasphemy, profanity, foul language, and xenophobic insult” (Hughes 2006: 67). It is assumed to be a truthful depiction of swearing practices of the time.

The rivalry between different Christian sects peaked during the Protestant **Reformation** in the 16th and 17th centuries. Linguistically, the religious antagonism is reflected in the boom of new patronizing swearwords including xenophobia, iconography, papal insults and terms deriving from crime, demonology and animals. Terms used uniformly by Christians against other religious groups in medieval times, were now applied against each other. For example, terms related to the medieval *Mahounde* (a version of ‘Mahomet’ which was used in the signification of ‘a devil’, ‘a false god’, ‘a false prophet’, ‘a monster’) were used by extremist Protestants to refer to rival Christian sects (mostly the Catholic Church):

- (59) *mawmet*
- (60) *mawmetry*

Rivalling religious groups used the opponents' names in an ironic or vehemently abusive manner. Examples included:

- (61) *Quaker*
- (62) *Presbyterian*
- (63) *Methodist*
- (64) *Non-conformist*

Iconographic insults used in an offensive way were:

- (65) *Idol*

- (66) *Image*
- (67) *Saint*
- (68) *picture*

Abusive terms referring to the pope included:

- (69) *papist*
- (70) *popish*
- (71) *Romish*
- (72) *Pope-holy* (meaning ‘hypocritical’).

Another example of the rivalry between Protestants and Catholics during the Reformation period is Titus Oates’ famous made-up complot according to which Catholics were conspiring to assassinate Charles II. Interestingly, even the name ‘Popish Plot’ contains an Anti-Catholic swearword widely used in England in Early Modern England.

However, the European **Renaissance** saw a number of cultural changes which also influenced the use of language. Renaissance swearing was complex and creative, but also restraint due to repression from Puritans and Quakers. Though it was generally an era of liberation, ironically, Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* were publically not accepted because of indecency and profanity. Furthermore, this period witnessed the last flyting duels and also the last gruesome punishments for swearing.

Two significant developments altered swearing in the Renaissance: firstly, since religious terms were more and more considered taboo, other words were chosen instead. Thus, the shift from religious to **secular** referents – which had already started in the Middle Ages – continued (Arnovick 199: 89). Secondly, it was the beginning of organized linguistic **censorship** which was absolutely secular (Burridge 2004: 230). In Elizabethan era, plays were censored and altered because of doctrine and politics. The inflicted punishments went as far as imprisonment of authors and actors – including Ben Jonson.

Ironically, Queen Elizabeth is said to have used a great deal of foul language. Apparently, she used to swear “like a man” (Shirley 1979: 10). Severe linguistic censorship started after Queen Elizabeth. In 1606 the ‘Act to Restraine Abuses of Players’, also known as the ‘blasphemy law’, was introduced under King James. The law stated:

If [...] any person or persons doe or shall in any Stage play, Interlude, Shewe, Maygame or Pageant jestingly or prophanely speake or use the holy name of God or of Christ Jesus, or of the Holy Ghoste or of the Trinite [...] [they] shall forfeite for every such Offence by him or them committed Tenne pounds. (3 Jac. I. c. 21, cited in Hughes 1991: 103)

Among others, William Shakespeare was affected by above cited statute which “sought to eliminate blasphemy from the theatre and printed texts” (Shirley 1979: xiii) and therefore his work cannot be seen as realistic picture of swearing in his time (as opposed to Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, for example). There were two kinds of reactions to the blasphemy law: On the one hand, authors used more pagan deities in their plays instead of the Christian God and, on the other hand, they ‘hid’ God’s name behind euphemistic expressions such as ‘minced oaths’. The latter development led to an increase in euphemisms such as:

(73) *zounds* (meaning ‘God’s wounds’).

Moreover, starting 1600, new xenophobic terms were introduced into the English language due to economic competition with other countries. New insults included:

(74) *Interloper*

(75) *Intruder*

(76) *Savage*

(77) *Alien*

(78) *Barbarian*

(79) *Foreigner*

Among others, Renaissance punishments for swearing constituted a Puritan law according to which offenders were asked to pay one shilling for every curse. People above the age of twelve who could not or refused to pay said money were set in the stocks and those under twelve years of age were whipped. Furthermore, in 1642 the theatres were closed by the Puritans.

Beginning in 1660, the **Restoration** period was an extreme reaction to Puritan restrictions and prudery it followed. Charles II was no stranger to licentiousness, surrounding himself with numerous mistresses (thirteen historically confirmed) and likeminded noblemen. One of the monarch’s closest friends was the “notorious poet of

obscurity” (Hughes 2006: 392) Earl of Rochester. The latter complimented his king’s character and private parts with the following words (cited in Hughes 2006: 392):

Nor are his high desires above his strengths,
His scepter and his prick are of length.

Theatres were reopened and a new kind of play emerged, namely the ‘comedy of manners’ also known as ‘Restoration comedy’. It was a genre written by the gentry and for the very same and was in vogue among those same. Though popular among the elite, it failed to entertain the lower classes which Hughes (2006: 393) explains as follows:

It [the theater] now offered alluringly decadent fare in the form of risqué sexual intrigue, outrageous compromising situations, adultery, fashionable swearing, knowing innuendo, outright ribaldry, and seductive actresses.

The Restoration period introduced an abundance of swearword novelties which were often minced and/or secular as in:

(80) *Cud’s body* and *God’s nigs* (‘Jesus’)

(81) *son of a thousand fathers* and *son of a batchelour* (‘bastard’)

Further insults included:

(82) *cuckold*

(83) *wittol*

(84) *pimp*

(85) *whore*.

Moreover, common expletives were:

(86) *devil!*

(87) *pox!*

The liberated Restoration era was followed by various social and moral movements emphasizing decorum. Beginning in the early 18th century with **Augustan** literature and poetry in which foul language was not only avoided, but condemned. The growing middle classes established “a discourse of purity as a discourse of power” (McEnery 2006: 2). Augustan choice of words was defined by decent ‘poetic diction’ which contained latinization of tabooed terms:

(88) *copulate*

The most famous representative of Augustan writing is Alexander Pope, who adhered to the prevalent of Augustan decorum, whereas Jonathan Swift is known for being the most notable violator of said etiquette by using taboo words such as

(89) *shit*.

The second half of the 18th century was characterized by the anti-bad language movement of **Romanticism** which was defined by the pursuit of proper discourse or at least the illusion of it and “Romantic association of bad language with the destruction of innocence, with the cult of the child and fallen woman” (Gray 1993: 324). A prominent example of Romantic literature is William Wordsworth who deceived himself by attempting to write in the “language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society” (Wordsworth 1798, cited in Gray 1993: 318) when actually he brought to paper a milder and censored version thereof (Gray 1993: 318-319).

Finally, **Victorian** attitudes started with Queen Victoria’s reign in 1837 and to some extent they are still predominant today. Victorian decorum sees swearing as “a direct reflection of morality” that is “uncomfortably aware in its own case of an awkward discrepancy between proclaimed standards of behavior and common linguistic practice” (Davis 1989: 8). Back in the 19th century, there were two parallel worlds in English society: the **elite** and **underworld**, whereby the former did not acknowledge nor include the latter.

For the most part, the middle and upper classes adhered to the prescribed use of language which did not accept the use of taboo language. As a matter of fact, Victorian taboo went so far that even words such as

(90) *legs*

(91) *trousers*

(92) *underclothing*

were regarded inappropriate (Allan & Burridge 1991: 3). In his works *Pickwick Papers* and *National partipated* Sam Weller found very humorous ways of paraphrasing taboo terms:

[...] he says if he can’t see you afore tomorrow night’s over he may be somethin’-unpleasant if he don’t drowned hisself. (from: ‘Pickwick Papers’, chapter 39, cited in Hughes 1991: 152)

[...] [he] demanded in a surely tone what the – something beginning with a capital H – he wanted”. (from: ‘National participated’, cited in Hughes 1991: 152-153)

Of course, the reader is aware that the taboo terms Weller is avoiding in the above quotes are

(93) *damned*

(94) *hell*.

These examples demonstrate the two-faced nature of Victorian attitudes very well which produced a large number of euphemisms. Likewise, the “extreme Victorian reticence and restraint produced all manner of perversions” (Hughes 1991: 155) including the popular genre of Victorian pornography. Texts of this sort contained a great number of euphemisms for ‘dirty’ words which were often derived from classical or foreign languages:

(95) *academician* (‘prostitute’)

(96) *pose plastique* (‘striptease’).

Nevertheless, occasionally there are also direct dysphemisms to be found such as this phrase taken from the 1860 text ‘Voluptuous Confessions of a French Lady of fashion’:

(97) “*What an adorable – ARSE!*”

While the elite mostly kept to ‘decent’ linguistic choices, the lower classes developed their own register, which was then called ‘cant’.⁵ As mentioned above, the elite did not accommodate the ‘underworld’ people; however, they were interested in their language usage. As a result, slang dictionaries were produced as early as in 1552, thus before the first ‘standard’ dictionary was published. Though they were not dictionaries in the true sense of the word, but rather explained to the elite the language of the underworld. Some words which were included in such slang dictionaries were:

(98) *booze*

(99) *prat* (defined as ‘buttock’)

(100) *niggle* (‘to have to do with a woman carnally’)

Terms for the underworld people included:

⁵ The Oxford English Dictionary defined ‘cant’ as: “The secret language or jargon used by gypsies, thieves, professional beggars, etc.” (cited in Hughes 1991: 156)

(101) *coney-catchers* / *Connie-catchers* ('cheaters')

(102) *Cross-biters* ('whores')

A prominent and popular slang dictionary was Captain Francis Grose's *A classical dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785). In this volume, some terms are altered by missing letters as in:

(103) *Sh-t sack*

(104) *sh-t-ing through the teeth*

Furthermore, Grose left out *damned* but mentioned terms such as *bidet* – which nowadays do not seem offensive at all. But his dictionary did include the following terms:

(105) *blast* ('to curse')

(106) *bloody*

(107) *piss*

(108) *fart*

In the nineteenth century, slang dictionaries celebrated a comeback. In the course of this, Grose's dictionary was republished in an altered version and under the title *Lexicon Balatronicum* in 1811. But the most important work of this time was John S. Farmer and William E. Henley's seven volume 'A Dictionary of Slang and its Analogues' (1890-1904). The authors define the word *fucking* as "A qualification of extreme contumely" and "a more violent form of BLOODY" (Hughes 1991: 158, 161) and list a variety of compound entries:

(109) *fuckable*

(110) *fuck-finger*

(111) *fuck-fist*

(112) *fuck-hole*

(113) *fuckish*

(114) *fuckster*

With **colonization**, the English language was diffused in more parts of the world and from there, developed distinctly. Accordingly, there are different attitudes towards swearing in the various British colonies. For example, the USA was strongly influenced by prude Puritans and Quaker attitudes, while Australian English was greatly shaped by

the convicts who were exiled on the red continent. In South Africa most swearwords used by English speakers are loan-words from Afrikaans. In order to illustrate those different attitudes, I would like to mention the 1914 premiere of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. While the use of the word 'bloody' caused a scandal in Britain, it failed to shock the American audience at the New York representation.

Since the beginning of **the twentieth century** the use of swearwords has increased rapidly and they are also frequently used in the media. Reasons which led to the augmentation of swearing are war, television and movies, politics, and racial conflicts (not necessarily in that order). All these factors played an important role during WWI and WWII.

During WWI swearing became a crucial factor of showing in-group solidarity among soldiers (Burnham 1993: 217). However, swearing also increased outside the armed services with wartime enthusiasm serving "as an excuse for wholesale violation of the swearing taboo" (ibid.). WWII augmented swearword usage further and Geoffrey Hughes points out that WWII has contributed to the "acceptance of slang and expletives" (Hughes 1991: 199). With the increasing secularization, religious restrictions are becoming less renunciant for most people.

In the twentieth century censorship often impeded the publication of many literary and theatrical works including D.H. Lawrence's 'The Rainbow' (1915) and 'Lady Chatterley's Lover' (1928), and James Joyce's 'Ulysses' (1922). In contrast to censoring in previous centuries, newer cases are less political and ideological, but the focus is on the **obscene** – meaning sex and use of taboo words. Nevertheless, since the 1960s there has been a change in censorship: as a result of the famous trial of D.H. Lawrence's 'Lady Chatterley's Lover', there has been more linguistic freedom and sexual referents in the public sphere.

The very first mention of the word *fuck* on the BBC was done by theatre critic and writer Kenneth Tynan in an interview in 1965. This led to a huge scandal in Britain with great media response. As a result, *Tynan* was used synonymously to *fuck* for a while. Although there has been an increase in the use of 'four-letter words' on TV and in movies, critique and sanctions still remain.

In 1971, the British magazine 'Oz' was brought to trial for obscenity because the magazine had not only dealt with taboo topics, but also advertised sex and drugs and

was openly critical of ‘the system’. As the accused were found guilty, the editor Richard Neville was sentenced to fifteen months in prison and his associates to twelve and nine months. This harsh ruling led to an outcry in media and society and was criticized by many – even by people not in favor with Oz. Finally, the sentences were revoked by the Court of Appeal.

Modern media such as movies, TV and music have had a great impact on language use all over the world, including a shift in attitudes towards swearing. This shift was probably most prominent in the USA where strict censorship regulations have relaxed notably within no more than two decades. While the production of motion pictures had been put under strict regulation and censoring with the installment of the 1934 ‘Production Code’, said code determined Hollywood movies up until the early 1950s. It was then, that competition with television lead to first relaxations of the code because movie makers realized the potential of the cinema as adult entertainment – as opposed to family programs shown on TV.

Nowadays, swearing seems to be part of most kinds of movies and TV programs. Some networks also broadcast them in shows labeled ‘family entertainment’ which are commonly watched by children (Kryk-Kastovsky 1994: 21). Swearwords commonly used in the mass media:

- (115) *ass*
- (116) *bastard*
- (117) *bitch*
- (118) *bullshit*
- (119) *damn*
- (120) *fuck*
- (121) *hell*
- (122) *motherfucker*
- (123) *piss*
- (124) *screw*
- (125) *shit*
- (126) *suck*
- (127) *son of a bitch*
- (128) *SOB* (shortened version of the above).

Many of these can be observed during ‘family hour’ on TV (8-9 p.m.) (Wachal 2002: 195-196). The HBO series ‘The Sopranos’ is a TV program widely known for coarse language. Robert S. Wachal (2002: 195) reports as follows:

A special case is the HBO series *The Sopranos*: in a single two-hour episode, I observed 100 uses of *fuck*, including two uses of *motherfucker*, and 9 uses of *(bull)shit*.

Another medium which has undergone major changes as to the use of swearing is music. A prominent modern genre associated with strong swearing is that of rap music. Rap has its origins in black America of the 1970s and was originally used to express opinions about society and politics. Though there is hardly a topic nowadays which is not dealt with by modern rappers, societal and politic critiques are still among the most common ones. Though many radio and TV stations still censure rap to this very day, others play the lyrics without modification and at any time during the day. Contemporary rappers include Eminem, Nelly, 50 Cent, and Akon. In his song ‘The way I am’ Eminem expresses his awareness of the taboo nature and censorship of the words he uses:

And since birth I've been cursed with this curse to just curse
And just blurt this berserk and bizarre shit that works
[...]
Radio won't even play my jam
Cause I am, whatever you say I am

But rap is not the only music genre which uses a great deal of swearwords. For example, in 2009 British pop singer Lily Allen released a single called ‘Fuck you’ and within the song’s three and a half minutes *fuck* is mentioned thirty-five times. Paradoxically, the song’s cheerful and carnival-like melody that almost sounds like a happy love song stands in contrast to the lyrics which convey a harsh critique of narrow-minded people.

As can be seen from the discussion above, linguistic taboos have relaxed significantly since the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, censorship still influences English language usage considerably and new prohibited topics emerge again and again. An interesting observation by Kate Burridge (2004: 229-230) is that offensive language flourishes during censorship and repression. This shows that whenever something is forbidden, it becomes more desirable.

Also, whenever certain taboo areas are not considered (sufficiently) shocking anymore, other topics replace them. An eminent example of modern language regulation is the international ‘political correctness’ (‘PC’) movement which is mainly concerned with issues of racist and sexist language (ab)uses. However, racial insults have been increasing since the installment of PC. Furthermore, most new racist expressions are coined in the USA, the place PCdom originated from (Burridge 2004: 229-230).

3. Defining ‘bad’ language

Having given a brief overview of the historic development of swearing, I would like to turn to linguistic definitions of swearwords. In the past centuries swearwords were largely neglected in linguistic research due to various reasons. Firstly, their taboo nature was considered too unfitting for scientific research and public display. Even authors claiming to describe ‘real’ language use often omitted offensive uses (Beers Fägersten & Dalarna: 14-15, Hughes 1991: 2, Steiner 1980: 23, 36).

This discrepancy is also visible in dictionary composition. Traditionally, there were two kinds of dictionaries: one dealt with ‘proper’ words and completely omitted ‘vulgar’ language and the other kind dealt exclusively with ‘lower’ registers such as slang and ‘improper’ uses of language – including offensive words and expressions. An interesting fact is that the ‘improper’ tradition, which dates back to the Elizabethan era, is actually older than the ‘proper’ one. For example, Thomas Harman’s *A Caveat for Common Cursetors* was published as early as 1566 (Hughes 2006: 123-124, Steiner 1980: 23-24).

However, in the last few decades restraints on the investigation of offensive language have relaxed greatly and various sciences – including psychology, sociology, anthropology and linguistics – have looked into the topic. Beers Fägersten and Dalarna point out that nowadays “profanity is a legitimate research area within psychology,

philology and linguistics” (2007: 15). This development has gone hand in hand with the comeback of the popularity of slang and swearword dictionaries starting in the 1990s (Hughes 1991: 2). Numerous new editions are published every year. Concerning the topic of offensive language in linguistic research, it should be added, that swearwords have also been overlooked because they are (to this day) often said to lack specific phonology and grammar (McEnery 2006:1). According to Andersson and Trudgill the same grammatical rules that apply to ordinary language also apply to swearing (2007: p. 198).

Nonetheless, research on swearing is still not completely free of prejudices and constraints. Beers Fägersten and Dalarna (2007: 15) continue their argument cited above as follows:

Nevertheless, despite an increasing amount of attention devoted to profanity [...], the true picture of dirty word usage is still compromised.

This gives rise to the questions why ‘bad’ language is so bad and how bad is really bad – issues which will be dealt with below.

As mentioned above, the research on swearing is a fairly young branch in various sciences. But in the last few decades, there has been an increasing interest in this specific field. I would like to give a brief summary of how different linguistic approaches have addressed the topic. In an article published in 1989 which deals with the fundamental question of ‘What makes bad language bad?’ Davis discusses three major linguistic approaches to swearing, leading to her own assumption as to explaining ‘dirty’ words. In the following paragraphs I will use Davis’ article and her four different approaches as a framework for looking at past research in the area of defining ‘bad’ language.

3.1 The sociolinguistic approach

The first and most widespread approach (which is also called ‘orthodox approach’) is based on the assumption that the use of certain lexical items is connected in a fairly systematic way with social indices such as **class**, **gender**, **age** and **race**, on the one

hand, and situational variables like **formal** or **informal** conversations, on the other hand. Sociolinguists analyze these correlations and explain them in terms of prestige (covert versus overt), differences in male and female talk, permissiveness, and so on. According to Davis' article, sociolinguistic research has concluded that gender and class are the two most important variables in the analysis of swearwords – a view shared by other scholars such as Francis Shirley (1979: xii). For this reason, I want to discuss these two indices in more detail in the succeeding paragraphs.

Regarding **class**, Trudgill (1985: 29) claims that

the type of word that is tabooed in a particular language will be a good reflection of at least part of the system of values and beliefs of the society in question.

Further, he argues that swearing is more likely to be found in the working class rather than middle or upper classes. To this argument I would like to add, that it is probably true, that working class people swear more than middle or upper class citizens, but the latter are by no means strangers to 'foul' language. As a matter of fact, arguing from a historic point of view, Hughes affirms that swearing has also been prevalent in the upper classes. He explains this phenomenon by the "assumption that the upper classes are not bound by bourgeois prissiness, norms, and expectations" (Hughes 2006: 81). An early example of swearing in upper classes is the flyting tradition carried out by the British nobility. Also, various British monarchs have been recorded to use 'foul' language including Henry VIII, Elizabeth I and present day Elizabeth II's husband, the Duke of Edinburgh and their children Princess Anne and Prince Charles. One can also add a number of American presidents to this list such as Harry Truman, Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy. (Hughes 1991: 33-34, Hughes 2006: 81-82 and *Fuck* 2005)

Another assumption about the social functions of swearing is that the use of certain vocabulary marks social difference or signals social solidarity (Crystal 1997: 61 and 2003: 173). Burrige (2004: 207) mentions studies concerning swearing patterns and the amount of swearing in closed communities which attest to this fact. Also, the more swearing there is in a group, the more relaxed are its members.

In terms of **gender**, one conclusion of sociolinguistic surveys is that women are more sensitive as to the offensive nature of swearwords (Beers Fägersten & Dalarna 2007: 23). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that men swear more than women in

informal situations⁶ (Svensson 2004: 13). Naturally, the latter finding may be explained by the former and by the fact that swearing is not regarded ‘standard’ language which women are more prone to use. Davis (1989: 3) suggests that women are “more conscious of propriety and upward mobility, [and therefore they] try harder to avoid using such terms”.

However, in a study published in 1987, Risch questions this and other assumptions concerning female use of ‘dirty’ language. She collected the swearwords used by women to refer to men and her forty-four female subjects came up with a sum of seventy-nine different derogatory terms. Risch concludes that the standard versus non-standard distinction does not apply to male versus female discourse. Nevertheless, she admits that her investigation method had one flaw since the swearwords were elicited by female interviewers. It is questionable if the test persons would have used such terms in the presence of men.

On the whole, Davis rejects all orthodox sociolinguistic approaches arguing that they do not pay enough attention to the different communicative contexts. According to her, they merely prove that ‘bad’ language exists and try to explain its uses, instead of providing an answer to the question ‘What makes bad language bad?’

3.2 The feminist approach

The next approach Davis examines in her article pays more attention to context. The approach was formulated by Cameron in 1985 and looks at how language is used to oppress women, thus being referred to by Davis as ‘feminist approach’. Cameron (1985: 77, cited in Davis 1989: 4) argues that swearing is in fact a “form of social control” (1985: 77 quoted) because there are more derogatory expressions insulting woman, or referring to female body parts and female animals than their male equivalents:

[...] generally speaking, taboo words tend to refer to women’s bodies rather than men’s. Thus for example *cunt* is a more strongly tabooed word than

⁶ There appears to be no remarkable gender difference in swearing in formal settings (Svensson 2004: 13-14).

prick, and has more tabooed synonyms. Even words like *bugger* and *arsehole* whose reference is male are insulting because they connote homosexuality, which is not only tabooed in itself but associated with femininity as well. (Cameron 1985: 76, cited in Davis 1989: 4)

Cameron's observations made above strongly correlate with findings by Allan (cited in BurrIDGE 2004: 204-205), Hughes (1991: 206-209), and Macaulay (2006: 100-101). Allan argues that not only in English, but in many languages terms referring to female genitalia have a wider range than male ones and are generally more powerful and thus more insulting. According to him, male sex organs such as *prick* can only be applied to men, while female body parts are applicable to both, men and women. He concludes that female-derived terms are much more potent. For example, Davis mentions a confrontation which occurred on a British cricket field in 1987, where a male player called another a "fucking cheating *cunt* [emphasis added]" (Davis 1989:1). The incident had caused huge agitation in the British media.

Furthermore, BurrIDGE (2004: 204-205), Aman (1996: 157) and Hughes (1991: 209) suggest that women are usually not downgraded by being ascribed the characteristics of a man and thus cannot be offended by male terms. Quite to the contrary: a woman that 'has balls' is complemented for her strength of character. Men, on the other hand, that are called *sissy*, *old women* or *girl*, are highly downgraded and insulted. Thus, often we complement females by ascribing them male characteristics, but usually insult men by referring to them with female-derived vocabulary.

Nevertheless, cases in which women were insulted by male-derived swearwords have also been recorded. For instance, Risch mentions an incident where a male student called a female a *dick* and thus suggests that derogatory vocabulary might be "losing their allotted features [+ male] or [+ female] altogether (Risch 1987, cited in Davis 1989: 3).

Swearing is also more socially acceptable among men. According to Reinhold Aman (1996: 157), men are allowed to curse and fight, while women are restricted to crying. Therefore, if a man cries, he is considered as being feminine and weak and when a woman curses or fights, she is called masculine or vulgar (Aman1996: 157).

Unfortunately, Cameron does not account for all uses of 'bad' language. For instance, it is not clear how men wield power over women by insulting other males with

terms such as *cunt*. Also, Cameron's approach has been criticized for excluding derogatory vocabulary which is not female-derived.

3.3 The speech-act approach

The third approach goes back to Harris (1987) who tried to define swearwords in terms of ontology, giving an explanation of why their mention and use are prohibited. Harris stresses the importance of explaining the speech act before analyzing this double prohibition, therefore his approach was entitled 'speech-act approach' by Davis. For Harris (1987: 185 and 187, cited in Davis 1989: 6), the mere pronunciation of a swearword is swearing because

semiotic displacement is the operative mechanism in the ontogenesis of swearing. [...] It therefore represents a primitive attempt to extend the use of learned signs as an indirect means of control over one's environment. [...] [S]wearwords become unmentionable precisely because institutionalized swearing is the unique and marginal case where locution and illocution are one: the utterance is the deed and the deed is the utterance.

According to this definition, even if a speaker recounts a situation in which offensive vocabulary was used by someone else, the speaker becomes a swearer himself no matter if she or he means to do so or not. Thus even "to say 'Damn!' is to swear whether you intend to or not" (Harris 1987: 187 quoted in Davis 1989: 7). However, this approach fails to explain why words such as *cock*, *prick*, *God*, or *Christ* are only considered derogatory in some contexts, but standard in others.

3.4 The Victorian idea

Disapproving of the three approaches above, Davis argues that the Victorian concept of swearwords is still applicable. According to this old theory swearing is described as

immoral language use. Once again, I would like to point out that this attitude towards ‘bad’ language is ambiguous because swearwords are used commonly and frequently in all population strata, while they are not acknowledged as standard language. It is this “discourse of purity as a discourse of power” (McEnery 2006: 2) which underlines the taboo nature of swearwords and thus allows regulatory institutions to suppress their usage.

Although Davis’ article was published in 1989, her assumption still holds true two decades later and more recent publications affirm this. Tony McEnery defines ‘bad’ language as “any word or phrase which, when used in what one might call polite conversation, is likely to cause offence” (McEnery 2006: 2). Unfortunately, he does not give explanations as to what might be ‘polite conversation’. Reinhold Aman (1996: 165) argues similarly when asserting that any word used in an offensive way is a swearword. BurrIDGE (2004: 200) expands this theory by saying that words alone are never offensive, but their shocking character lies in their context and the way they are used. Consider, for instance, the following two examples:

(129) Lady Mary, would you like to come in?

(130) Can you make up your mind, lady?

Obviously, context plays an important role in the definition of swearwords.⁷ In an article in 2007, Andersson and Trudgill (2007: 195) name three main characteristics of swearing:

- (a) refers to something that is tabooed and/ or stigmatized in the culture;
- (b) should not be interpreted literally;
- (c) can be used to express strong emotions and attitudes.

In order to demonstrate their definition, Andersson and Trudgill (2007: 195) use the example of the word *shit*. Literally, *shit* refers to excrement which is part of the tabooed category of scatology. Yet when used as an expletive swearword, its literal sense does not apply, but it is rather an expression of emotion. In this case, the literal meaning has been completely lost. In other words, there is no “shit” in “*Shit!*”.

According to Davis, swearing is assimilated to other linguistic ‘faults’ (such as misspelling, mispronunciation, or mistakes of syntax) and thus is considered ‘bad’ language as opposed to offensive behavior. Nevertheless, she points out that the

⁷ I will return to this notion in the subsequent section.

category ‘swearword’ is essentially open-ended and suggests that more research has to be done in this area. As in all sciences, it is quintessential to continue investigation and analyze current issues, i.e. present-day language use.

4. Modes and functions of swearing

Hughes (1991: 4 and 2006: xv-xx) claims that there is a need to classify swearwords according to broad distinctions as well as in more restricted categories as there are many varied and developed forms of swearing. His broad distinction is concerned with differences between mode and content and these are in turn subdivided in smaller categories. In this section I will discuss issues concerning mode, followed by a discussion of content in the following section.

The term ‘**mode**’ refers to the questions ‘why’ and ‘how’ we swear. According to Hughes (1991: 4 and 2006: xvi-xvii), different modes in swearing are as follows:

- to swear *by* (some higher force or somebody)
- to swear *that* (something is so)
- to swear *to* (do something)
- to swear *at* (something or somebody)

To this list I would like to add one more item:

- to swear *out of* (anger, disappointment, frustration, pain etc.)

In other terms, mode is the linguistic means of expressing the specific **function** of swearwords, i.e. asseveration, invocation, imprecation, malediction, blasphemy, profanity, ejaculation, and profanity etc.

As mentioned in the first section of this theoretical part, there has also been a noticeable change in terms of mode in swearing due to the increasing number of derogatory terms over the years: in the past, people used to swear **by** some higher force or somebody, or **to** do something, but now they swear mostly **at** something or

somebody. Thus the type of swearing which is the focus of this thesis is the most prevalent of all the different modes today.

Hughes (2006: 170) mentions three basic modes of swearing, namely the **expletive or exclamation**, the **curse**, and **the intensive**. The following words and expressions exemplify these three modes:

(131) *Damn!* (expletive or exclamation)

(132) *Damn you!* (curse)

(133) *A damn shame!* (intensive with negative force)

(134) *A damn good show!* (intensive with positive force)

As mentioned above, mode and function are inseparably connected. Furthermore, they are important factors in the definition of offensive language and a number of linguists use them in order to describe swearwords. Andersson and Trudgill (2007: 196) argue that functions are often quintessential in defining what specific swearwords or expressions mean. For instance, in the following examples, the literal meaning has been lost and therefore the expressions can only be defined according to their function:

(135) *Go to hell!*

(136) *Fuck off!*

(137) *Get your ass out of here!*

Although all three expressions have very different literal meanings, they share one function, i.e. making someone leave. Depending on context, swearwords can mean something completely different in another setting. For example, apart from the abusive function already mentioned, *Fuck off!* can also be a means of expressing surprise (both in the positive as well as negative sense). But not every expression can be used in every given situation. *Go to hell!* for instance, does not express surprise. Since the literal meaning of the examples above does not apply, their meaning and purpose has to be described according to their function in specific situations. In the subsequent paragraphs I will give an overview of the most important functions of swearing.

Burridge (2004: 207) names three major categories of swearing functions: **expletive**, **abusive** and various **social functions**. Andersson and Trudgill (2007: 196-197) came up with four different functions, wherein the two main categories (expletive and abusive) correspond to Burridge's first two functions. In addition, they specify two

secondary functions, namely **humorous** and **auxiliary**. Subsequently, I would like to explicate these altogether five functions.

When we feel pent-up frustration, we need to find a way to let our emotions out. One way of doing so is by using a swearword as **expletive**. These cases of swearing are not meant for other parties but just for the swearer himself or herself. In other words, their purpose is not to offend, but they are a means of letting off steam. In this way – as previously mentioned – swearing can function as stress releaser. Nevertheless, bystanders may still take offense if they are sensitive about ‘bad’ language use. Examples include:

(138) *Fuck!*

(139) *Shit!*

(140) *Damn (it)!*

While the examples above are not directed towards others, the second category, discussed below, is. The **abusive** function of swearing aims at insulting people with derogatory words and expressions. This includes name-calling and all kinds of malignant curses like the following:

(141) *Fuck you!*

(142) *You are a bastard.*

(143) *Go to hell!*

Nevertheless, not all swearwords which are directed towards others aim at insulting the receiver(s). Although this kind of swearing may look and/or sound like an abusive speech act, its function is merely **humorous**. Andersson and Trudgill (2007: 197) assert that humorous swearing “often takes the form of abusive swearing but has the opposite function”. This includes the cases of jocular and ironic swearing previously discussed. Frequently, the opposite of what is actually meant is expressed (Hirsch & Andersson 1985: 72). Therefore, this function is not offensive but rather playful. Examples include:

(144) *You son of a bitch!*

(145) *Hello bitches!*

(146) *Get your ass in gear!*

Furthermore, swearing can also perform a grammatical function, namely that of **auxiliary** or as Gray (1993: 311) calls it “meaningless particle”. It is another function

which does not aim at offending anyone but is rather a case of non-emphatic “lazy swearing” (Andersson & Trudgill 2007: 197), i.e. swearing as a way of speaking. However, there are some cases of auxiliary swearing which are emphatic and also heavily stressed (Hirsch & Andersson 1985: 67), thus functioning as intensifiers. Auxiliary swearwords are often adjectives, but they may also be inserted into other words. The following expressions exemplify this function:

(147) *this fucking X*

(148) *bloody Y*

(149) *abso-fucking-lutely*

Last but not least, concerning **social functions**, swearing can demonstrate that a speaker or writer belongs to a certain community or the opposite thereof, i.e. distancing oneself from others. Crystal (2003: 173) mentions a study about swearing patterns of a group of zoologists in the Arctic where it was observed that social swearing increased when the members of the group were relaxed. In this case swearing was a means of demonstrating that the participants were “one of the gang” (Crystal 2003: 173).

Words and expressions which are developed in and used by certain sub-groups of a society in order to show in-group membership are known as **slang** (Jay 1992: 6). Societal sub-groups can be determined by nationality (e.g. British versus American), age (teenagers versus adults), occupation and hobbies (musicians, soldiers, athletes), and unlawful acts (drug users, dealers, prostitutes). The following two examples are American slang words:

(150) *pimp*

(151) *cherry* (refers to ‘virginity’ in American English)

Each slang has a certain code by which members of the particular group can be identified and non-members exposed. Sometimes slang terms become popular among non-members of the group as well and may even be integrated into standard language. For example, the word *pimp* originally singly named procurers of prostitutes, but has since been integrated into general American slang. Nowadays several meanings have been added and there is also a verb version, *to pimp*, with several meanings of its own (including the paradox sense ‘to upgrade’). As a result of such language change, the sub-group in turn has to invent a new code which is only understood by its members (Jay 1992: 7).

Since swearing is frequently used to show belonging to a certain social class, it has even been abused for political purposes. For example, former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is known for uttering “political *shit* storm” on national TV in 2009 but he has been accused for saying the word on purpose. Opposition politicians claimed that the line was scripted in order to “appeal to blue-collar workers” and to make him sound like “one of the lads” (Malkin: 2009).

Similarly, but with the opposite goal, some people avoid using ‘bad’ language in order to show that they do not belong to a certain group of people. For example, most American citizens of the so-called WASP (‘White Anglo-Saxon Protestant’) society strongly oppose the use of swearwords. Some young WASP males even consider the word ‘panties’ unmentionable and therefore advocate the use of the term ‘underwear’.

Jay (1992: 2-9) looked at swearwords in terms of pragmatics and thus analyzed how dysphemistic words function in use as well as how people curse. He came up with ten categories of swearword usage, three of which dealing with different functions of swearing:

- cursing
- insults and slurs
- epithets

‘**Cursing**’ (or ‘cussing’) is an act of swearing which is directed at someone or something and its purpose is to harm the other (Arnovick 199: 90). The attention is on the target of the curse, not the swearer. Therefore, the term covers all swearwords with the above-mentioned abusive function. When a speaker curses another person s/he intends to harm the receiver through the use of certain words or phrases. Historically, it has developed from old ancient curses and hexes and thus bears remarkable resemblance to those. Though in the past curses were meant to come true, nowadays, they are meant in a metaphorical way.

Curses are mainly of religious or social demarcation and range from very serious to comparatively trivial (Hughes 2006: xvii). For example, in the cases of imprecation and malediction the intention is to call down divine or diabolic forces against the object or person concerned and thus the curses have a serious force as can be observed in the expression *May you rot in hell*. In contrast, expletives such as *Blast it!* are somewhat more trivial. Once again, the gravity of the curse depends on the cultural background.

Examples:

(152) English: *Damn you!*

(153) German: *Fahr zur Hölle!* ('Go to hell')

(154) Spanish: *¡Qué te tomen por culo!* ('May they take you from behind!')

Examples (152) – (154) all share the function of telling someone off and may be used in order to say "Leave me alone". The German and English examples both have religious referents, while the Spanish one is sexual, namely referring to the homosexual act of copulation. It has to be mentioned that the Spanish curse is very harsh and insulting. From this we can elicit that in Hispanic culture homosexuality is a tremendous taboo.

Returning to the functions of a curse, apart from cursing others, the swearer her/himself can become the focus of the curse (Hughes 2006: xvii). 'Self-immolating oaths' are not meant to insult, but they are rather common outlets of frustration or surprise:

(155) *Strike me dead!*

(156) *I'll be damned!*

An '**insult**' or '**slur**' is a verbal attack on other people in which the receiver is harmed by the words alone. The swearwords are supposed to denote real or imagined characteristics of the target. Clearly, the focus is on the listener who is meant to be hurt. Slurs may be racial, ethnic, or social and involve stereotypes and prejudices of the speaker, whereas insults may denote the physical, mental, or psychological qualities of the target. Macaulay calls these insults "fighting words" (2006: 100) because according to him, they are likely to provoke a physical response when used in certain situations.

Insults often use figurative language such as metaphors and hyperboles. Especially metaphors are also found in a great number of insults wherein the addressee is compared to all sorts of derogatory objects including animals and feces. For example, when we call a woman a *bitch* we thus compare her to a female dog in heat and the insult *ass(hole)* is an indirect figurative reference to feces. When calling a woman who has frequent sexual intercourse with various partners a *whore*, this may be a metaphor and a hyperbole.

Examples:

- (157) English: *bitch, bastard, ass, nigger*
- (158) German: *Scheißkerl* ('shithead', literally 'shit guy'), *Arsch* ('ass')
- (159) Spanish: *perra* ('whore', literally 'bitch' in the sense of female dog), *maricón*, ('fag')

Epithets are brief but forceful bursts of emotional language which arise from a strong feeling of frustration. They are loud, short and consist of only a few words, usually just one or two. This category includes expletives which are “a way of releasing anger, frustration or anguish” (Burridge 2004: 207). In the act of performing an epithet, the speaker’s presentation plays an important role. For example, loudness and short duration are representations of increased power. There are different kinds of epithets, as in expressing frustration after hurting yourself or hostility when someone cuts the line in a supermarket. Jay calls them “verbalized physical aggression” (1992:7) which replace physical violence and thus reduce the anger of the speaker.

Examples:

- (160) English: *Goddamn it!, Fuck!, Fuck you!, Shit!*
- (161) German: *Scheiße!* ('Shit!'), *Fick dich!* ('Fuck you')
- (162) Spanish: *¡Joder!* ('Fuck!')

Furthermore, Hughes states, that depending on one’s culture, age, gender, social status etc. “there are differences in the degree of provocation carried by certain swearwords” (Hughes 2006: xix). These different degrees of directness in swearing can be categorized ranging from directly personal to general expressions. The following examples illustrate some prominent degrees of directness:

- (163) *You asshole!, Fuck you!* (directly personal)
- (164) *Peter is a bastard.* (personal by reference)
- (165) *Fuck off!* (personal rejection)
- (166) *Screw this!, Shit!* (general expression of anger, frustration, or annoyance)

How the person(s) addressed or those who witnesses the insult will respond depends on the character and also temper of the individual(s). Some might defend themselves or other addressed objects verbally, others react physically and some may even go to court Hughes (2006: xix). As previously discussed, most cases of verbal swearing are emotional uses of language wherein the swearer (usually spontaneously) conveys his or her true feelings. Often he or she does not consider possible consequences beforehand.

In spite of it all, the reaction following an act of cursing largely depends on the referent of the swearword(s). The more a word is taboo in a specific speech community, the more powerful it is when used in an offensive way. I will discuss the issue of content in swearing in the following section.

5. Major categories according to referents

Over the years dysphemistic vocabularies around the world have increased largely. So far, with derogatory terms becoming more fashionable, they have already reached an immense number which is constantly growing. As a result, for the analysis of swearwords categorization is necessary (Hughes 2006: xv and Jay 1992: 9). Classification helps the interpretation of individual lexical items and also the speaker's intention when performing an act of swearing.

Categorizing swearwords allows us to define the different types of references or meaning that 'dirty' words carry. Furthermore, by analyzing individual terms in connection with other lexical items of the same group, it becomes apparent that there is a logic or purpose behind dysphemistic vocabulary usage (Jay 1992: 9).

When considering the **content** of our 'dirty' vocabulary, there are numerous different referents. Hughes (2006: xviii) comments on the variety of content as follows:

Given the diversity of speech communities, the range of content is remarkable for its protean diversity and poetic creativity, but also shocking in its ugliness and cruelty.

Due to the infinite number of swearwords there are many referents according to which swearwords can be categorized. Since lexical categories are a very important issue in the definition and analysis of swearing I will discuss the most prominent ones in this section.⁸ I would like to point out that the categories may overlap and some expressions can be cross-categorized. To illustrate the concept of cross-categorizing, the

⁸ Jay (1992: 2-9) and Hughes' (2006: various pages) will serve as main source in this section Further sources are indicated in the text.

word *bitch* serves as example: this lexical item can be listed both in ‘obscurity’ and in ‘animal’ referents.

5.1 Obscenity

This first category refers to taboos regarding **sexuality** and **scatology**. ‘Obscenity’ is a legal term with focus on the receiver because it is a means of protecting him or her from harmful language. For example, in the 20th century, the word ‘condom’ was omitted from the *Oxford English Dictionary* because it was considered obscene (Macaulay 2006: 99). Related terms are those of ‘indecent language’ or ‘indecent language’. While obscene use of language is determined by the courts, indecency is subject to those in control of media content.

Sexuality and scatology are regarded as ‘low’ varieties of taboo because and obscene terms refer to ‘lower’ functions of digestion, defecation and copulation (including taboos relating to incest), and references to the genitalia. As a matter of fact, Hughes (1991: 21) suggests that the degree of (non-)acceptance of swearwords depends on their solidity and proximity to genital or anal area. This theory explains why a word such as *burp* is considered less offensive than *shit*.

5.1.1 Sexuality

Regarding sexual taboos, Popp (2004: 121) lists three linguistic fields of common referents:

- copulation
- genitalia
- tabooed sexual practice and orientation⁹

⁹ Popp calls this category “sexuelle Abartigkeit” (‘sexual deformity’), which I do not consent with. It implies that there is something wrong with the receiver’s sexual practices and/or orientation.

The most frequent term referring to copulation in the English language is *fuck*. Though this word's etymology is still widely unknown or uncertain, its first mention in written text dates back as early as 1503 (Lass 1995: 99). Today, there is an endless list of variants of this word, including nouns, adjectives, adverbs, interjections, etc. Here are some examples (Hughes 1991: 30):

- (167) *You're cheating, you fuck!* (noun)
- (168) *You fucking bitch!* (adjective)
- (169) *motherfucker* (compound noun)
- (170) *fuck off* (phrasal verb)
- (171) *go fuck yourself* (verb phrase)
- (172) *What the fuck is going on?* (interjection)

Nevertheless there are many other terms that refer to love making:

- (173) *screw*
- (174) *bang*
- (175) *thump*
- (176) *shag*
- (177) *bone*

As for the linguistic field of genitalia, it is noteworthy that the English language contains more than 2,500 expressions for male and female sex organs (Burridge 2004: 214)¹⁰. The following examples are frequently used terms for genitalia:

- (178) male: *cock, prick, dick, weenie*
- (179) female: *cunt, twat, pussy, gash*

The last field of sexual referents for swearwords deals with tabooed sexual practice and orientation. This broad category includes topics such as homosexuality, incest and sexual anomalies. Here are some examples:

Nevertheless, this category includes taboos concerning all sexual orientations differing from heterosexuality (e.g. homosexuality). Thus the term 'deformity' is highly degrading and discriminating and therefore I will refer to this category as 'tabooed sexual practice and orientation'.

¹⁰ For an extensive list of words and expressions concerning male and female private parts and copulation see Ellis 1996: 42-60.

- (180) homosexuality: *faggot, cocksucker, dyke*
(181) incest: *motherfucker*
(182) sexual anomaly: *pigfucker, Go fuck yourself!*

Obscene swearwords may specify their referents directly or refer to them indirectly via innuendos and metaphors. I want to illustrate this with three different swearwords meaning ‘homosexual man’:

- (183) direct reference: *faggot*
(184) innuendo: *cocksucker*
(185) metaphor: *queen*

5.1.2 Scatology

The word ‘scatology’ is closely linked to ‘excrements’, as it refers to human waste products and processes and the body parts linked to these processes. Swearwords of this category are common among children because they learn such terms fairly soon when being trained on how to use the toilet.

Once again, Popp (2004: 132) lists three linguistic areas of reference:

- excrement
- body parts related to digestion and defecation
- places where scatological processes usually take place

Here are some scatology examples in English German and Spanish:

- (186) English: *shit, crap, piss, Piss off!, ass, asshole*
(187) German: *Scheiße, Kacke* (‘shit’), *Geh scheißen!* (‘Fuck off!’, literally ‘Go shit!’), *Arschloch* (‘asshole’), *schiffen* (‘to piss’)
(188) Spanish: *mierda, caca* (‘shit’), *¡Vete a la mierda!* (‘Fuck off!’, literally ‘Go to the shit!’) *mear* (‘to piss’)

Returning to the topic of obscenity in general, Hughes (2006: xvii) argues that many obscene words “deal with literal or practical impossibilities”. For instance, a person who is called a *son of a bitch* is practically impossible since no human can be born from the womb of a dog. Naturally, the swearer using this expression actually refers to the son of prostitute not a female dog. Further examples are the following expletives:

(189) *Bugger off!*

(190) *Go take a flying fuck!*

In this respect, these words and phrases differ from the ‘high’ varieties of taboo (profanity and blasphemy) in “literal potential” (Hughes 2006: xvii).

Finally, obscenity is not restricted to the English language as illustrated in the following examples taken from German and Spanish:

(191) German: *Schlampe* (‘whore’), *Fotze* (‘pussy’), *Schwuchtel* (‘faggot’), *Scheiße* (‘shit’), *Arschloch* (‘asshole’)

(192) Spanish: *hijo de puta* (‘son of a whore’), *coño* (‘pussy’), *marricón* (‘faggot’), *mierda* (‘shit’)

5.2 Religion

Above I have given a detailed account of the history of religious referents in swearing¹¹ and therefore I will not discuss this topic here further. Nevertheless, there is an important distinction between two kinds of religious swearing which I do want to mention, namely that of profanity and blasphemy.

¹¹ See section 2.3.

5.2.1. Profanity

When a swearer uses profane language, she or he is using the names of deities or sacral referents in a secular or indifferent manner. The speaker or writer is ignorant or intolerant of the guidelines of a particular religious order and usually she or he does not mean to offend the religion. Profanity is the outcome of ignorance or indifference (as opposed to intentionally insulting religions).

Examples:

- (193) English: *Jesus Christ!*
- (194) German: *Oh Gott!* ('Oh God!')
- (195) Spanish: *¡Dios mío!* ('My God!')

5.1.1. Blasphemy

Blasphemy is often interchanged with profanity, but they differ in terms of speaker intention. Both involve violation of the taboos against religious names and referents. But profanity is usually regarded as habitual, secular or indifferent to religion, whereas blasphemy is a direct attack on a religious group, deity or figure. The blasphemer is aware of the direct insult, whereas the profane might not be. In most Western societies, profanity and blasphemy have become less potent with the increasing secularization, but they are still widely used (Burridge 2004: 199-200).

Examples:

- (196) English: *Screw the Pope!*
- (197) German: *Zur Hölle mit der Kirche!* ('To hell with church!')
- (198) Spanish: *Me cago en Dios!* ('I shit on God')

To non-believers these expressions may be humorous, but believers are usually highly offended by them. In the past blasphemy was often punished by monetary penalties, imprisonment, excommunication or even death. Therefore, people created euphemisms

and other disguise mechanisms to avoid profanity and blasphemy such as the word *gosh* for *God* (Macauley 2006: 99-100).

5.3 Social referents

The most prevalent social referents in swearing are intellect, gender and ethnicity which shall be discussed in more detail in this section. But these are by no means the only semantic fields which have created opprobrious terms. Social referents include age, family origins, the attribution of various reprehensible behaviors and violations of moral codes (including treachery, idleness, promiscuity, dishonesty, theft, lack of courage or martial commitment, sycophancy, meanness, dirt), social stigmas (such as illegitimacy or perversion), social conditions (like poverty), insulting names, demeaning labels, and unflattering comparisons (including animal, sexual, intellectual, excretory, racist and political objects of comparison). Basically, a social slur can refer to anything that differs from the norm within one closed community or society as a whole. Frequently used terms for people that do not ‘fit in’ in society are:

(199) *freak*

(200) *weirdo*

5.3.1 Intelligence and intellect

According to Hughes, this category (termed “stupidity” by Hughes) is “probably the richest source of terms of personal insult and abuse, both historically and geographically” (2006: 452) in the English language. It is noteworthy that lack of intelligence is often equated with lack of worth, which explains its popularity as insult of contempt. Although the use of many swearwords in this category has been reduced due to political correctness, new terms are continually created.

Some of the oldest and also most common swearwords in this category are:

- (201) *fool*
- (202) *idiot*
- (203) *moron*
- (204) *imbecile*

The four examples above all have an interesting history. Whereas *fool* could be used in an endearing, sympathetic way in the past, *idiot*, *moron* and *imbecile* were formerly neutral technical terms in psychology.

A large number of swearwords referring to lack of intelligence or intellect are of metaphorical nature. There are many different categories referents may stem from. Some are listed below:

- (205) animals: *donkey, ass, coot, loon cuckoo*
- (206) food: *nutter, fruitcake, noodle*
- (207) sexuality: *dildo, prick, tit, twat, cunt, screwball*
- (208) utensils: *lunchbox, cement head*

While swearwords in general are often compound nouns, terms in this category often start with *dumb-* or end with *-head*:

- (209) *dumb-ass, dumbell, dumbo, dummy*
- (210) *airhead, blockhead, cement head, jamhead, lunkhead, prawnhead, puddinghead, toolhead*

Apart from intelligence and intellect, many of these opprobrious terms may be used in other senses, especially that of madness. Another interesting fact is that the majority of swearwords referring to stupidity are usually used toward men rather than woman (ibid.). However, there are exceptions such as the following example, which refers to females:

- (211) *chickenbrain*

Closely linked to the concept of intelligence and intellect, is the concept of different classes. Since swearing is usually associated with lower classes, swearwords are often called ‘vulgar’. Jay (1992: 6) defines ‘vulgarity’ as:

[T]he language of the common person, ‘the person in the street, or the unsophisticated, unsocialized, or under-educated.

Clearly, this involves a value judgment concerning proletariat by the middle and upper classes which to me seems hypocritical, since swearing is not restricted to lower classes.

According to Jay (1992: 6) there is no particular need or function in vulgarity, but in my opinion vulgarity can be a social marker showing that the speaker belongs to a specific community with the same language code. Thus one possible function of swearing is expressing in-group-solidarity.

Furthermore, the concept of vulgarity is prevalent in the vast majority of languages around the world. The use of vulgarity may even mark the difference between a native speaker and a non-native as may be the case in the following examples:

(212) English: *up yours, kiss my ass*

(213) German: *Fotze* ('cunt'), *Leck mich am Arsch* ('kiss my ass', literally 'lick my ass')

(214) Spanish: *batidora* ('female beater', literally 'mixer')

5.3.2 Gender

Above,¹² I have discussed two of the three basic aspects of gender in swearing, namely the gender of the swearer and that of the target. Here, I would like to focus on the gender of the swearwords used.

Most languages, including English, are predominantly 'patriarchal' or "phallocratic" as feminists say (Hughes 2006: 498). As a result, most insults are products of male prejudice. According to Hughes (2006: 196) and Lakoff (2000: 101), female-derived terms are more potent than their male counterparts. Although insults referring to the male sex do exist, they are much weaker than those referring to females or homosexuals. This can be observed in the juxtaposition of the following examples of female- and male-derived obscenities:

(215) male: *dick, cock, prick, ballocks, pig*

(216) female: *cunt, pussy, twat, bitch, sow*

(217) homosexual: *cocksucker, bugger*

¹² See section 3.1.

Interestingly, all of the female-derived terms can also be applied to men, whereas the male-derived are usually not used for women. As aforementioned, female swearwords that are used toward men are stronger and are more insulting than male ones.

Moreover, there has been a so-called ‘feminization of swearwords’, a process in which words that originally referred to men changed in meaning and are now exclusively applied to women (Hughes 2006: 163). For example, *shrew* was originally the name for a small, mouse-like animal. Later its meaning changed to “a wicked, evil-disposed or malignant man, rascal or villain, specifically the Devil” (Hughes 2006: 435). But nowadays both these significations are not in use anymore. Instead, a shrew denominates a loud and aggressive woman. More swearwords which have undergone this process of feminization are:

- (218) *witch*
- (219) *scold*
- (220) *shrew*
- (221) *wench*
- (222) *bitch*
- (223) *minx*
- (224) *tramp*

As seen in the examples above, gender-specific swearwords applied to women often refer to female promiscuity. This leads back to the traditional angel/whore dichotomy and its stereotypes and role models (most prominently Eve versus the Virgin Mary). For centuries this idea has formed societal ideals and also language and it has only been criticized in recent decades (Hughes 2006: 498). Nevertheless, women that do not adhere to their supposed female role and behavior are still called ‘manlike’. Insults for ‘manly’ women include:

- (225) *amazon*
- (226) *shrew*
- (227) *virago*
- (228) *battle-ax*

When discussing female promiscuity, it is important to mention the two most frequent words referring to women as prostitutes:

- (229) *whore*

(230) *slut*

I would like to mention an observation by Jay (cited in Hughes 2006: 501) according to which *whore* is the preferred term of male swearers, while women tend to use *slut*. Furthermore, according to Hughes (2006: 437) women typically use *witch* and *shrew* when talking to or about other women.

The quantity of insults for women is so great that there are numerous categories of referents according to which the terms can be classified. Here are some examples:

(231) sexuality: *cunt, pussy, twat, bitch*

(232) animals: *bitch, vixen, cow, sow, harpy*

(233) superstition and prejudice: *witch, hag, dragon, siren*

But these are by far not all. More frequently used insults for women include:

(234) *hussy*

(235) *fishwife*

(236) *quean*

As the discussion in this section has shown, there is a large number of contemptuous terms for women for the sake of being female. However, so far the only swearword I have come across which insults men for being male are:

(237) *dick*

(238) *prick*

(239) *phallocrat*

Obviously this word is much weaker than the terms for females listed above and, more importantly, it is not nearly as frequently used as any of the female terms above.

5.3.3 Ethnicity

Nowadays, in the time of political correctness, xenophobic terms have become the most tabooed swearwords in most societies. Terms in this category are regarded as ‘unspeakable’ and thus have an extreme potential to shock sensitive ears and eyes. Race and skin color are distinguishing factors in xenophobic language.

Xenophobic swearwords are also called ‘**ethnic insults**’ or ‘**ethnic slurs**’. However, it should be mentioned that here ‘ethnic’ is a euphemistic term since ethnic slurs are always racist (Hughes 1991: 134). The problematic here is similar to the gender-specific inequality in a patriarchal society just discussed. As Matsuda says: “racist speech proclaims racial inferiority” (cited in Lakoff 2000: 101).

To my knowledge, most languages contain derogatory expressions referring to foreign cultures and people and I find it very interesting to analyze these since they often reflect historical and social development of the community. For example, English ethnic slurs go as far back as the Anglo-Saxon period. Back then, war and religious competition with the Vikings and Celts lead to lead to insults such as (Hughes 1991: 50-52)¹³:

(240) *pirate*

Until recent decades, ethnic slurs were not considered ‘offensive’ or ‘taboo’ in dictionaries (Hughes 2006: 146). Accordingly, many speakers were not aware of the insulting nature of expressions like the following (Burridge 2004: 210)

(241) *French vice* (‘sexual malpractices’)

(242) *French disease / French pox* (‘venereal disease’)

(243) *Excuse my French* (when apologizing for using offensive language)

The last three examples reflect Britain’s long historical rivalry with France. War is one of the main reasons for the creation of ethnic insults. Other factors include migration and immigration, politics and business rivalry.

Regarding the content of ethnic insults, Hughes argues that the key factor in developing them lies not in the word itself but in the person who uses it (2006: 146):

They [ethnic insults] are usually based on malicious, ironic, or humorous distortions of the target group’s identity or “otherness”. Stereotypes, blasons populaires, and nicknames are also major contributing features, used to create and label these identities.

Examples of such stereotypes are found in the two subsequent examples, which both condemn Germans from a British point of view:

(244) *fritz*

¹³ For a figure of the historic development of the semantic field of xenophobia in English see Hughes 1991: 127.

(245) *kraut*

Obviously, (244) refers to the fact that many German men are called ‘Fritz’ and thus generalizes the whole nation. Example (245) is a blason populaire referring to the popularity of sauerkraut in the German cuisine. It may also infer that Germans stink since sauerkraut has a distinguishing smell.

There are two typical phonetic patterns found in English xenophobic nicknames. Firstly, many contemptuous names are **short**, consisting of just one syllable:

(246) *chink* (‘Chinese’)

(247) *yid* (‘Jew’)

(248) *frog* (‘French’)

(249) *gook* (‘East Asian’)

(250) *jap* (‘Japanese’)

(251) *coon* (‘black person’)

(252) *wog* (‘person of color, especially from Northern Africa or western or southern Asia’)

Secondly, another widespread group consists of words that contain **ironic diminutives ending** in -y:

(253) *sheeny* (‘Jew’)

(254) *paki* (‘Pakistani or South Asian’)

(255) *pommy* (‘British’, used in Australia and New Zealand)

(256) *yankee* (‘American’)

(257) *whitey*

(258) *honky* (‘white person’)

(259) *frenchy* / *frenchie*

(260) *jerry* (‘German’)

(261) *eyetie* (‘Italian’)

Another noteworthy characteristic of racial insults is their **grammatical flexibility**. Most ethnic insults can be used as an adjective:

(262) a *jap* car

(263) a *gook* grave

(264) a *limey* suit

Though considerably less frequent, some xenophobic terms can also take the form of a verb:

- (265) they want to *frenchify* the whole place
- (266) the West is not yet as *yankified* or *pommified*
- (267) *to jew* ('to cheat or overreach' or 'to drive a hard bargain, to haggle')

All of the examples above portray prejudices against out-groups. But in some cases, the insult has come to be accepted in a positive way within the group as a means of showing in-group solidarity. For instance, the predominantly American swearword *nigger* is used by African-Americans themselves as means of endearment or joking. Nevertheless, the word is not applicable by members outside the group. Lakoff says that "words mean different things to different people in different contexts" (2000: 105).

Furthermore, in the case of *nigger*, there is another, rather new sense of the word which is not restricted to people of African ethnicity nor Americans. According to Hughes, it refers to

any victim of racial or other prejudice, a person who is disenfranchised economically, politically, or socially. (2006: 328)

Thus, Irish novelist Roddy Doyle wrote in *The Commitments* in 1987 (cited in Hughes 2006: 328):

- (268) The Irish are the *niggers* of Europe, lads.

Xenophobia is a global issue and in order to illustrate this, I want to cite a few prominent examples for ethnic slurs from three different languages:

- (269) English: *nigger*, *chink* ('Chinese')
- (270) German: *Tschuch* / *Tschutsch* (Austrian German referring to people of Southeasterly European or oriental descent), *Schlitzauge* ('Asian')
- (271) Spanish: *moro* (referring to Arab people), *gringo* / *yanqui* ('American / yankee')

5.4 Animals

Swearwords that use animal referents are metaphors in which people are deliberately compared to animals and therefore applying undesirable ‘beastly’ characteristics to a human being. As seen above, they are often used in order to portray sexual promiscuity and lack of intelligence. Furthermore, when a swearer applies an insult referring to an animal to another person, he or she denies the target the status of human being. The target’s status is lowered to that of an inferior being. Since humans generally see themselves as superior to animals, this usually results as especially insulting.

As aforementioned, terms that originally denominated animals and were later regarded as too offensive for ‘decent’ speech, had to be replaced by new terms. Above, I have already discussed the cases of:

(272) *ass / arse*

(273) *cock*

(274) *shrew*

Another example that has seen its original meaning die out is the frequently used:

(275) *bitch*

As a matter of fact, *bitch* is the oldest insult among animal terms. New, euphemistic expressions referring to a female dog include:

(276) *dogess*

(277) *lady dog*

(278) *she dog*

(279) *puppy’s mother*

Despite its female derivation, *bitch* is frequently applied to both men and women. According to Hughes (2006: 137) “its tone ranges from extremely offensive to mildly critical”. Moreover, it can also be used in difficult situations or for complaints. There is also a verb form, to bitch, which means “to complain or criticize” (Hughes 2006: 23-24). Moreover, in America the adjective *bitching* or *bitchin’* has come to be accepted as a positive term, meaning “very, wonderful or excellent” (Ibid.).

Bitch is part of the largest group of insults derived from animal terms in English, namely dogs. This is curious since dogs have been regarded as loyal and domesticated animals for long time. Nowadays words from this category refer to treacherous, cowardly, sneaky and promiscuous people. More examples include:

(280) *minx*

(281) *mongrel*

Whereas in medieval times, *dog* was a common swearword, it has not been used as such since the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, nowadays *dog* is often used in order to denominate a man who has sex with many women. But promiscuity in men and in women are two different stories: while the latter is perceived as more scandalous, the former is oftentimes portrayed as ideal. Therefore *dog* is not used as insult, but rather as compliment. *Bitch* and *minx* on the other hand cannot be used in a positive way. Promiscuity in a man is usually expressed by the mention of contemptuous family origins as in the above mentioned *mongrel*. Another example includes the following swearword:

(282) *son of a bitch*

The expression *son of a bitch* is mainly used in American English. It has undergone a process of weakening and nowadays is often used in an endearing way. Therefore, when used as insult it often needs other words (e.g. adjectives) to reinforce offensiveness (Hughes 2006: 441-442).

According to Hughes the field of insulting animal terms “shows a typical concentration of female terms” (2006: 11) including many feminized forms. Opprobrious words with animal referents that have undergone the process of feminization are:

(283) *shrew*

(284) *bitch*

(285) *minx*

(286) *sow*

Male versions of the examples above are less common and in most cases less offending. This also holds true for neutral forms. The following two examples for male and neutral version of *sow* shall illustrate this:

(287) *pig*

(288) *swine*

There are numerous other English animal terms used as swearwords. Some examples include:

(289) rat ('someone who has betrayed another')

(290) cow ('corpulent person, usually female')

(291) baboon ('dumb person')

(292) skunk ('despicable person')

Frequency, seriousness and meaning of animal referents vary from language to language. Nevertheless, there are certain similarities in European speech communities. For example, the pig- and dog-related terms are to be found in most of them. Here are some examples from German and Spanish:

(293) German: *Hund, Sau, Schwein*

(294) Spanish: *perro, perra, cerdo, cerda*

The degrees of offensiveness of the pig-related terms are fairly similar in English, German and Spanish. However, there are remarkable differences regarding references to dogs. While *Hund* literally means 'dog', it is used to insult mean, scurrilous men. The Spanish literal equivalent is *perro*. The female version, *perra*, on the other hand denominates promiscuous women and is used in the same way like the English *bitch*. The German word for she-dog, *Hündin*, is not used as a swearword, but only refers to the actual female dog. I would like to add that *Hund* is much less offensive than *perro*, *perra* or *bitch*.

There is a special grammatical feature in German swearing in which an insulting word can be used as prefix or suffix and thus making any other word offensive as well. When used together with another swearword, these suffixes aggravate the offensive character of the word. This also applies to animal terms. Here are some examples:

(295) nouns: *Sauwetter, Sautrottel, Charaktersau, Sauhund, Hundskerl*
Bullenschwein, Kommunistenschwein

(296) adjectives: *saukalt, hundemüde, hundsgemein*

6. Disguise mechanisms

“What is taboo is revolting, untouchable, filthy, unmentionable, dangerous, disturbing, thrilling – but above all powerful” (Burridge 2004: 199). As mentioned repeatedly, violation of linguistic taboos has always led to sanctions of various kinds. In the past the punishments were exceedingly harsh with consequences going as far as imprisonment and execution. Thus, to avoid pronouncing or writing offensive words, people came up with a great range of alternatives, i.e. disguise mechanisms. Nevertheless, for Hughes (1991: 12) disguise mechanisms themselves are a covert form of censorship and I strongly agree with this assumption. Often, disguise mechanisms are imposed on speakers and writers from standardization institutions such as legislative authorities and governments. A current example is that of ‘political correctness’.

Burridge (2004: 200) claims that the difference between swearwords and acceptable words with the same meaning (e.g. *cunt* versus *vagina*) is that the former display the essence of the thing they refer to. The most common disguise mechanisms are euphemisms, dysphemisms, coded forms, and distorted words (Hughes 2006: 135). These categories shall be discussed in more detail in this section and since the empirical part of this thesis will analyze swearing occurrences in movies, the matter of disguising spoken language is dealt with separately.

Prior to that I would like to mention an observation made by Allan and Burridge (1991: 4) who claim that euphemism and dysphemism are not merely a matter of lexical choice but the determining choice mainly lies within the context the words are used in. This is a notion which should be kept in mind during the subsequent discussion of various disguise mechanisms.

6.1. Euphemism

‘Euphemism’ is the deliberate use of polite and inoffensive (or less offensive) words and expressions instead of taboo language. Allan and Burridge (1991: 3) define it as

“expression that seeks to avoid being offensive”, i.e. an accepted alternative to offensive terms. Cameron (1995: 74) relates euphemism back to word magic:

It is a form of superstitious word magic whereby I can convey the meaning without ambiguity, but without actually allowing the taboo word to pass my lips.

It has been suggested that euphemisms have been part of language use since the very beginnings of language development (ibid.: vii). This may be explained by the fact that censorship was very harsh in former times. Burridge (2004: 200-201) observed that in the past “euphemisms could literally be a matter of life or death”. Nevertheless, nowadays we mainly use euphemisms because we do not want to ‘lose face’ or avoid censorship by standardization institutions.

Depending on the nature of a taboo, the disguised forms vary. Hughes (1991: 12) claims that “[t]he stronger the taboo, the greater the number of evading forms”. Thus, Farmer and Henley (1890-1904, as cited in Hughes 1991: 12) for instance, list around seven hundred synonyms for *cunt*.

Due to its long history, euphemism has become a broad lexical field and there are many different kinds of euphemisms. Allan and Burridge (1991: 14) have summarized the various types of euphemisms as follows:

Many euphemisms are figurative; many have been or are being the cause of semantic change; some show remarkable inventiveness of either figure or form; and some are indubitably playful.

Subsequently, I want to give a brief overview of different kinds of euphemisms¹⁴.

The most obvious way of avoiding certain words is not to say or write them at all and instead use different expressions. This is known as **one-for-one substitution** as in the following examples:

(297) *bottom* for *arse/ass*

(298) *the f-word* for *fuck*

Swearing includes a special metalinguistic terminology in which also the name of the overall category of swearwords has a number of substitute expressions – many of which are also used in this thesis – such as ‘bad language’, ‘foul language’ ‘four-letter words’, ‘dirty words’ etc.

¹⁴ My main resource for this purpose will be Allan and Burridge 1991: 14-20. Further sources are indicated in the text.

One of the most common characteristics of euphemism is the use of **figurative** language, i.e language that does not express directly what is meant but via altered or exaggerated ways. This often includes the use of figurative devices such as metaphors, hyperboles, and understatements:

(299) **metaphor:** *the cavalry's come*

(300) **hyperbole:** *flight to glory*

(301) **understatement:** *sleep, he's not very bright*

For instance, the metaphorical expression *the cavalry's come* indicates that a woman has her period by referring to the British army which is known to wear red uniforms. A hyperbole (or overstatement) is found in *flight to glory* which is a euphemistic depiction of death. Apart from overstatements, there are also euphemistic understatements as in using the word *sleep* instead of *die*. The phrase *he's not very bright* is an understatement which can replace insulting expressions like *he's as thick as two short planks* or *he's an idiot*.

Another way of evading offensive language is to change words in their form, known as **remodeling**. As a result, the new word resembles the original one in a way, but it seems less strong. This frequently involves alliteration or rhyme:

(302) **alliteration:** *darn, dang* and *drat* for *damn*

(303) **rhyme:** *ruddy* for *bloody*

Though less offending, some of the remodeled versions of swearwords are still perceived as offensive by some people.

The more frequent a swearword is used, the more disguised forms it will produce. For example, *bloody* is a particularly popular swearword in Britain and thus there are numerous disguised forms including expletives and epithets such as the following:

(304) *Blimey!, Blast!, Blow!*

(305) *blessed, bleeding, blinking, blooming, blinding, blasted*

However, it should be noted that some of the euphemisms above in turn touch upon blasphemous and profane topics such as the fires of hell and the wrath of God (Burridge 2004: 209) and thus they are often not considered acceptable either.

Also, offending words can be changed in form via the method of **clipping**. This means that the word is shortened because part of it is left out, i.e. clipped:

(306) *jeeze* for *Jesus*

(307) *eff* for *fuck*

(308) *effing* for *fucking*

Similar to clipping, **abbreviations** or ‘minced oaths’ (Hughes 1991: 16 and 2006: 3) shorten offensive words and expressions too:

(309) *a-hole* for *asshole*

(310) *S.O.B.* for *son-of-a-bitch*

The very last example above may also be referred to as **acronym** – another technique of evading offensive language use. Hereby, the first letters of a phrase or longer name are put together to build a new word, thus disguising the offending parts of the swearword. Further examples are:

(311) *snafu* for ‘situation normal, all fucked up’

(312) *fubar* for ‘fucked up beyond all recognition / any repair / all reason’

Furthermore, one may also employ a different jargon in order to hide a tabooed term. This is known as **circumlocution**. Hereby, figurative language and technical terms from a different jargon are often used. The following examples employ both these strategies and thus the direct mention of genitals and specific distinguishing female body parts is avoided:

(313) *private parts* for *cunt*, *prick*, *cock* etc.

(314) *lady parts* for *vagina* and/or *breasts*

While circumlocution often makes use of technical terms pertaining to a different jargon, euphemisms can also be expressed via the corresponding **technical jargon** or **learned terms**:

(315) *feces* for *shit*

(316) *copulate* for *fuck*

Furthermore, in order to ‘hide’ swearwords, one can paraphrase them by referring to them via related things. For once this can be done by talking or writing

about something which is part of the tabooed expression but does not offend when standing on its own (**part-for-whole**) or vice versa (**general-for-specific**):

(317) **General-for-specific:** *go to bed* for *fuck*; *you-know-what* for any offensive expression or topic;

(318) **Part-for-whole:** Afrikaans *ghat* ('hole') for *ass/arse*;

Another strategy of avoiding offensive words and expressions is the use of foreign languages, also known as **borrowing**. Although whoever witnesses the swearing may understand the borrowed word(s), it often does not seem as harsh¹⁵:

(319) *cojones* for *balls* in American English

Last but not least, one can simply leave out the offensive term. Such **omissions** can occur both in spoken and written language. Also, there are many varied forms such as full omissions (also called 'expungements') and quasi-omissions in which letters of a word or whole words of an expression are left out. In writing, omissions have been indicated by asterisks (*) or dashes (—) since the early eighteenth century. Though it is presumed that the reader knows what is meant by these disguised words, the writer can at least pretend s/he has not written them. Quasi-omissions in writing may look as follows (Hughes 1991: 18, Macaulay 2006: 100, Steiner 1980: 23, Allan and Burridge 1991: 3-4):

(320) *c**t*

(321) *f***, f**k, f*ck, f—ck, f—*

(322) *son-of-a* (wherein the offensive word *bitch* is expunged)

An example of a full omission can be found in Alexander Pope's edition of Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar' wherein the word *hats* was expunged (cited in Hughes 1991: 19):

(323) *Their ---- are pluckt about their ears.*

In spoken discourse, omissions are commonly expressed via words such as the following:

(324) *mhm*

¹⁵ Nowadays, the use of English swearwords in many other languages – such as German – opposes this view since many English swearwords are well known around the world and in many cases they are actually a lot more offensive than the native alternatives and equivalents.

(325) *er-mm*

An interesting observation about euphemisms is that they might obscure their original meaning so well that they are finally commonly used in polite conversation. That is, many people who say or write euphemisms such as *heck* or *blooming* are not deliberately using ‘bad’ language. Though some would normally not use the words they are obscuring (in our examples *hell* and *bloody*), they are often not aware of their taboo origin. Further examples of this kind include the following expletives which have been coined in order to avoid saying *Jesus* (Crystal 1997: 61):

(326) *Geraniums, Gee Whiskers, Jeepers Creepers, Jiminy Cricket*

Finally, euphemisms are a universal phenomenon (Hughes 1991: 11). The following examples relating to the universal taboo of direct reference to death shall demonstrate this fact.

Universal examples:

(327) English: *pass on, pass away, pass over, make one’s bow, go aloft, meet one’s maker, depart this life, sleep*

(328) German: *ableben* (‘demise’), *den Tod finden* (‘find death’, poetic), *ums Leben kommen* (‘to lose one’s life’), *heimgehen* (‘go home’)

(329) Spanish: *dejar de existir* (‘stop existing’), *exhalar el ultimo espiro* (‘exhale the last breath’), *despedir el espíritu* (‘bid farewell to the spirit’)

6.2. Dysphemism

‘Dysphemism’ refers to the opposite of euphemism. Although the term has been around since at least the nineteenth century, it is not part of our general language use (whereas euphemism is) nor mentioned in many dictionaries and reference books so far and it has only recently been added to specialist vocabulary (Hughes 2006: 142, Burridge 2004: 200).

Dysphemism refers to the intentional use of offensive language (as opposed to polite words and expressions). Allan and Burridge (1991: 3 and Burridge 2004: 200) describe it as our verbal resources for being offensive and abusive or letting off steam. According to this definition, swearwords are a subcategory of dysphemism. While Burridge defines our dysphemistic vocabulary as any kind of tabooed language, Hughes (1991: 11) limits the category to “startlingly direct and shockingly coarse violations of a taboo”. Furthermore, Hughes (2006: 142) describes dysphemisms as “macabrely metaphorical, or gruesomely physical” and including black humor.

The following words are dysphemisms for being ‘drunk’:

(330) *pissed, shitfaced*

Commonly, dysphemisms are also used as insults. The subsequent words and expressions denoting someone’s lack of intelligence and/or competence illustrate this:

(331) *blockhead, bonehead, dickhead, lamebrain, not have a full deck of cards, not know one’s arse (ass) from one’s elbow, couldn’t organize a booze-up in a brewery*

Due to their metaphorical use of words, dysphemisms can be offensive without using words categorized as ‘offensive’ when standing on their own. The following expressions referring to sexual intercourse and insulting someone for their ugliness serve as illustration for this characteristic (Ibid.):

(332) *bed-pressing, belly-bumping, bum dancing, a squeeze and a squirt, screw, poke*

(333) *a face to shatter glass, to stop a clock, something the cat dragged in*

Like euphemism, dysphemism is universal too. The subsequent examples in three different languages are straightforward, graphical, and often cruel references to the physical aspect of death and dying and thus stand in contrast to the euphemistic expressions for dying listed above.

Universal examples:

(334) English: *bite the dust, to be pushing up the daisies, snuff it, snuff the candle, croak (it), kick the bucket, cut the painter*

- (335) German: *krepieren*, ('croak it'), *abkratzen* ('scrape off')
- (336) Spanish: *estirar la pata* ('stretch the leg'), *dejar/soltar/dar el pellejo* ('leave the skin'), *hincar el pico* ('stick the peak', as in mountaineering)

6.3. Spoken language

Above I have discussed the topics of euphemism and dysphemism in a general matter referring to both spoken and written language. But there are some crucial differences between written and spoken communication and each have interesting ways of avoiding 'unwanted' words. On this, Gray (1993: 314) observed:

Written obscenities may have a completely different form and force from those spoken. And those spoken may have completely different lives according to their contexts.

Here, I am going to look at specific ways of disguising spoken language since the empirical part of this thesis will be examining swearing in spoken discourse. Therefore some oral and auditory disguise mechanisms will be presented.

First of all, tabooed words are often transformed phonetically to make them look like different words. As a matter of fact, many euphemisms which are also used in written language derive from phonetically disguised forms. This strategy is one of the oldest ways of disguising taboo language. For example, Hughes (1991: 13) lists 36 euphemisms which are some kind of distorted form of *God* that were in use between 1350 and 1909 including the following:

- (337) *gog* (1350s), *cokk* (1386), *cod* (1569), '*sblood* (1598), *gad* (1611), *egad* (1673), *od* (1695) *gosh*, *golly* (both 1743), *s'elpe me Bob* (1842)

Phonetic transformations frequently include alliterations, rhyme and rhythm (Hughes 2006: 136):

- (338) **alliteration**: *blooming* or *bleeding* for *bloody*
- (339) **rhyme**: *ruddy* for *bloody*
- (340) **rhythm**: *a-hole* for *asshole*

A special case of phonetic disguise mechanism is that of rhyming slang, also known as **Cockney rhyming slang** (because it originated in London working class). Herein, words and formulas are used in which the last word rhymes with the intended swearword. For instance, *Bristol City* stands for *titty* and *Khyber Pass* for *ass*. In spoken language these terms are often abbreviated as in *bristols* and *khyber* (Hughes 2006: 136). Rhyming slang disguises original meanings so well that in many cases people who use them are not aware that they are using offensive language at all. For example, Burridge (2004: 205) has observed that people use the following phrase without realizing what it means:

(341) He gets on my *wick*.

Though the word *wick* sounds harmless and may as well be an acceptable synonym for *nerves*, the term is actually an abbreviation of the Cockney rhyming slang *Hampton Wick* meaning *prick*. Similarly, some users know they are using offensive language but may not be aware of the exact meaning:

(342) He's a real *berk*.

In the example above, the word *berk* derives from *Berkeley/Berkshire Hunt* which is a rhyming slang of *cunt*.

Furthermore, spoken transformations include **phonetic clippings** as found in the widely used *eff* which is among the most common euphemisms for *fuck*. Usually, phonetic transformations of words can be used in the same way as the term they are disguising:

(343) *eff, eff off, effing* for *fuck, fuck off, fucking*

The discussion of euphemism and dysphemism leads to the question if disguised forms of swearwords should be considered offensive as well. Although they are clearly not as offensive as the terms they are obscuring they still have a great potential in upsetting receivers and listeners and therefore I will also consider them separately in my analysis below. I think it will be especially interesting to see how these words have been translated in film before.

But there are other forms of disguising spoken swearing worth mentioning. One prevalent in radio and television is that of dubbing offensive language with a 'bleep'-sound. This of course is an overt form of media censorship. Furthermore, the

onomatopoetic term *bleep* presents an interesting case because it has been integrated into the English language as in the verb *bleep out* (Hughes 1991: 19, Burridge 2004: 210). On TV, the bleep-sound is usually accompanied by a black bar placed over the speaker's mouth or by blurring this area in order to conceal lip movements. Nowadays it is often replaced by a mere omission wherein the swearers' voice is cut out. This last strategy is particularly prevalent in music wherein it is often so well done that listeners who do not know the lyrics of a song might not even notice that there is a gap.

II. Empirical part: Swearing in *Pulp Fiction*

7. Material and method

The goal of this thesis is to compare swearword usages in English and German. Before doing so I want to mention a statement by Andersson and Trudgill (2007: 199) concerning the comparability of swearing in different cultures:

It is an extremely hard task to compare the frequency of swearing in different cultures. No one can really be expected to have a complete knowledge of swearing even in the various layers of their own society. Even within one culture there seem to be differences in the frequency of swearing between different groups and within one and the same group. Still, there is no need to give up the search for descriptions and explanations of these differences, as long as the difficulties are kept in mind.

This argument in mind, my first and essential task was to find materials that would allow me the best possible way for my analysis. For several reasons, my choice soon fell on movies. Firstly, emotions play a major part in swearing and in films the manifestations of emotions (voice, tone, gestures, body language, and facial expressions) are visible and audible. As a result, the possibility of being confronted with ambiguity is lower than with written texts. Secondly, background information is crucial for a profound analysis of a text. The storyline of a movie provides context to specific instances of spoken language.

The next step was to decide on the movies that could be compared. Since I felt that comparing different movies posed many disadvantages, I came up with the idea of comparing one movie in different versions, i.e. translations. This method seemed appropriate for the scope of this kind of analysis because it allows for analyzing the linguistic choices in the very same context. Furthermore, as presented above, censorship is an important topic related to swearing and translations are often used as means of censoring. It will be interesting to see in how far this may have affected the work of dubbing authors in Quentin Tarantino's movie.

There are also several reasons for my choosing *Pulp Fiction* as basis for my analysis. Foremost, it was the movie that originally inspired this thesis and it is a movie widely known for its great number of swearwords. Thus I knew I would have enough material to work with. Polan (2004: 55) argues:

[...] *Pulp Fiction* uses the relatively safe space of an unreal movie about unreal characters to engage in a rush of vulgarity, bad taste, bathroom humour and gross-out display.

But it was precisely this “rush of vulgarity” that intrigued me to use the movie for my analysis.

One may argue that *Pulp Fiction* is not a representation of real life and thus unfitting for a linguistic analysis. But I do not agree with this argument. Although the characters are invented and most of the situations they find themselves in are not day-to-day experiences, the language use in the original version does seem real. In an interview Eric Stoltz, the actor playing a character named Lance, also claims that the language is very natural:

The great thing, [...] about Quentin’s writing is, it all seems real it’s like the words just come out, like real people talking [...]. (*Pulp Fiction: The facts*: 2002)

As a preparation for my empirical part I read the original screenplay, but for my analysis I transcribed all swearword utterances of the movie myself, thus coming up with my very own movie scripts. However, during this process, the screenplay still functioned as reference book and therefore I will also discuss the movie’s screenplay below.

Nevertheless, my analysis does not only include the original English version of the movie, but also its German translation, i.e. dubbing. Thus my comparison depends on audiovisual translation as well. For this reason I will discuss some parameters thereof next.

7.1. Audiovisual translation

Similar to the issue of professional swearword investigation, there has been comparatively little scientific research on audiovisual translation methods and the translator's scope, restrictions, duties and responsibilities. Although audiovisual translation has existed for many years, it has been ignored by the general public and professional world for a long time.

When Rowe wrote his article "The English Dubbing Text" in 1960 it was considered pioneer work (Cedeño Rojas 2007: 14) and the issues raised by the author still hold true today. Since the 1990s audiovisual translation has experienced more recognition due to the increase in mass media in society. (Díaz Cintas 2008: 1).

In his article, Rowe describes the task and difficulties for synchronization authors and how they are pressured by producers and audience reactions. Furthermore, he points out that the greatest obstacles in the translation process are synchronizing the words to the lip movements and gestures:

Audio-image synchronism includes concordance of the text with both the gestures and the lip movements of the actors on the screen. While respecting the rhythm and action of the play, the point of emphasis of the dubbed line must be made to coincide exactly with the emphatic gesture on the screen. (Rowe 1960: 117)

To the factors listed above, Cedeño Rojas (2007: 19) adds that of facial expressions. According to Rowe, due to the reasons stated, the dubbing writers are often forced to change the original to some extent. This then often leads to a lot of criticism and accusations of mistranslation. However, these changes are inevitable and Rowe argues the best way to deal with such problems is to change the words but not the essential meaning, the "spirit" of the phrase (Rowe 1960: 116, 118).

Another critical choice in dubbing is whether to retain the specific features of the source language (such as foreign accents, expressions, locutions) as well as cultural referents. Even in the smallest linguistic or cultural discrepancies may cause problems with the translation (Cedeño Rojas 2007: 23). This is illustrated in the following example in three different languages which all express that someone wishes someone else luck:

(344) English: *I'll keep my fingers crossed for you.*

(345) German: *Ich drück' dir die Daumen.*

(346) Spanish: *Te cruzo los dedos.*

Firstly, all versions vary in length, rhythm and stress and secondly the German content differs from the English and Spanish ones. Thus when an actor imitates the gesture of crossing his fingers, there will be fewer problems in English-Spanish translations. However, when the same scene is translated into German, the dubbing author is faced with a problem: Does s/he keep to the original aligning words to the gestures with the risk of confusing his/her audience or does s/he change it to the German equivalent and thus disrupting the balance between word and gesture?

Similarly, there are many lexical terms that cannot be translated literally into other languages (Hughes 1991: 32-33). This may cause problems in the translation when the words are accompanied by visual representations. For example, here are three equivalents for common insults:

(347) English: *asshole*

(348) German: *Arschloch*

(349) Spanish: *cabrón*

Whereas the translation of the English term into German (and vice versa) is unproblematic since the words are semantic equivalents, the Spanish one is derived from a completely different semantic field. 'Cabrón', meaning 'he-goat', does not refer to any body parts, but rather an animal.

On the one hand, exchanging foreign referents and locutions may strip the text of its original flavor, but on the other hand if they are kept the target audience may not fully understand the meaning (Rowe 1960: 119). This includes the use of slang and swearwords in the original. Additionally, dubbing is often used as a means of censorship. Rowe criticizes such censoring measures harshly:

Needless to say, such categoric prohibitions are unwise and lead only to violation of the author's intent. (Ibid: 120).

Further, Rowe suggests that slang and locutions restricted to one language can be translated into another language by using equivalent words or phrases of the target language. Nevertheless, according to Rowe, the power to decide such matters frequently does not lie with the translators but with their producers.

Translations can also be misleading when the translation emphasizes cultural differences or perpetuates the wrong stereotypes (Díaz Cintas 2008: 4). Moreover, it is a known fact that movies are often used to manipulate their audiences. But not only original versions may be used in this way. Translations can be altered specifically for this reason too. Díaz Cintas (2008: 4) argues that while pictures are usually more straightforward, words often have secret meanings that audiences may not notice at first and even forget. But then these secret meanings may slowly work their way into the conscious minds of the audience:

They may rest for a period, remain inactive, but they slowly work their way into the conscious of the viewers/hearers/readers, moulding their behavior, their stereotypes and their perception of their socio-cultural environment. (Ibid: 4)

I believe that translation processes and the drawbacks dubbing authors are faced with are interesting topics and worth looking into, however, they are beyond the scope of this analysis. Regardless, it is important to mention that such factors influence the dubbing process and therefore also the results of my comparison.

7.2. *Pulp Fiction*

7.2.1. The movie¹⁶

Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* is a postmodern indie gangster movie that frequently breaches genre boundaries. Although it was produced on a budget of only 8.5 million American dollars, it became the first indie film which was a worldwide commercial hit making over 200 million dollars at the box office. Today it continues earning money with the sales of DVD versions, the soundtrack CD and other franchise products such as posters and clothing items. In Polan's words it "was able to cross over from independent film cult classic to mainstream hit" (2004: 26).

¹⁶ The sources for this section are Biskind 2004: 320, 327-328, 347-348, Mason 2002: 160-163 and Polan 2004: 7-16, 38, 70

The producers' marketing strategies and the movie's star-studded cast (including John Travolta, Samuel L. Jackson, Harvey Keitel and Bruce Willis) marked a turning point in the production of indie films. The involvement of major Hollywood production companies, which began with *Pulp Fiction* and Miramax, led to the coinage of the term 'Indiewood'. *Pulp Fiction's* commercial success brought forth numerous imitators worldwide and thus changed indie films forever.

Tarantino's movie not only influenced movie making per se, but also generated an obsessive fan cult. There are innumerable fan websites and forums dedicated to the screenwriter-director and *Pulp Fiction*. However, the movie has also evoked a lot of criticism and even produced an Anti-Tarantino movement. There is an ongoing verbal war between Tarantino fans on the one side and Tarantino haters on the other.

Nevertheless, *Pulp Fiction* won numerous prizes including the prestigious Palme d'Or at the 1994 Cannes Film Festival. It was nominated for seven Oscars in 1995 (Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor in Leading Role for John Travolta, Best Actor in Supporting role for Samuel L. Jackson, Best Actress in a Supporting Role for Uma Thurman, Best Original Screenplay and Best Editing), winning only Best Original Screenplay.

7.2.2. Screenplay

As mentioned above, the *Pulp Fiction* screenplay is a highly successful script. Nevertheless, there is a controversy concerning its authorship. While the front credits name both Quentin Tarantino and his then close friend Roger Avary as authors ("Stories by Quentin Tarantino & Roger Avary"), the end titles present a different view stating "Written and directed by Quentin Tarantino". There have been many arguments and speculations about this matter.

Roger Avary once wrote a feature film script named *Pandemonium Reigns*, telling the story of a boxer who refuses to lose a fight on purpose and has to deal with some gangsters while trying to retrieve his father's gold watch. With Avary's permission, Tarantino adapted the story and wrote it into the screenplay of *Pulp Fiction*.

It became the plot of one of the three main stories of the movie, entitled “The Gold Watch”. According to Avary, he was also part of this adaption process and therefore should have been quoted as co-author. But Tarantino denies Avary’s further involvement in the screenplay writing. The controversy was not just between the two friends, but took on a whole new dimension when the 1995 Golden Globe for Best Screenplay went to Tarantino alone, but the Oscar of the same year was awarded to both Tarantino and Avary (Biskind 2004: 284, 347-348, 290-291 and Polan 2004: 68).

The writing credits ambiguity aside, the screenplay contains sharp dialogue and detailed set and character descriptions. The written words as well as the final audiovisual version are highly literary. As a matter of fact, when Tarantino wrote the text, his goal was to “make a novel on the screen” (cited in Polan 2004: 78). The following excerpt from the screenplay portrays this literary aspect:

(350) *The Mia-made cigarette is brought up to her lips, and she takes a long, cool drag. Her hand slides the zippo back in the overcoat pocket. But wait, her fingers touch something else. Those fingers bring out a plastic bag with white powder inside, the madman that Vincent bought earlier from Lance. Wearing a big smile, Mia brings the heroin up to her face.*
(Tarantino 1999: 68)

One of *Pulp Fiction*’s most striking characteristics is its brutality. There are many scenes of conflict ranging from verbal discussions and disputes to highly violent brawls and even cold-blooded executions. The physical fights and murders and their aftermath are without exception exceedingly bloody. However, I do not want to go into further detail of the movie’s violent imagery and content, but concentrate on the linguistic aspect.

The movie features two kinds of violent language: firstly, there is a great deal of verbal menace and secondly, there is an abundance of swearwords. Naturally, it is the latter which I have most interest in since it is the focus of this thesis.

There is hardly a scene in *Pulp Fiction* that does not use language which may be described as ‘offensive’. Polan (2004: 55) has also made this observation and comments on it as follows

“[...] as one watches *Pulp Fiction* or reads threw the screenplay, one can’t help but feel that the film-making team (the screenwriter-director, the actors) is enjoying the game of seeing just how many obscenities it can pepper in the film (and just how imaginative and colourful its epithets can be).

Polan's annotation may be a personal and humorous account, but it draws an accurate picture of the swearing in *Pulp Fiction*. Moreover, swearwords are not just to be found in the dialogue, but also in the director's instructions in the screenplay. Here are two examples:

- (351) *her [sic] head jerks back. Her hands go to her nose (which feels like it's on fucking fire), something is terribly wrong. Then... the rush hits...* (Tarantino 1999: 68)
- (352) *Then, to the amazement of the Patrons, the Waitresses, the Cooks, the Busboys, the Manager [sic], these two bad-ass dudes – wearing UC Santa Cruz and 'I'm with stupid' T-shirts, swim trunks, thongs and packing .45 Automatics – walk out of the coffee shop together without saying a word.* (Tarantino 1999: 187)

Excerpt (351) is taken from the same scene as excerpt (350) above. (351) describes what happens after (350) in which a woman, Mia, confuses heroin with cocaine and inhales it. As a result of her mistake, she overdoses. Looking at the text, the insertion of the f-word in “*her nose [...] feels like it's on fucking fire*” makes the reader empathize with Mia.

The use of the adjective “*bad-ass*” in combination with the slang term “*dudes*” in example (352) gives the text a familiar feeling. Also, the juxtaposition of “*bad-ass*” with the physical description of the characters, which clearly questions their coolness and severity, has a comic effect.

Concluding, when reading a screenplay, most people would probably not expect to find swearwords anywhere else as in the dialogue. But then again, one must not forget that Quentin Tarantino is not like most screenwriters.

7.2.3. Plot

As previously mentioned, context is a quintessential factor in the analysis of spoken or written discourse and since I will be quoting characters from a movie in my analysis, it is important to know some of their background and the situations they are faced with. For this reason, I want to summarize the movie's plot briefly.

As the movie's unofficial subtitle, "Three stories about one story" (Tarantino 1999: i) portends, there is not just one storyline. As a matter of fact, the film is divided into a prologue, three main stories and an epilogue (prologue and epilogue telling a fourth story). The order of these sequences is not chronological, yet the movie's structure is circular with the epilogue returning to the events shown in the prologue. Polan (2004: 26) comments on the movie's episodic structure as follows:

The very structure of *Pulp Fiction* is a puzzle, its unveiling of the plot achronologically asking spectators to figure out just what happened, and when, chronologically.

But in order to give a clear overview of the different situations, I will describe them chronologically.

One L.A. morning two gangsters, Vincent Vega and Jules Willfield, are executing their boss Marsellus Wallace's order to bring him a suitcase from a group of young men (lead by Brett), who have betrayed Marsellus. They take the suitcase and execute the young men save one, Marvin, who had been working for them as a mole.

Another young man hides in the bathroom and when he storms out with the attempt to kill Vincent and Jules, none of his many bullets hit their targets and he is shot by the two gangsters. Jules is convinced that it was "divine intervention" that saved them from the young man's bullets. While discussing this matter in the car, Vincent's gun goes off by accident and he shoots Marvin, leaving the car a highly visible, bloody sight.

To hide the car from the police, they drive to a friend of Jules' who lives nearby, Jimmie. The latter is not happy about the situation because he dreads that his wife Bonnie, who will be home soon, may divorce him because of it. (Thus, this storyline is called "**The Bunny Situation**".) Jules calls Marsellus who sends Winston Wolf to their rescue. Wolf helps them out of their precarious situation, making the gangsters clean the car and themselves and disposing of the car and Marvin's corpse.

Afterwards (as shown in the movie's **epilogue**) Jules and Vincent have breakfast at a diner where they discuss Jules' intention to change his lifestyle. Meanwhile, a small-time criminal couple, who call each other Honey Bunny and Pumpkin, talk about changing their robbing habits from liquor stores to restaurants (as seen in the movie's very first seen, the **prologue**). Subsequently, they start raiding the diner. When Pumpkin prompts Jules to give him Marsellus' suitcase, Jules overpowers the man. (We are now

introduced to the woman's real name, Yolanda, and Jules keeps calling the man Ringo.) But instead of killing Pumpkin, Jules gives him all of his money and lets the couple go.

In the meantime, as part of the story “**Vincent Vega and Marsellus Wallace's wife**”, Marsellus bribes boxer Butch Coolidge at a club to cheat in his upcoming fight. While the two men are still talking, Vincent and Jules arrive at the same place. After this scene, it is not known what happens to Jules, but he most likely follows his plan of quitting his criminal lifestyle.

Next, Vincent visits his dealer Lance at his and his wife Jody's house, buys heroin from him and injects some of it. Then he picks up Marsellus' wife Mia and takes her out on Marsellus' request (who is not in town). They have dinner and enter into a twist dancing contest at a place called Jack Rabbit Slim's. After returning from the restaurant, Mia mistakes Vincent's heroin for cocaine and almost overdoses. Vincent takes her to Lance's home where they save her with an adrenalin shot. Before saying their goodbyes, Vincent and Mia agree not to tell Marsellus about the incident.

On the night of his boxing match, Butch has a dream about a childhood memory when he was visited by Captain Koons, who delivered his dead father's golden watch to him. (Therefore, this story is called “**The gold watch**”.) Later that night, Butch betrays Marsellus by winning the fight and also kills his opponent by accident. He flies in a taxi with Colombian driver Esmeralda Villalobos. When he gets to his hide-out motel, his French girlfriend Fabienne is already waiting for him, ready to flee the city with him the next day.

The following morning Butch realizes that Fabienne has left his father's gold watch at his old apartment and decides to go and collect it. At the apartment he finds Vincent, whom he recognizes from the club, and kills him with a shotgun he found in the kitchen. While driving back to the motel, he encounters Marsellus at a crosswalk, runs him over and as a result gets into a car crash. When Marsellus wakes up from unconsciousness, he tries to kill Butch, shooting an innocent bystander instead. Marsellus follows Butch into a pawn shop where they are overpowered by the owner, Maynard, who calls his friend Zed.

While Maynard and Zed rape Marsellus, Butch is guarded by a man in a sadomasochist outfit called The Gimp. Butch manages to free himself, knocks out the Gimp and kills Maynard with a samurai sword from the pawn shop. Before he can kill

Zed, Marsellus takes over, shoots his rapist between the legs and promises to torture him more. Marsellus and Butch make peace and Butch agrees to leave Los Angeles and never come back. Butch takes Zed's chopper, picks up Fabienne at the motel and they drive away.

8. Analysis

In this part of my thesis I want to compare the use of swearwords in two different languages, namely English and German. My main interest lies in the comparison of lexical items according to their referents. Thus I would like to compare which taboos seem to be relevant in the respective culture. There are certain stereotypes which I would like to examine as well. For instance, I found the following argument by Jay (1992: 9):

Different cultures pay attention to types of taboo. Americans have a penchant for sexual and religious terms [...] and the Germans appear to be more attentive to scatological references than others.

From my own experience I agree with Jay on these stereotypes. Nevertheless, it will be interesting to see if they also apply in *Pulp Fiction*.

According to Hughes, taboo depends on the culture and not the language community (2006: xxii). Some swearword categories seem to be universal, or at least prevalent in European languages, while others are more confined to one specific culture. Finding out similarities and differences is the focus of my analysis. The goal of this thesis is not to find out all the details of similarities and differences of English and German swearwords in general, but to look at their usage in specific situations illustrated in *Pulp Fiction*. I will also look at words and phrases in certain scenes of the original English text and examine how they are expressed in German.

Although my focus is on lexical features, I will mention some prominent phonetic and grammatical features as well. As aforementioned, swearing follows the same grammatical rules as ordinary language usage. Thus, according to Andersson and

Trudgill a combination of ordinary grammar rules and swearwords results in the grammar of swearing in any specific language (2007: 198).

I will start my analysis by examining the English movie script in more detail since it is the original text. Then I will give a short summary of the German dubbing and finally compare and contrast a selection of interesting features. For purposes of demonstration, I will use quotes from the two movie scripts. In order to emphasize the words which are being discussed in the examples, I will italicize them. I want to stress that this graphic emphasis only serves as pointing out certain words for the analysis and has nothing to do with the content of the scene or the actor's voice, intonation or stress.

8.1. Original version

As mentioned above, *Pulp Fiction* is known for having enthused viewers worldwide as well as shocking others. A great deal of its shocking value lies within its violence, both in action and word. As a matter of fact, Polan argues that the continual use of swearwords was a deliberate choice with the aim of causing outrage. He describes the text as “a slew of obscenities (and strings of obscenities combined in fanciful fashion) that are used for brute, visceral shock value” (Polan 2004: 55). If this is the case, Tarantino clearly has reached his goal since many detractors criticize the abundance of offensive terms in the movie. After all, in the 148 minutes runtime there is a total number of 534 swearword occurrences. This means that on average viewers are confronted with ‘offensive’ language every 16 seconds.

When Polan talks about ‘obscenities’ he refers to swearwords in general. For instance, he also calls *nigger* “one particular obscenity” (2004: 55). Thus it is clear that he does not refer to the same referential category which I have entitled ‘obscenity’. Rather, he summarizes all swearwords as obscenities according to the aforementioned notion that it is a legal term with focus on the receiver, rather than the subcategory of sexual and scatological referents which I have used.

Nevertheless, even if Polan had meant to denominate the referential category, his argument would still hold true because obscenity is by far the most frequent category in

the movie's script. As one can observe in Table 1, almost 80% of the swearwords used in *Pulp Fiction* can be categorized as obscene. Further frequent categories include religious (ca. 8%) and racist (ca. 5%) terms. The remaining lexical items, which are all of social referents, make up a little over 8% of the total and are all but one of social references. However, I want to stress that there are many terms which can be cross-categorized. Nevertheless, I have only counted each term in the one category which seemed more prominent.

Table 1: Summary of swearword categories in English movie script

Category / referents	Number of occurrences	Frequency
Obscenity	422	79.02 %
Social swearwords	44 (+60) ¹⁷	8.24 %
Religion	41	7.68 %
Racism	27 (+1) ¹⁸	5.06 %
TOTAL:	534	100 %

Following, I will discuss the most frequent categories in more detail. Furthermore, in contrast to the words which carry shocking value, I have found a few instances of euphemistic expression. These shall also be analyzed at the end of this section.

8.1.1. Obscenity

As aforementioned, obscenities are swearwords referring to sexuality and scatology. The total number of obscene terms in *Pulp Fiction* is 422, making up roughly 80% of all the offensive terms in the movie. Of these, 295 have sexual referents and 127

¹⁷ Various terms not counted in this category because also listed in 'Sexuality' and 'Scatology'.

¹⁸ *Hillbilly* not counted in this category, because also listed in 'Social swearwords'.

scatological. With 272 occurrences, variations of the f-word are the great majority of sexual terms as well as obscenities at large.

Since there is such a great number of obscene words found in the *Pulp Fiction* movie script, I have come up with three subcategories for my analysis. I have decided to dedicate the first subcategory to *fuck* and its numerous variations. All other sexual swearwords are discussed thereafter and the third subsection deals with the scatological terms. Table 2 shows the frequency of obscene words within the subcategory obscenity as well as their overall frequency compared to the total number of swearwords in the movie:

Table 2: Obscenities in English movie script

Subcategories of obscenity		Number of occurrences		Frequency within obscenities		Frequency within all swearwords	
Sexuality	Fuck	295	272	64.46 %	69.91 %	50.93 %	55.24 %
	Other sexual obscenities		23	5.45 %		4.31 %	
Scatology		127		30.09 %		23.78 %	
TOTAL:		422		100 %		79.02 %	

8.1.1.1. *Fuck*

Fuck and its different derived forms constitute the largest part of obscene words in the movie. The 272 occurrences¹⁹ make up 64.3% of obscene terms and even more than half of the total of all swearwords. In other words, on average this makes one mention of the f-word every 33 seconds in *Pulp Fiction*. To demonstrate the high frequency of the f-word I would like to quote a scene from the movie with a notable high rate of f-words.

¹⁹ There is one occurrence which was left out of the analysis since it is not a full word. It is part of Vincent's agitated speech when driving away from the young men's apartment: Vincent says to Jules "You *fuck* - You fuckin' freakin' out on us." In my opinion this first *fuck* was supposed to become *fucking*, but the word was never finished due to Vincent's agitation. Judging from the context, it is also not *fuck* as a noun, but merely an unfinished word. Therefore, it was left out of the analysis.

In this scene Butch has just found out that Fabienne has left his father's watch at his old apartment and has an angry outburst:

(353) *Fuck, fuck, fuck, motherfucker! Fucking... Do you know how fucking stupid you fucking are?*

Here, Butch uses several different forms of the f-word. The first three are simple expletives, followed by a third expletive which is also a compound noun. It is possible that *motherfucker* is also an insult directed at Fabienne, but in my opinion it is rather unlikely because *motherfucker* is usually only used for men. The following sentence begins with the adjective *fucking*, though Butch suspends the rest of the phrase due to his heated emotions. The next case of *fucking* is an adjective as well and the last functions as adverb. Out of the fourteen words in the example seven are variants of the f-word. Moreover, the adjective *stupid* – though not counted as swearword – is also an insult and thus leaves the excerpt with only six neutral words out of fourteen.

Example (353) clearly shows that the f-word can take on numerous forms. Historically, its original and only use was that of a verb. But since it is a highly charged swearword, it has adapted to various different parts of speech. According to Hughes, the more charged swearwords are, they extend in grammatical flexibility (1991: 30). In *Pulp Fiction* it is used as noun, verb, adjective, adverb and interjection (both intensifier and expletive). As aforementioned it is also found as compound, most notable in combination with *mother-* (*motherfucker*, *motherfucking*). I will discuss some of these cases in more detail in this section.

To begin with, the adjective *fucking* (usually pronounced as *fuckin'*) is the most frequent swearword in the movie. In the 148 minutes runtime it is uttered 97 times. The second most frequent obscenity is *fucking* as an adverb with 34 occurrences. In most cases both the adjective and the adverb function as intensifier, which can be observed in example (353), but there is one instance where it means something else. The following text contains *fucking* in a different meaning and it is also a good portrayal of the word's frequency. The excerpt is taken from an early scene in *Pulp Fiction* where Pumpkin talks about a bank robbery which was carried out with nothing more than a cell phone:

(354) *Fuckin' A it worked, that's what I'm talkin' about! Knucklehead walks in a bank with a telephone, not a pistol, not a shotgun, bu' a*

fuckin' phone, cleans the place out, and they don't lift a *fuckin'* finger.

The example shows two different functions and meanings of the f-word. The last two are mere intensifiers and carry no specific meaning, whereas the first expresses assurance as in 'of course it worked'. As aforementioned, this is the only occurrence of *fucking* which carries meaning and does not function as mere intensifier. Nevertheless, there is one more scene in which *fucking* might have a different meaning. In this scene Jules and Vincent talk about foot massages and Jules claims the following:

(355) Don't be tellin' me about foot massages – I'm the foot-*fuckin'*-master.

Here, one might argue that *fucking* stands for 'massaging', though in my opinion it is rather an intensifier for the noun 'foot master'. In any case the grammatical position of the verb, namely as infix, is also noteworthy.

Although *fucking* as adjective or adverb mostly doesn't carry meaning, there are other instances of the f-word that do. *Pulp Fiction* features a great number of different meanings of *fuck* , especially when used as a verb. Interestingly, only four of these occurrences refer to its original meaning, the act of copulation. What is more, one of the scenes is repeated in the movie, so if one were to count these two occurrences as one, there would only be three cases of *fuck* in its original denotation. Here are those three (or four) occurrences:

(356) So, what'd he do? *Fuck* her?

(357) *Fuck* him!

(358) But Marsellus Wallace don't like to be *fucked* by anybody except Mrs. Wallace.

In example (356) Vincent asks Jules about Antwan's relationship with Mia and if he had slept with her. In (357) Maynard is sexually aroused by Zed raping Marsellus and urges the former to continue abusing the latter. Example (358) is the one which is repeated in the movie due to the film's achronological structure. It is taken from the scene (or two scenes) in which Jules confronts Brett about his betrayal of Marsellus. As a matter of fact, this scene deliberately plays with the ambiguity of the f-word. Here is a longer version of the extract which comprises the play of words:

(359) JULES: Does Marsellus look like a bitch?

BRETT: What?

JULES: Does he look like a bitch?

BRETT: No.

JULES: Then why you try and *fuck* 'em like a bitch, Brett?

BRETT: I didn't.

JULES: Yes, you did. Yes, you did, Brett. You tried to *fuck* 'em. But Marsellus Wallace don't like to be *fucked* by anybody except Mrs. Wallace.

The play of words lies in the double-meaning of *fuck* as 'copulate' on the one hand and 'betray' on the other. Also, comparing the powerful criminal leader Marsellus to a *bitch* adds to the implication that Brett and his friends have no respect for the man. Moreover, the comparison can be seen as hidden foreshadowing of the rape scene in which Marsellus' power is taken away in an act of sexual abuse, literally being 'fucked like a bitch'.

However, there are many more implied meanings of the f-word in *Pulp Fiction*. Subsequently, I want to discuss a few. For instance, there are several uses of the term which mean 'destroy' or 'injure':

(360) Well, Marsellus *fucked* him *up* good.

(361) You *fucked* her *up*, you fucking deal with it!

In (360) Jules talks about what Marsellus did to Antwan after he found out about the alleged foot massage (see above). Noteworthy is the grammatical form presented in this example, the phrasal verb 'to *fuck up*'. As a matter of fact, there are eight occurrences of this phrasal verb with the meaning 'destroy' or 'overdose' in *Pulp Fiction*. One of these further mentions is presented in example (361). Here, Lance accuses Vincent of being responsible for Mia's overdose and tells him to deal with his problems on his own. Furthermore, there are also five occurrences of *fucked up* as adjective. Here are some examples:

(362) I just want you to know how sorry we are that - that things got so *fucked up* with us and Mr. Wallace.

(363) This is some *fucked up* repugnant shit!

(364) You are not bringin' this *fucked up* bitch into my house!

In (362) Brett tries to talk himself out of being punished by Jules and Vincent and calls the situation *fucked up* as in ‘unpredictably and involuntarily out of control’. Example (363) is an emotional outburst by Jules who is voicing his discontent with having to clean the mess in his car after Vincent killed Marvin in it. Here, *fucked up* functions as intensifier. In (364) Lance is on the phone with Vincent who is driving to Lance’s house with an overdosed Mia. Lance uses *fucked up* in reference to Mia’s overdose.

However, *fuck* meaning ‘destroy’ is not only used in reference to people. The following example features several uses of the verb in combination with an inanimate object:

- (365) I had it in storage for three years. It was out five days and some dickless piece of shit *fucked* with it. [...] What’s more chickenshit than *fucking* with a man’s automobile? I mean, don’t *fuck* with another man’s vehicle.

The example above is an extract from an earlier scene in the movie in which Vincent complains to Lance about someone who had keyed his car. Here, *fuck* is used in reference to an object rather than a person.

Moreover, the f-word is not only used in the sense of ‘destroy’, but also instead of ‘play’, ‘waste time’ or ‘bother’ as the following examples demonstrate:

- (366) Quit *fucking* around and give her the shot.
(367) Totally *fucking* cool, in control. Didn’t even get really pissed when you were *fucking* with him. I was amazed.
(368) That’s what’s *fuckin’* with me! I don’t know why. But I can’t go back to sleep.
(369) Night of the fight, you may feel a slight sting, that’s pride *fuckin’* with you. *Fuck* pride!

In (366) Vincent urges Lance to stop looking for his medical book and thus waste Mia’s time, who is almost dying from a heroin overdose. Example (367) is an extract from the conversation between Vincent and Jules in the diner towards the end of the movie. Here, Jules praises Winston Wolf’s composure in an earlier scene when Vincent was trying to give him a hard time. Later in the same dialogue the two men talk about the earlier incident in the young men’s apartment when the fourth man’s bullets failed to hit them. Convinced that it was an act of God, Jules contemplates why God would have gotten

involved in this very moment, which I cited above in (368). In this instance, *fuck* refers to an unsure state of mind. Similarly, the first mention of the f-word in example (369) refers to the human mind and consciousness. Here, Marsellus is bribing Butch to cheat in his upcoming boxing match and refers to his pride as an undesirable characteristic.

Moreover, the last example above includes another frequent meaning of *fuck*, in *Pulp Fiction*, namely ‘forget’. Thus, ‘*fuck* pride’ stands for ‘forget about pride’. There are two more occurrences of the term with this meaning:

(370) *Fuck* it, forget it. We’re out of it.

(371) *Fuck* the bags!

Extract (370) is taken from the conversation between Pumpkin and Honey Bunny at the beginning of the movie. Here, Pumpkin is trying to convince his girlfriend to give up robbing liquor stores. The second example is also a quote by a man talking to his girlfriend, namely Butch urging Fabienne to forget their bags and hurry up.

Also, the verb *fuck* in combination with ‘you’ is also used as expletive with the function of telling someone to ‘go away’ or as a synonym to ‘leave me alone’. The following example is taken from the scene in which Jules and Vincent discuss foot massages:

(372) VINCENT: Have you ever given a guy a foot massage?

JULES: *Fuck you.*

VINCENT: You give em a lot?

JULES: *Fuck you.*

Furthermore, when Vincent finds Mia in her living room unconscious from the heroin overdose, he curses himself:

(373) Oh, *fuck me! Fuck me!*

Both of the examples above are utterances which arise in desperate situation. In (372) Jules realizes that Vincent has better arguments than him, but instead of admitting to it he merely tells Vincent to leave him alone. In (373) Vincent knows that he is in big trouble when he sees Mia. Firstly, Marsellus had asked him to take care of his wife and secondly, Mia overdosed on his drugs.

As mentioned above, *fuck* frequently occurs as a phrasal verb. Another frequent compound verb featuring the f-word is ‘to *give a fuck*’, meaning ‘to care’. There are five occurrences in the movie and I want to quote some of them here:

(374) They're insured, why should they *give a fuck*?

(375) Well, ya, who *gives a fuck*? It's over now.

(376) If all I *gave a fuck* about was my watch, I should've told you.

All of the five occurrences of *give a fuck* in *Pulp Fiction* are uttered by only two characters, namely Pumpkin and Butch. Pumpkin uses the phrasal verb three times in his conversation with Honey Bunny, all referring to people who would not care when they robbed their business. One of these instances is cited in example (374). Butch says it when talking on the phone with his friend Scotty in reference to the death of his boxing opponent, as quoted in example (375). The second time Butch uses it he is talking to Fabienne admitting that it is also partially his fault that she forgot about the watch. Therefore the grammatical form of the sentence in (376) is a third conditional.

So far, I have discussed various meanings of the f-word as verb, adjective and adverb. Another frequent use of this common swearword is that of a noun. While there are only three occurrences of the term as *fucker*, there are 34 instances of compound nouns, most notably *motherfucker* and least frequent with only one mention, *fuckhead*. Here are some examples of the f-word as noun:

(377) What a *fucker*!

(378) Shut up, *fuckhead*! I hate that mongoloid voice.

(379) Any of you fuckin' pricks move and I'll execute every one of you *motherfuckers*!

(380) *Motherfucker* do that shit to me, he better paralyze my ass, 'cause I'd kill the *motherfucker*, you know what I'm sayin'?

(381) You feel better, *motherfucker*?

(382) Well, I'm a mushroom-cloud-layin' *motherfucker*, *motherfucker*!

(383) Hey man, as far as I know, the *motherfucker*'s tip-top.

(384) It's the one that says "Bad *Motherfucker*". That's it. That's my bad *motherfucker*.

In (377) Lance expresses that he sympathizes with Vincent's frustration about his destroyed car and therefore uses the insult *fucker* towards the anonymous doer. The

only mention of the compound noun *fuckhead*, quoted in (378), is voiced by Fabienne and directed towards Butch who bothers her with his interpretation of a disabled person.

As mentioned above, the most common noun including the f-word is *motherfucker*. All in all there are 33 occurrences of this word, both in singular and plural, directed at others and oneself. Most uses of *motherfucker* are disparaging as can be observed in examples (379) and (380). (379) is taken from the epilogue when Honey Bunny is shouting at the patrons of the diner urging them to stay quiet if they want to live. Here, *motherfuckers* is a direct insult with the receivers present. In example (380) on the other hand, Jules talks about and insults a person not present, namely Marsellus. As a matter of fact, with the target not present, the insult seems a lot less potent. Example (381) presents a special case of usage. Here, *motherfucker* is employed in a familiar fashion by Marsellus talking to Jules. The tone is friendly and thus the word could be substituted by amicable terms such as ‘friend’.

Concerning the reference of the insult, *motherfucker* can be directed at others and also oneself. Both if these cases can be observed in (382). In this scene Jules expresses his anger at having to clean up the mess in his car caused by Vincent’s killing of Marvin. He calls himself a “mushroom-cloud-layin’ *motherfucker*” in reference to an atomic bomb and directs his speech towards Vincent, calling him “*motherfucker*” too.

However, *motherfucker* is not only employed with regards to people, but also things and inanimate objects. For instance, the *motherfucker* in (383) is a car and the one in (384) a wallet. In both Jules is the speaker.

Furthermore, I would like to mention that there are two versions of Honey Bunny’s slur cited in example (379). As aforementioned, the one quoted above is taken from the epilogue. However, this scene is one of those repeated in the movie and the citation is the second occurrence. The first occurrence is to be found in the prologue, right before the title and credit sequence. In the prologue Honey Bunny’s words differ from the ones she uses in the epilogue:

(385) Any of you fuckin’ pricks move and I’ll execute every *motherfucking* last one of ya!

The prologue’s noun phrase “every *motherfucking* last one of ya” takes the form of “every one of you *motherfuckers*” in the epilogue. As regards to the compound *motherfucker*, in the first version it is used as adjective and in the second as noun. This

leads me to my next point of discussion, namely the use of the compound *motherfucking* as adjective.

The function of the adjective *motherfucking* is the same as that of *fucking*, which I have previously discussed, namely intensifying the word (or words) that follow(s) it. *Pulp Fiction* features nine instances of *motherfucking*. I would like to discuss two selected cases below:

(386) Look, just because I wouldn't give no man a foot massage, don't make it right for Marsellus to throw Antwan off a building into a glass-*motherfuckin'*-house, fuckin' up the way the nigger talks.

(387) No, Yolanda! He ain't gonna do a goddamn, *motherfucking* thing!

Once again, the first of the examples above is taken from the scene in which Jules and Vincent talk about giving foot massages. In (386) Jules argues that Marsellus' reaction to the alleged foot massage was exaggerated. Here, in the position of infix, the adjective changes the intonation pattern. Without the infix, the stress would be on 'glass', whereas with it, the stress is on 'house'. Nevertheless, the meaning of the sentences is not affected by this change.

Similarly, *motherfucking* intensifies the noun 'thing' in example (387) together with the preceding adjective *goddamn*. What is especially interesting about this example is the use of two consecutive, intensifying adjectives which are both swearwords. In this particular scene Jules talks to Honey Bunny (we now know that her real name is Yolanda) and tries to calm her down after Vincent has threatened to kill Pumpkin. Jules' lexical choices seem to point towards an inner anxiety. He is trying hard to avoid letting the situation get out of hand. Here, the stress is on the first adjective, *goddamn* and thus makes it stronger than the following *motherfucking*.

Last but not least, *fuck* is also used on its own as expletive or interjection. The frequent use of the word as expletive may be explained by its phonetic features. Firstly, *fuck* is a mono-syllabic word with a short, stressed vowel. According to Crystal (2003: 251), these are frequent features in swearwords because they make them sound harsher and thus more unpleasant to the ear of the beholder. Crystal claims that most swearwords are "short, sharp, and to the point" (ibid.) and this description clearly fits *fuck*: firstly, there is the fricative /f/ followed by the short, stressed vowel /ʌ/ and the final velar /k/. I think that these factors play an important role in the popularity of the f-

word in general but especially in its use as expletive. In *Pulp Fiction*, there are thirteen cases of the term as expletive including the following examples:

- (388) *Fuck!* Fuck you!
- (389) *Fuck, fuck, fuck!*
- (390) *Fuck.* I'm fucked. Oh, *fuck.*
- (391) *Fuck.* What'ch you gonna do then?

Example (388) is Zed's outcry after Marsellus shoots him between the legs. This is not the only expletive in *Pulp Fiction* as a reaction to physical discomfort. Though a lot less painful and serious, example (389) is Vincent's reaction to the cold water with which Wolf washes him and Jules in Jimmie's backyard.

The further examples both express a kind of desperation. In (390) Marvin is shocked after watching the other young men being shot to death by Jules and Vincent in front of his eyes in the apartment. In this scene Marvin is under great shock and keeps talking to himself. The last extract is part of the conversation between Jules and Vincent in the diner. In (391) Vincent is disappointed by his colleague's decision to quit the criminal life and his use of *fuck* is also an expression of disbelief.

As regards to the f-word as interjection, there are three occurrences in which the word stands alone.

- (392) Oh, *fuck*, Scotty, that is good news – That is great news, man.
- (393) Hey, *fuck*, nigger? What *the fuck* did you just do to this towel?
- (394) Now, man, you know, *fuck*, I wanna help you, but I don't wanna lose my wife doin' it, alright?

In all of the three citations above, *fuck* serves as mere filler in oral conversation. It does not carry any meaning or function. Nevertheless, one might argue that these interjections emphasize the speaker's feelings. In other words, in (392) *fuck* may express Butch's joy at Scotty's news about the wager profits, in (393) it could be an expression of Jules' annoyance with Vincent's carelessness and in (394) it may be the linguistic manifestation of Jimmie's helpless situation.

As a matter of fact, example (394) features another kind of interjection, namely that of *the fuck*. Here, the f-word is combined with the determinate article *the*, thus forming a new grammatical entity. According to Andersson and Trudgill this is a

grammatical rule that applies specifically to swearing (2007: 198). Furthermore, Hughes argues that these usages cannot be explained by ordinary grammar rules:

Clearly, one could be hard put to it to explain these usages in terms of traditional grammar or ordinary logic. It is as if there is a syndrome whereby, in an emotional context, normal constraints of usage and grammatical function are relaxed, enabling curious idioms to be generated. (Hughes 1991: 30-32)

As suggested by Hughes, swearwords are able to develop new grammatical forms, which then are incorporated into the general language use. This can be observed in *Pulp Fiction*, because with 33 occurrences *the fuck* is the third most frequent intensifier in the movie. Here are some examples:

- (395) Get *the fuck* out of my way!
- (396) Well, then do it, and then get *the fuck* out of my house before she gets here.
- (397) Get *the fuck* down!

As can be observed above, *the fuck* is often used in combination with *get* and *out*. In these cases, the function is always to make someone move in a certain direction. For instance, in (395) Lance yells at his wife Jody to get out of his way while he is frantically searching for his medical book. Similarly, Jimmie wants Jules and Vincent to leave his house as soon as possible in (396), before his wife Bonnie comes home from work. The sentence in (397) is used repeatedly by Pumpkin during the robbery of the diner and it is directed towards patrons and employees of the restaurant. The last example above is also taken from the diner scene.

Another frequent combination of *the fuck* is to be found with the phrasal verb *shut up*, another swearword. For instance:

- (398) Vince, *shut the fuck up*!

This excerpt is taken from the diner scene towards the end of the movie. Here, Jules urges Vincent to be quiet after an inconsiderate comment by the former. *The fuck* strongly intensifies the meaning of the insulting phrasal verb *shut up*.

However, one of the most frequent occurrences of *the fuck* is in combination with question words. Some examples include:

- (399) They wouldn't know *what the fuck* a Quarter Pounder is.

(400) So *where the fuck* is it?

(401) Why *the fuck* didn't you tell us somebody was in the bathroom?

Example (399) is taken from one of the movie's most famous conversations, that is when Jules and Vincent talk about the little differences between America and Europe. I would like to add, that *what the fuck* is also a popular idiom expressing surprise. Fulfilling this particular function, it can stand alone as well. Nevertheless, in *Pulp Fiction* it is never used in this way, but only as intensifier.

In (400) Butch asks Fabienne about the whereabouts of his father's watch and in (401) Vincent asks Marvin about the fourth young man who had been hiding in the apartment's bathroom. While *the fuck* seems to be a mere interjection in (399), the words function as intensifier in (400) and (401).

In this subsection I have discussed various usages of the f-word and its derived forms in some detail. After all, it is the most frequent swearword in *Pulp Fiction* making up exactly half of all swearwords in the movie. Summarizing, there are multiple meanings of *fuck* as a verb, adjective and adverb including references to copulation, betrayal, states of the mind, curses towards others and oneself, as well as requests to forget about something and caring (or not caring) about certain things. Moreover, *fuck* is frequently used as interjection and expletive, often functioning as an intensifier.

8.1.1.2. Other sexual obscenities

The obscene swearwords I will discuss in this section are all of sexual referents. Their total number is 23 and 14 of them involve the word *bitch*. As previously mentioned, *bitch* can be used to insult both women and men:

(402) Hey! Hey! Hey! Are you deaf? You are not bringin' this fucked up
 bitch into my house!

(403) Does he look like a *bitch*?! (...)

In (402) Lance is telling Vincent that he cannot bring an overdosed Mia into his house. Although *bitch* is a downgrading insult here, it is less offensive than the one in example (400) where the receiver of the insult is male. The latter is part of the dialogue between

Jules and Brett which I have already mentioned and discussed above in example (359). Jules refers to Marsellus as a *bitch* and thus compares him not only to an animal but a female one as well.

Interestingly, *bitch* is never used as a direct insult but only when talking about someone else who may or may not be present. Both of the examples above can be counted as the receiver of the insult not being present. Although Mia is physically present in (402) when Lance calls her a “fucked up *bitch*”, she has passed out and thus I consider her as not present. Nevertheless, there are also instances in the movie where the receiver of the insult *bitch* is present as seen in the next quote:

(404) Tell that *bitch* to be cool! Say, *bitch* be cool! Say, *bitch* be cool!

Here, Jules wants Pumpkin to calm down a hysterical Yolanda and he deliberately talks to the man, not the woman herself. Thus, the receiver is present and supposed to hear the insult but it is not directly said to her.

There is one mention of the term *bitch* as part of a longer noun. After shooting Marvin Vincent refers to the deceased as *son of a bitch*:

(405) Hey, look! I didn't - I didn't mean to shoot this *son of a bitch*, the gun went off, I don't know why!

Furthermore, *Pulp Fiction* features three swearwords referring to the male sex organ and one referring to the female one. I have already discussed two scenes that contain the term *pricks* (see examples 379 and 385) and there is one other synonym for ‘penis’ in *Pulp Fiction*:

(406) Well, let's not start suckin' each other's *dicks* quite yet.

(407) Tell me about it. I had it in storage for three years. It was out five days and some *dickless* piece of shit fucked with it.

Example (406) is taken from the scene in Jimmie's garage after Jules and Vincent have cleaned the car off Marvin's blood. While Jimmie is impressed by the transformation of the car and Jules and Vincent's are proud of their cleaning achievement, Wolf reminds them that they still have to do other things. Although the noun *dick* is often used as insult towards people, here it refers to the actual body part. Example (407) is part of the previously mentioned dialogue between Lance and Vincent (see example 365). While Lance is preparing Vincent's order of heroin, Vincent tells his dealer about his car,

which has been damaged by an unknown person. *Dick* is part of a compound adjective, namely *dickless*, which downgrades the unknown doer as not being a man.

Similarly to *dick* and *prick*, the only mention of the female sex organ also refers to the actual body part:

- (408) It's laying hands on Marsellus Wallace's new wife in a familiar way.
Is it as bad as eatin' her *pussy* out? – No, but you're in the same
fuckin' ballpark.

This quote is voiced by Vincent when he and Jules are discussing the meaning of foot massages. Moreover, the verb phrase *eatin' her pussy out* is all the more offensive because it consists of two vulgar elements, *pussy* and the phrasal verb *to eat out*. The latter is a highly dysphemistic way of referring to oral sex performed on a woman.

Similarly, the last term I want to discuss in this subsection is another phrasal verb referring to a sexual practice: *to jerk off*. It is also very vulgar and means 'to masturbate'.

- (409) So you're gonna go out there, drink your drink, say "Goodnight, I've
had a very lovely evening," go home, and *jerk off*. And that's all
you're gonna do.

The example above is part of a monologue by Vincent's who is experiencing a moral crisis because he feels sexually attracted to his boss' wife. Here, he is trying to convince himself to resist the tempting Mia and go home and masturbate instead.

8.1.1.3. Scatology

The 127 scatological terms in *Pulp Fiction* make up slightly more than 30% of all obscenities and 24% of all swearwords in the film. Thus they are the second largest category of swearwords in the movie after those referring to the f-word. The group includes mostly nouns and some expletives, verbs and adjectives.

The most common scatological term is *shit*. It mostly occurs as noun (69 times), expletive (8 occurrences), but there are also two compound nouns, one adjective and one interjection. There is also one mention of the word in French (*merde*). Interestingly,

it is never used as verb. *Shit* is not only one of the most frequent swearwords in *Pulp Fiction*, but actually also the very first one uttered in the movie. In the first scene, we see Pumpkin and Honey Bunny sitting at a table in the diner and Pumpkin lights a cigarette while he says:

(410) Forget it, it's too risky. I'm through doin' that *shit*.

Thus, the word *shit* is mentioned within the first 30 seconds of the entire movie. The example above portrays the most common use of the lexical item, namely as noun substituting words such as 'stuff' or 'thing(s)'. The term is used in a negative way, but the emotions portrayed by the actor seem rather neutral.

Most of the uses of *shit* are metaphorical. As a matter of fact, there are only two references to actual feces:

(411) Pigs sleep and root in *shit*. That's a filthy animal.

(412) I'm gonna take a *shit*.

The two examples are taken from the same scene when Jules and Vincent are in the diner having breakfast. In (411) Jules talks about animals belonging to the Suidae family claiming that pigs are dirty animals because they live in and surrounded by their own feces. Example (412) is an utterance by Vincent who informs Jules that he is going to use the bathroom.

The latter portrays another interesting linguistic usage of *shit*, namely that in a verb phrase. As mentioned above, throughout the whole movie, *shit* is never used as verb on its own, but there are two occurrences of the noun *shit* within a verb phrase. Here, *take a shit* is a dysphemism meaning *to defecate*. The second of the verb phrases is uttered by Vincent when he and Jules are washing their bloody hands in Jimmie's bathroom:

(413) JULES: Well, put yourself in his position. It's eight o'clock in the morning. He just woke up, he wasn't expecting this *shit*.
Shit, we gotta remember who's doin' who a favor.

VINCENT: If that favor means that I gotta *take shit*, then he can stick that favor straight up his ass. I don't care.

The verb phrase *take shit* is another metaphorical dysphemism which means that someone (in our example Vincent) has to endure verbal abuse by someone else (in our

case Jimmie). Nevertheless, example (413) also contains other uses of scatological swearwords. The first use of *shit* is similar to the one in (410) and refers to ‘situation’. This occurrence is followed by the only use of *shit* as interjection which is employed in order to intensify the statement following it. Here, I would like to add that *shit* as interjection or exclamation is considerably milder than *fuck* which I have discussed in detail before. Finally, there is a long verb phrase in (413) containing the word *ass* which will be discussed below.

As mentioned above, *shit* is usually used in a negative fashion in *Pulp Fiction*. But its frequent and oftentimes emotionally distant mention makes it sound almost neutral. For example, when Vincent talks about his time in the Netherlands, he says to Jules:

- (414) It’s the little differences. I mean they got the same *shit* over there that they got here, but it’s just there is a little different.

Here, *shit* stands for ‘things’ and it is said without emotive force. Vincent utters the swearword like any other inoffensive term and thus its offensiveness lies just within its referent.

Moreover, in some cases, the word *shit* stands for ‘anything’ or ‘nothing’. The following example is taken from Jules and Vincent’s discussion about the meaning of foot massages. Before they enter the young men’s apartment, Vincent argues that foot massages are sensual, whereas Jules insists that they are meaningless:

- (415) Foot massages don't mean *shit*.

Nevertheless, there are also uses of *shit* which clearly express positive or negative emotions. For example, in the scene that introduces Jimmie to the audience, Jules compliments his host’s coffee by saying:

- (416) Goddamn Jimmie, this is some serious gourmet *shit*.

Here, the positive meaning of *shit* is generated by the word *gourmet*. Though (416) shows *shit* in a positive way, most of the term’s occurrences are negative (as seen in most of the examples above). Interestingly, the same conversation cited in (416) also features a negative use of the word with the same referent, namely coffee:

- (417) When Bonnie goes shopping, she buys *shit*. I buy the gourmet expensive stuff ‘cause when I drink it, I wanna taste it.

When it comes to portraying emotions, *shit* as expletive seems most prominent. This may be explained by its pronunciation and articulation. Like *fuck* (whose phonetic features I have discussed above), *shit* is a short, mono-syllabic word. Its pronunciation pattern is very similar to that of *fuck*. It starts with a fricative /ʃ/, has the short, stressed vowel /ɪ/ in mid-position and the final alveolar /t/. Furthermore, the /t/ is plosive, adding to the harshness of its sound. There are eight expletive uses of *shit* in *Pulp Fiction* and in most cases they are the articulation of a character's frustration as in the following example:

(418) Lance? ... *Shit!* It's one-thirty in the goddamn morning!

Here, Vince has just arrived at Lance's house with the overdosed Mia. The quote is uttered by Jody, Lance's wife, who is angry at being disturbed in the middle of the night and bursts out her feelings.

As aforementioned, there is also one use of *shit* as an adjective. This occurs during the epilogue when Pumpkin and Honey Bunny are still in control of the diner and the young man is holding a gun at Jules, demanding him to open the briefcase. Jules lies about the case's content as being laundry and Pumpkin makes a snide comment about Jules' duties:

(419) Sounds like a *shit* job.

Clearly, here, the adjective use of the word has the function of insult and ridicule. Pumpkin is asserting his power over Jules by making fun of his opponent and downgrading his occupation.

Furthermore, I would like to comment on the two occurrences of *shit* in compound nouns:

(420) Why do we feel it's necessary to yack about *bullshit* in order to be comfortable?

(421) What's more *chickenshit* than fucking with a man's automobile?

In both examples, *shit* is the second of two nouns following animal referents. In (420) Mia complains to Vincent about "uncomfortable silences" and the necessity to talk about anything, no matter what, just to fill those. A euphemistic term for Mia's *bullshit* could be 'nonsense'. Example (421) is taken from the first conversation between Vincent and Lance seen in the movie when the former buys heroin from the latter. Vincent tells his dealer about the recent damage done to his car by an unknown

perpetrator. He refers to the act of destroying someone's car as *chickenshit* and thus downgrades the absent and anonymous doer as a coward. Literally, *chickenshit* is a tiny kind of excrement and therefore refers to some demeaning, insignificant action.

Finally, there is one last mention of the word *shit* which is somewhat disguised:

(422) *Merde!* You startled me.

Merde is the French equivalent for *shit*. Taken out of context, one may think that the use of a foreign word in an English sentence is a euphemism, but since it is uttered by Fabienne, who is French, this is probably not the case. Also, the person she is talking to is Butch, who seems to know some French. *Merde* is used as an expletive in this example.

The next group of scatological terms I want to discuss is related to the previous one. We are still in the semantic field of human waste products, but instead of defecation these swearwords deal with urination. In *Pulp Fiction*, there are only four occurrences of such words, all including the word *piss* (one noun, one verb and two verb phrases).

Starting with *piss*, it is noteworthy that out of four mentions of this word one is the verb *to piss* (in comparison, there are 81 occurrences of *shit*, not featuring the noun *to shit* at all):

(423) I got to *piss*.

The example above is taken from a small scene in which Jules, Vincent and English Bob are talking about Vincent's upcoming date with Mia. Jules cavalierly informs the other two men about his urge and intention to use the bathroom.

Furthermore, the only mention of the word as a noun is also part of a verb phrase:

(424) I'm gonna take a *piss*.

One interesting observation about this last example is how the character the utterance is directed towards, Mia, reacts to it. Although Mia is no stranger to swearing herself, the mention of *piss* seems to upset her a little:

(425) That's a little bit more information than I needed, Vince, but go right ahead.

The two remaining occurrences of *piss* are to be found in the same kind of phrase and both are uttered by the same person, namely Jules:

(426) Yo, you best back off, man. I'm *gettin'* a little *pissed* here.

(427) Totally fucking cool, in control. Didn't even *get* really *pissed* when you were fucking with him.

In both examples, *to get pissed* means to get angry. In (426) Jules reacts to Vincent teasing him about foot massages and in (427) he praises Winston Wolf's composure in an earlier scene when the latter had been challenged by an arrogant remark from Vincent. The verb phrase *to get pissed* also has another popular and frequently employed meaning, namely 'to get drunk'. However, in *Pulp Fiction* it is not used in this way.

The last scatology subcategory of my analysis is the only one not concerned with human waste products, but the metaphorical use of the word *ass*. In *Pulp Fiction*, there are 35 nouns, four compound nouns (*asshole*) and one adjective (*crazy-ass*) of this kind.

With 28 occurrences, the most frequent use of *ass* is in combination with possessive pronouns. These are all pars pro toto metaphors wherein the body part stands for the whole person identified by the possessive pronouns. Thus, "your *ass*" means 'you', "my *ass*" 'me', and so forth. Here is one example of usage:

(428) My name's Pitt, and *your ass* ain't talkin' your way outta this shit.

The example above is taken from the scene in the young men's apartment. It is Jules' reply to Brett's question about his name. Clearly, "your *ass*" refers to Brett.

Nevertheless, there is one mention of a possessive pronoun and *ass* combination, which does not stand for people:

(429) I been sayin' that shit for years. And if you heard it, that meant *your ass*.

The two sentences are voiced by Jules when he talks about his new attitude towards life in the diner scene. They refer to the Bible passage he quotes twice in the movie.²⁰ Here, “your ass” means “you would die”.

Furthermore, *ass* and *asses* occur seven times in the movie. Although *ass* may also be used as an insult directed at people, all of the occurrences in *Pulp Fiction* refer to the actual body part. The following example is taken from Butch’s flashback scene from his childhood in which Captain Koons tells the young Butch the story of his father’s watch:

- (430) So he hid it in one place he knew he could hide something: his *ass*.
 Five long years, he wore this watch up his *ass*. Then he died of
 dysentery, gimme the watch. I hid this uncomfortable hunk of metal
 up my *ass* two years.

There is one more noteworthy use of *ass* which I want to comment on, namely the verb phrase “stick that favor straight up his *ass*” said by Vincent in the bathroom scene in Jimmie’s house (see example 413). “To stick something up someone else’s *ass*” means that one does not want ‘something’. In our example, Vincent says that he does not want Jimmie’s help if it means having to listen to Jimmie complain.

Apart from *ass(es)* as a single noun, I have counted four occurrences of the compound noun *asshole(s)*. Here are some examples:

- (431) Then why did you fuckin’ ask me about it for? *Asshole*.
(432) I thought you told those fuckin’ *assholes* never to call here this late!

Example (431) is Vincent’s reaction to English Bob’s teasing him about taking Mia Wallace out. Although the *a*-word is a direct insult, Vincent does not look at the receiver and merely mutters it. In (432) Jody complains to her husband Lance about a late night caller (Vincent). In this example the insult is not direct, but it is reinforced by the preceding adjective *fuckin’*.

There is also one occurrence of *ass* as part of an adjective:

- (433) I’ve seen a lot of *crazy-ass* shit in my time, but this –

²⁰ As audience we hear it three times since the scene in the young men’s apartment is repeated once from a different perspective.

In the example above Jules expresses his disgust with his car's condition after Vincent has accidentally shot Marvin. Here, the scatological term does not change the semantic meaning of *crazy*, but it reinforces the speaker's feelings.

Similarly to ass, the word *poo-butt* is used as well:

(434) Do not be bringing some fucked up *pooh-butt* to my house!

It is Lance who uses this rather infrequent swearword when talking on the phone with a hysteric Vincent. He tries to convince his friend not to bring an overdosed woman (Mia) to his house and in the process calls Mia a "fucked up *pooh-butt*". The noun "*pooh-butt*" is an equivalent to *bitch*.

8.1.2. Religion

Religion and religious swearing play important roles in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*. Most prominently, religious views and beliefs are expressed via Jules who claims to be very believing. He frequently quotes a bible passage (Ezekiel 25:17) and he also believes that "divine intervention" spared his and Vincent's lives in the young men's apartment when none of the fourth men's bullets hit them.

Furthermore, when Jules, Vincent and Marvin are in the car after the bullet incident, Jules tells Vincent that what has happened opened his eyes and made him want to retire from the criminal life. As a reaction, Vincent expresses his disbelief by using religious terms as expletives and thus upsets Jules:

(435) VINCENT: *Jesus Christ!*
JULES: Don't blaspheme!
VINCENT: *Goddammit, Jules –*
JULES: I said don't do that!

Although Jules gets highly offensive of his religion in this scene, his credibility is reduced since he himself uses profane language throughout the movie. As a matter of fact, in the same dialogue quoted in (435), Jules uses profane language too:

(436) I don't give a *damn* if he does.

In this example, Jules refers to the fact that he does not care if Marsellus laughs at his decision of starting a new crime-free life. It is possible that he does not consider *damn* as religious swearing since this particular word has been greatly weakened due to secularization of society (Hughes 2006: 116). Nevertheless, Jules also uses distinctive religious words in swearing. For example, in the scenes following the accidental murder of Marvin, he repeatedly uses *goddamn*:

(437) I used the same fucking soap you did and when I finished, the towel didn't look like no *goddamn* Maxie pad.

(438) *Goddamn*, Jimmie, this is some serious gourmet shit.

Example (437) is taken from the conversation between Jules and Vincent in Jimmie's bathroom when they are washing Marvin's blood off their hands and in (438) Jules compliments Jimmie's gourmet coffee (see also example 416). In both scenes he does not seem to care or notice that the language he uses is profane.

Another interesting observation is that Jules uses the term "blaspheme" when criticizing Vincent's use of religious words (example 435). But this does not mean that Vincent's intention was to offend God. In my opinion, he merely used the words without thinking twice about their meaning. They are merely conversational expressions. Thus, they can be categorized as profanity rather than blasphemy. As a matter of fact, all of the religious swearwords in *Pulp Fiction* can be categorized as such.

Overall, religious terms make up 7.68% of all the swearwords in *Pulp Fiction*. There is a total number of 41 words and with 33 uses almost all of them are related to the word *damn*, five to *hell* and three refer to *Jesus Christ*. Subsequently, I will discuss these three categories in more detail.

8.1.2.1. *Damn*

As aforementioned, terms and phrases containing *damn* are the most frequent religious swearwords in *Pulp Fiction*. Since its weakened status in our society (see above), *damn* on its own has relatively little offending power. There are only seven occurrences of this kind, two

adjectives, one expletive and two verb phrases (two of which containing the adjective *damned*). Above, I have mentioned the verb phrase *to give a damn* (see example 436) which means ‘to care’. There is another use of this same verb phrase voiced by the character Fabienne:

(439) I don’t *give a damn* what men find attractive.

Here, Fabienne talks about her longing to have a “pot belly” and when Butch asks her if she thinks that men would find this attractive, she retorts that she does not care about their opinions. Similar to the example (436), wherein Jules claims not to care about Marsellus’ appraisal, the verb phrase is negated, thus expressing indifference about other people’s opinions.

Furthermore, *damn* or *damned* are used as adjectives and expletive:

(440) I’ll be *damned*!

(441) He’d be *damned* if any slopes gonna put their greasy, yellow hands on his boy’s birthright.

(442) That’s a *damn* shame.

(443) I ain’t through with you by a *damn* sight.

(444) *Damn*, this morning air is some chilly shit.

Example (440) is Marsellus’ reaction to seeing Butch. After being hit by a car and unconscious for an indeterminate amount of time, Marsellus comes to the realization that the driver who ran him over was the man who had betrayed him beforehand. “I’ll be *damned*” is a common American English expression for surprise or shock.

A similar expression is also used in example (441) when Captain Koons is talking to the young Butch about his father and his golden watch. But here, *to be damned* does neither express surprise nor shock. It is the only occurrence of *damn* in *Pulp Fiction* which portrays the word’s original meaning related to religious damnation. According to Captain Koons, Butch’s father would have done anything, even face hell, in order to assure that his son would get his watch.

Examples (442-444) show *damn* as intensifying adjectives and expletive wherein the word does not carry any special meaning. In (442) Vincent comments on Tony Rocky Horror’s story who supposedly sustained a speech impediment after being thrown out of a window on the account of massaging Mia Wallace’s feet. Though Vincent stresses the word *damn*, he merely mutters the words with seemingly no emotional attachment. This example stands in contrast with the one quoted in (443) wherein the speaker, Marsellus, is highly emotional. It is taken from the basement scene

after Zed has raped Marsellus but in turn has been overpowered by Butch and Marsellus. The latter talks about his rapist and this is the only scene in the movie where the otherwise cool and relaxed Marsellus raises his voice.

Finally, *damn* occurs as expletive once. In (444) Jules expresses his discontent with the cold morning air and strongly stresses the expletive *damn*. Here, the term also functions as intensifier.

As aforementioned, there are only a few uses of the word *damn* on its own. Nevertheless, with 22 total occurrences the compound *goddamn* is mentioned more frequently in the movie. As opposed to the single version *damn*, no one can deny the obvious religious connotation of *goddamn*. The word has a special offensive force because it combines two opposing religious referents: God on the one hand and damnation, which is usually associated with hell and the devil on the other.

Goddamn is considered as being typically American (Hughes 2006: 203) and in *Pulp Fiction* it is used as adjective (eleven occurrences), adverb (twice) and expletive (nine times). Uses of the word as adjective and expletive can be observed in (437) and (438) respectively. The following example contains the religious term as adverb. It is voiced by Butch when talking on the phone to his friend Scotty:

(445) OK, my brother. – You're right, you're *goddamn* right.

There is one more scene worth mentioning which features three highly stressed utterances of the word in a row. When in the bathroom at Jack Rabbit Slim's and after inhaling cocaine, Mia exclaims:

(446) I said *goddamn! Goddamn! Goddamn!*

This quote is interesting because it is one of the numerous references to American pop culture in *Pulp Fiction*. According to Polan (2004: 17-18), as outsider it is often hard to spot such references. But in this case Tarantino (1999: 59) himself left a hint in his screenplay in the form of a stage direction:

(447) MIA (*imitating Steppenwolf*)

'Steppenwolf' is the name of a Canadian-American rock band popular in America in the 1960s. What is imitated by Mia in the bathroom scene is the chorus of their song 'The Pusher':

- (448) *Goddamn*, the Pusher
Goddamn, I say the Pusher
I said *goddamn*, *goddamn* the Pusher man

The song is about an aggressive dealer, also called a ‘pusher’. This explains the reference to the song when Mia takes her drugs on the bathroom sink.

Returning to the analysis of swearwords, there are four mentions of the expletive *goddammit* in the movie. One of these I have already quoted above (see example 435). As can be observed in example (435), this term is used to voice negative feelings such as anger, desperation, and frustration. Nevertheless, in *Pulp Fiction* it is also employed as an expression of curiosity:

- (449) *Goddammit*, what is it?

In this scene Honey Bunny wants to know what Pumpkin can see in Jules’ mysterious black briefcase. Her facial expression is tense but at the same time she is smiling and chuckling with joyful curiosity.

8.1.2.2. *Hell*

With five occurrences *hell* is the second most frequent religious swearword in the movie. It appears as noun three times and twice as interjection *the hell*. The first two mentions of the word are to be found in the Jack Rabbit Slim’s scene when Vincent orders his steak from a waiter who is impersonating Buddy Holiday:

- (450) BUDDY: How d’ya want that cooked, burnt to a crisp, or bloody as
hell?

VINCENT: Bloody as *hell* and oh yeah, look at this – vanilla coke.

At first sight the word *bloody* also looks like a swearword, but in fact it merely refers to the condition of the steak. Both the waiter and Vincent do not stress the term *hell* nor do they seem to award it any attention. This may be explained due to the common use of *as hell* as intensifier for adjectives. In such cases, the term *hell* does not refer to the Christian place of damned souls, but it rather bears no specific meaning at all.

Similarly, the interjection *the hell* has no semantic meaning either. It is a mere intensifier and functions the same way as *the fuck* (which I have discussed in detail above). But while there are 33 uses of *the fuck* in *Pulp Fiction*, there are no more than two of *the hell* and both are voiced by the same character, namely Jody:

(451) What *the hell* was that?

(452) Get her *the hell* outta here!

Example (451) is Jody's reaction to the noise caused by Vincent driving his car into her and Lance's house. In this scene the woman is still in the bedroom. Soon after this remark, she leaves her bedroom in order to find out what is going on in the living room and when she is told that Mia is overdosing, she wants the unfamiliar woman out of her house which is quoted in example (452).

So far, all occurrences of *hell* have not directly referred to the Christian place of damnation. Nevertheless, there is one use which draws on images this term evokes in the readers mind:

(453) We were in that Hanoi pit of *hell* together over five years.

The example above is taken from the scene in which Captain Koons talks to the young Butch telling him the story of his father's gold watch. Here, he tells the boy about his bond with his father during the Vietnam War. Thus the American soldier calls Hanoi a 'pit of *hell*', meaning a place which to him felt as bad as hell itself.

8.1.2.3. *Jesus Christ*

Last but not least, there are three mentions of the term *Jesus Christ*. Interestingly, all three occurrences are spoken by Vincent. One I have already mentioned in example (435) where it is used as expletive and upsets Jules due to its religious meaning. The two other mentions are uttered by Vincent when he finds Mia unconscious in her living room after she has accidentally inhaled his heroin:

(454) Oh *Jesus Fucking Christ*! You fu... oh *Jesus Christ*. Oh, fuck me! Fuck me! Oh ...

Although the religious terms are part of a swearing tirade here, they still stand out because of their religious stigma. Vincent is obviously upset in this scene and thus one may argue that he is praying for help. However, in my opinion they simply express Vincent's desperation. Another interesting observation in example (454) is that the adjective *fucking* is used as intensifier in infix position in the first mention of the words, hence making it very unlikely that it is a prayer.

8.1.3. Social swearwords

In this subsection I want to discuss swearwords motivated by social factors which do not fit in any of the previously mentioned categories. This means that there are definitely more socially charged slurs in *Pulp Fiction* than mentioned here. But those that refer to more than one semantic field have already been discussed in the section 'Obscenity'. For example, the f-word variant *motherfucker* refers to an act of incest which is a violation of both social and moral codes; *fuckhead* is an insult regarding one's intellect; the scatological adjective *crazy-ass* touches upon the social stigma of insanity; the obscene nouns *bitch* and *pooh-butt* describe promiscuous women thus referring to gender on the one hand and moral codes on the other hand; and *son of bitch* disparages family origins. Furthermore, there is a large number of racial slurs which require a more detailed discussion. For this reason I have decided to analyze them separately in the section entitled "Racism".

Not counting plurivalent and ethnic terms, this leaves us with 44 social swearwords which make up 8.24% of all the offensive terms in the movie script. Nevertheless, most of the social insults are only mentioned once in the movie and I will not discuss every single one of them in detail, but only a few exemplary cases.

As aforementioned, intellect and intelligence (or lack thereof) are probably the most common social referents in English. This does not mean that socially motivated swearwords are the most frequent in usage, but that there is a great variety of different terms. This is also apparent in *Pulp Fiction*. There is a total number of 19 terms referring to stupidity, consisting of ten different nouns and two adjectives, some of

which occur more than once in the movie script (the number of occurrences is indicated in brackets):

- (455) *bubblegummer* (1)
- (456) *dork* (2)
- (457) *dumb* (2)
- (458) *fuckhead*²¹ (1)
- (459) *gimp* (2)
- (460) *hillbilly* (1)
- (461) *imbecile* (1)
- (462) *knucklehead* (1)
- (463) *nimrod* (1)
- (464) *palooka* (1)
- (465) *retard* (3)
- (466) *stupid* (3)

Also previously mentioned, most swearwords of this kind are directed towards men. This holds true for *Pulp Fiction* because almost all of the terms mentioned above are used in connection with male characters. Of the insulting nouns only one is directed at a woman. Interestingly, when Butch names Fabienne a *retard*, she defends herself and insists on not being named thus:

- (467) BUTCH: No *retard*, from the fight.
- FABIENNE: Don't call me *retard*.

Afterwards, the couple breaks into a short, but intense verbal fight. Fabienne's reaction to the derogatory remark demonstrates the high offensiveness of swearwords referring to lack of intelligence. Nowadays it is one of the least desired human attributes, thus making it a taboo.

Another interesting use is that of *gimp*. The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* defines the term as a "stupid or contemptible person" and in another entry as a "lame person, a cripple". Its employment in *Pulp Fiction* is particularly interesting because it is used as proper noun, denomination a character, The Gimp. His appearance in the movie is one of the great mysteries of the storyline. The Gimp is a man dressed from

²¹ For reasons of completeness, I have including this obscene term here, but I will not discuss it further in this section since I have already done so in 'Obscenity'

head to toe in a sadomasochist outfit including a mask which covers his whole face, showing only his eyes and part of his nose. He is kept in a cage in the basement by Zed and Maynard who literally treat him like a pet dog. They put him on a leash, pat his head and talk to and about him as if he were a dog:

(468) Bring out *The Gimp*.

(469) Get down.

Throughout his scenes, he himself never talks. Although this could be explained by the leather mask he is wearing, it may also be a reference to his mental capacity.

Further categories of social referents are social status, conditions and stigmas. For example, people who are homeless are disrespected and looked down upon in most Western societies. A derogatory term for a homeless person is *bum* which is also employed as insult frequently. In *Pulp Fiction* this term is mentioned in the discussion between Jules and Vince about Jules intention to “walk the earth”. Vincent strongly disapproves of his partner’s plan:

(470) No, Jules, you decided to be a *bum* just like all those pieces of shit out there who beg for change, who sleep in garbage bins, eat what I throw away. They got a name for that, Jules. It’s called a *bum*. And without a job, a residence or legal tender, that’s what you’re gonna be, man. You’re gonna be a fucking *bum*.

Vincent’s account is not only shockingly condescending but unfortunately also exemplary for many people’s opinions of homeless persons. Not having a domicile and/or job is not the norm and thus people affected are expelled from society and called names such as *bum*.

In spite of it all, to me one of the most intriguing swearwords in the movie is a name given to Roger, one of the young men in the apartment with Brett, by Jules:

(471) You, *Flock of Seagulls*, you know why we’re here?

Flock of Seagulls is another pop culture references in Tarantino’s movie. As a matter of fact, Jules alludes to the fact that Roger’s haircut looks like that of the lead singer of the eighties band with the same name (Polan 2000: 18).

Regarding derogatory adjectives designating people or their actions little intelligent, the ones used in *Pulp Fiction* are rather mild. For example, when Jules tries to relax an agitated Honey Bunny he shouts:

(472) Right now. Yolanda! We're not gonna do anything *stupid*, are we?

Nevertheless, in most mentions the adjectives are accompanied by other, more offending terms. We have already seen such a case in example (353) where *stupid* is surrounded by seven different versions of *fuck*.

Also, in both occurrences *dumb* is followed by the noun *ass*:

(473) The motherfucker said that shit never had to pick up itty-bitty pieces of skull on account of your *dumb ass*.

(474) Besides, I been through too much shit over this case this morning to just hand it over to your *dumb ass*.

Both examples above are uttered by Jules. In (473) he is talking to Vincent while cleaning the bloody car and in (474) the insult is directed towards Pumpkin. As can be observed in both situations, *dumb* sounds a lot more offending due to the noun it modifies than it would on its own.

All the same, with eleven occurrences the most frequent socially motivated term is the verb *to shut up*. It has no special semantic referent but because it is vulgar it is a socially charged swearword. Its meaning is 'to stop talking' and its most frequent use is as imperative, thus urging someone else to stop talking. This is also the case in *Pulp Fiction* where eight of the eleven occurrences are direct imperatives. For instance, in the movie's epilogue the diner manager tells Jules not to cause any trouble, but Jules refuses to listen:

(475) *Shut the fuck up, fat man, this ain't any of your goddamn business!*

Here, the imperative *shut up* is intensified by the interjection *the fuck*. As a matter of fact, six of the verb's uses in the movie involve this highly charged, obscene intensifier. Also, in (475) it is followed by the insulting adjective *fat* that disparages the manager's physical appearance. Although *fat* may seem rather harmless to some people, it can in fact be one of the most vulnerable words to others. Since our modern society is very visual, looks are quintessential to social status. By belittling someone's physical

appearance the insulter tries to attack the victim's self-esteem and self-worth. The adjective *fat* is a common term of abuse and in *Pulp Fiction* it is also used three times as offensive adjective.²²

Furthermore, there is a noun-version of the adjective, namely *fatso*. It is voiced by Fabienne and directed at Butch when they talk about the size of women's bellies:

(476) Shut up, *fatso*! I don't have a pot!

But in this case, body language, facial expressions and tone play an important role. The whole statement is accompanied by Fabienne laughing and the couple caressing each other. Instead of fighting the two merely tease each other and the woman does not really mean to offend her boyfriend, but *fatso* is rather used as term of endearment. The use of insults as pet names seems to be common practice among the couple.

Though the verb *to shut up* is a direct demand expressed in imperative form in the examples (475) and (476), there are also grammatically less direct forms. But these are by no means less offensive or menacing. This argument is demonstrated adequately in the next example. It is taken from the scene at Lance and Jody's house with an overdosed Mia in the living room and a reproachful Jody at her husband side. In a moment of distress, Lance tells Jody:

(477) I'm going to fucking kill you if you don't *shut up*!

The demand to be quiet is not expressed as imperative, but by using the exaggerated threat of killing Jody, it is even stronger and more menacing.

However, not all mentions of the verb are requests. For instance, in the following statement told by Mia to Vincent, it occurs in the form of infinitive main verb in combination with a modal verb:

(478) That's when you know you found somebody really special. When you can just *shut the fuck up* for a minute, and comfortably share silence.

As aforementioned there is another group of social swearwords that display many interesting uses, namely racial slurs. Because there are 25 terms in this category which

²² There are also some other inoffensive uses of *fat*, but since they are not considered swearwords, they have not been counted or listed for the analysis.

deserve a more detailed analysis, I have decided to create a new subsection for ethnic insults, following below.

8.1.4. Racism

The 27 racist terms in *Pulp Fiction* make up 5.06% of all swearwords in the movie. Most of these racial slurs are referring to African-American and Asian people and therefore these shall be discussed in detail below. Nevertheless, there are two terms which do not fall into these two categories, but they are still worth mentioning: the nouns *wetback* and *gyp*.

Wetback is an American slur for ‘illegal immigrant’, originally and mainly referring to those of Mexican origin. The term is rooted in the fact that many Mexican immigrants have entered and continue trying to enter the United States by crossing the Rio Grande (*The Oxford English dictionary. Online edition*). Although *wetbacks* are historically Mexicans and the insult mostly refers to the latter, nowadays the term is also used to insult any foreigner. In *Pulp Fiction* it is uttered by Pumpkin when he explains his intention of robbing restaurants to Honey Bunny:

(479) Busboys, some *wetback* getting’ paid a dollar fifty an hour really give a fuck you’re stealin’ from the owner?

Here, it is not clear, if Pumpkin refers to the busboys as being Mexican or any kind of immigrants. Nevertheless, later he addresses the kitchen personnel as ‘Mexicans’:

(480) Mexicans, outta the fucking kitchen!

Therefore, it can be assumed that he actually did refer to *wetbacks* as Mexicans, thus using the swearword in its original and most common meaning.

The second ethnic slur worth mentioning is *gyp*. It is voiced by Vincent in his dinner conversation with Mia when Mia refuses to tell a joke:

(481) MIA: Now I’m definitely not gonna tell ya, ‘cause it’s been built up too much.

VINCENT: What a *gyp*!

Vincent uses the term *gyp* in the same way one would use ‘nonsense’. The use of the word in this situation relies on ethnic prejudices. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, these three letters are “perhaps short for GYPSY” (ibid.), thus referring to:

A member of a wandering race (by themselves called *Romany*), of Hindu origin, which first appeared in England about the beginning of the 16th c. and was then believed to have come from Egypt. (Ibid.)

All over the world there are many prejudices concerning Romani people. One common stereotype is the fortune telling gypsy woman who reads people’s hands. In my opinion, Vincent’s use of the term goes back to this image since gypsy fortune tellers are often said to talk gibberish. Thus *gyp* evokes the association of ‘nonsense’.

However, now I want to direct the focus of my thesis at the most common referents for racial slurs, namely African-Americans and Asians. Subsequently, these shall be discussed in more detail.

8.1.4.1. African-Americans

With a total of twenty swearwords, African-Americans are the most common referents of racial slurs in *Pulp Fiction*. Nineteen of these are variants of the term *nigger* and there is also one mention of *Negro*. As discussed above, the functions of ethnic slurs depend heavily on speaker and context. Thus they may be highly offensive insults when voiced by someone outside the social group or terms of endearment that show in-group solidarity (Hughes 2006: 327-328). Naturally, this also refers to the term *nigger*:

African Americans can call one another “nigger” with relative impunity under specific conditions, but a white person cannot do the same. Language by nature is ambiguous and sensitive to context. (Lakoff 2000: 105):

In detail it is more complex, as are the semantic nuances, which in American English vary from extreme offensiveness when used of blacks by whites, to affectionate expressions of solidarity when used in black English. (Hughes 2006: 326)

As we will see in this analysis, context and the relation between speaker and receiver can broaden these arguments.

In American English, and therefore also in *Pulp Fiction*, there is an explicit distinction between in- and out-group pronunciations of the n-word. As Polan argues, slang and pronunciation are “linguistic codes of inclusion and exclusion” (2004: 59). In the case of *nigger*, the difference lies in the articulation of the last sound. African-Americans voice the mid-central vowel sound schwa /ə/, while out-group speakers clearly pronounce the –r at the end of the word, producing the postvocalic sound /ər/. For these reasons one can clearly hear if the word’s function is abusive or not.

To differentiate the two, the in-group version is often spelled *nigga*. Hughes says that “[a]lternative spelling, usually of an illiterate kind, is also a way of establishing identity” (2006: 328). Thus, with the alternative spelling and pronunciation African-Americans have reclaimed the n-word as their own and use it to show in-group solidarity. In order to avoid confusion of the two different versions, I will use these suggested in- and out-group spellings (*nigga* versus *nigger* respectively) in my examples and analysis.

Regarding *Pulp Fiction*, I want to start analyzing in-group uses of racial slurs referring to black people. There are twelve mentions of *nigga(s)* and one of *Negro*, voiced by two African-American characters, namely Jules and Marsellus. Firstly, the terms are used to talk to or about other African-Americans and thus fulfilling the social function of demonstrating belonging to the African-American community:

(482) Let’s go, *nigga*. C’mon!

(483) I’m washin’ the windows and you’re pickin’ up this *nigga*’s skull.

(484) Shit yeah, *Negro*, that’s all you had to say.

In examples (482) and (483), the person referred to as *nigga* is Marvin. In (482) Jules orders the young black man to hurry up while leaving the young men’s apartment and addresses him directly. Nevertheless in the scene quoted in (483), Marvin is already dead and Jules and Vincent are cleaning some of his human remains off the car. After Jules gets angry with Vincent, he demands a swap of duties in which he refers to Marvin as *nigga* again.

Example (484) provides the only mention of the word *Negro* in the movie. It is often suggested that this term is the etymological derivation of *nigger*, but Hughes claims that this is not true since the latter derived from the Latin *niger*, meaning ‘black’

(Hughes 2006: 328). However, nowadays, the two words are used synonymously. In *Pulp Fiction*, *Negro* it is voiced during a phone call between Jules and Marsellus and once again, Jules is the speaker who addresses Marsellus directly.

The three examples above show that Jules is part of the African-American community and thus illustrate the words' social function of demonstrating belonging. Nevertheless, it could be argued that they do not necessarily fulfill the social function regarding in-group solidarity because they are all voiced by Jules and throughout the movie, Jules uses *nigga(s)* to refer to anyone, regardless of their ethnicity. For example:

(485) Hey, fuck, *nigga*! What the fuck did you just do to this towel?

(486) Go back in there, chill them *niggas* out and wait for the cavalry, which should be comin' directly.

The referents of *nigga(s)* in both examples above are white people. In (485) Jules scolds Vincent for staining Jimmie's white towels with blood, addressing his interlocutor as *nigga*. Example (486) is taken from the phone call between Jules and Marsellus and Jules is telling the latter what he wants to hear him say, referring to Jimmie and Vincent as *niggas*. (The phrase is then repeated by Marsellus almost word by word.) However, it seems that both Jules and Marsellus only use the term when talking to or referring to people they have some kind of personal relationship with. For example, Marsellus denominates men that work for him *nigga(s)*:

(487) I'm gonna call a couple o' hardpipe-hittin' *niggas*, who'll go to work on the homes here with a pair of pliers and a blow torch.

(488) Vincent Vega is in the house. My *nigga*!

(489) You *my nigga*?

Example (487) is taken from the scene after Marsellus shoots Zed in the crouch and he is telling Butch what he plans to do next. Since the people adverted to in (487) are unidentified, their ethnicity is uncertain. But they do not necessarily have to be black because many men of different ethnicities work for Marsellus. In any case, the addressee in (488), Vincent, is obviously white. In a way, by calling Vincent *nigga*, both Jules and Marsellus treat him as if he were part of the African-American community.

An interesting case is the use of *nigga* in (489). In this scene Marsellus is offering Butch a bribe for cheating in his upcoming boxing match. Calling Butch '*his*

nigga' implies that by agreeing to the deal Butch will be under constraint to work for Marsellus. In a way, this particular use reminds of the origins of the word *nigger* when it was used to denominate African-American slaves dating back as far as America's colonial period (Hughes 2006: 326-327). Also, when Butch reacts to Marsellus' comment with a frown, it is obvious that he is not happy being called thus.

The second group of *Pulp Fiction* characters, who use the n-word, consists of four white men: Jimmie, Lance, Maynard and Zed. All of these clearly pronounce the swearword *nigger*. But Jimmie is the only one who voices the word with no apparent racist motivation:

(490) When you came pulling in here, did you notice a sign out in the front of my house that said "Dead *Nigger* Storage"?

The example above is taken from the conversation in Jimmie's kitchen when he and Jules talk about Marvin's corpse. In total, Jimmie refers to Marvin as *nigger* four times and each time clearly pronounces the ⟨r⟩ at the end of the word. The actor-director's (Tarantino plays Jimmie) choice of pronouncing the word /nigə/ clearly shows that Jimmie is not part of the closed group of African-Americans. However, the character seems to share a kind of in-group solidarity with Jules because they are friends and thus the in- and out-group rules are repealed. The black interlocutor does not object to his white friend's enunciation of the word.

Even so, Jules seems to be uncomfortable in this scene. On the one hand, this may be explained by their unfortunate situation, on the other hand it could also be due to Jimmie's pronunciation of the word in its derogatory, out-group version. As a matter of fact, Samuel L. Jackson, who plays Jules, has voiced his discontent with Tarantino's acting choice:

'I kept saying: "Quentin, as long as say 'nigger', it's going to be like fingernails on a chalkboard. You've got to say 'N-I-G-G-A-H, nigga.' That means you're familiar with the use of the word and you've used it in mixed company, not just some white guys"' (cited in Polan 2004: 58)

This comment clearly shows Jackson's negative feelings towards the word *nigger* and its abusive, insulting pronunciation /nigə/. Also, he acutely points out that *nigger* is an out-group term, while *nigga* is its in-group variant, with which Tarantino and his character Jimmie in the movie should be familiar with.

Moreover, Tarantino has also been criticized for the excessive use of the n-word in his movies. Especially members of the black community have disapproved of the white director for this reason. For instance, African-American director, writer and producer Spike Lee has criticized him repeatedly and went as far as calling him an “ignorant” in public. However, this critique was mostly for Tarantino’s later movie *Jackie Brown* (Biskind 2004: 517-519).

Anyhow, Jimmie does not seem to be a racist or use the word *nigger* in a derogatory fashion. But there are also openly racist characters in *Pulp Fiction*, who use the term in its abusive function. First of all, there is Vincent’s drug dealer Lance. When talking to Vincent about the quality of his heroin, Lance says:

(491) Am I a *nigger*? Are we in Inglewood? No. You’re in my home. Now, white people who know the difference between good shit and bad shit, this is the house they come to.

The example above makes it obvious that Lance is racist. He uses *nigger* in a highly deprecatory context and insinuates that a black dealer would offer low quality drugs, while he is in possession of high quality. The racist effect is even stronger due to the juxtaposition of the words *nigger* and *white people* within the same statement. It is also interesting, that Lance mentions Inglewood. This Californian city has a predominantly African-American and Latino population and in another scene in the movie, it is revealed that Jules is from Inglewood.

Two more racist characters are the friends Maynard, a pawn shop owner, and Zed, a policeman, who take Butch and Marsellus prisoner in the segment “The gold watch”. Maynard’s racist attitude is apparent from the beginning because of a large confederate flag hanging in his pawn shop. Furthermore, while separating Marsellus and Butch, he says the following to the white boxer:

(492) Take your foot off the *nigger*.

The speaker voices this statement in a relatively calm, emotionless manner. Linguistically more interesting is his mate Zed’s use of the word. Zed, who is the dominant one in their trio (including the submissive, masked man called The Gimp), cites an old, controversial version of a children’s counting-out rhyme when asked which of the two he “wants to do first”:

(493) Eeny, meeny, miny, moe, catch a *nigger* by his toe. If he hollers, let him go. Eeny, meeny, miny, moe. My mother said pick the perfect one and you are it.

This version has actually been banned from common present-day language use for its racist wording. However, a similar rendition including *nigger* was used up until the 1950s (Opie and Opie 1951: 156). Moreover, according to Opie and Opie in this decade it was “[u]ndoubtedly the most popular rhyme for counting-out both in England and America” (ibid.). Nowadays there are a number of different versions, including animal referents such as ‘tiger’ and ‘monkey’ instead of the offensive n-word. The new, non-racist wordings remain very popular and many Americans are not aware of the rhyme’s racist history. Nevertheless, some African-Americans are still sensitive to it and do get offended when hearing it (http://www.usatoday.com/travel/news/2004-01-22-swa-rhyme_x.htm#, 22 January 2004 and Stossel 2003).

Furthermore, there is another interesting fact behind Zed’s voicing of the racist nursery rhyme. It is the specific situation of choosing a victim for his perverted intention of sexual abuse which is similar to ancient Celtic practices:

The tradition in England was that counting-out rhymes were remnants of formulas used by the Druids for choosing human sacrifices. (Opie and Opie 1951: 12)

Similar to Celtic traditions, Zed is choosing a human victim. By employing ‘Eeny, meeny, miny, moe’ he is in a certain position of power like the druids in ancient times. However, while it is believed that druids chose victims to sacrifice to their gods, in Zed’s twisted case he himself is the one profiting first-hand from Marsellus’ involuntary “sacrifice”.

8.1.4.2. Asians

There is a certain amount of hostility towards Asians noticeable in *Pulp Fiction*, first and foremost due to Captain Koons’ attitude. But before Koons’ tale of the golden watch, another character voices xenophobic thoughts, namely Pumpkin. All in all, the

movie's script contains four racial slurs concerning people of Asian descent voiced by these two characters. There are three mentions of *gook(s)* and one of *slope(s)*.

As for *gook*, the word is a relatively young American slang term²³ which has been applied towards various ethnic groups foreign to the USA (including Filipinos, Nicaraguans, South Sea natives, Italians, Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Mexicans Vietnamese, Indians, Lebanese, Turks and Arabs) in the past. Interestingly, the term has commonly been an expression of contempt referring to America's enemies in war (Hughes 2006: 227), which can be observed in *Pulp Fiction* when Captain Koons talks about the Vietnam War. However, nowadays it is mainly used to insult Asians, especially those from (South-)East Asian countries such as China, Korea and Vietnam (*The Oxford English dictionary. Online edition*).

In *Pulp Fiction*, Pumpkin says *gook* twice when telling Honey Bunny about the advantages of robbing restaurants as opposed to liquor stores:

- (494) It's too many foreigners own liquor stores. Vietnamese, Koreans, they don't even speak fuckin' English. You tell 'em: "Empty out the register," they don't know what the fuck you're talking about. They make it too personal. We keep on, one of those *gook* fuckers' gonna make us kill 'em.
- (495) And if it's not the *gooks*, it's these old fuckin' Jews who've owned the store for fifteen fuckin' generations.

The use of *gook* in (494) is linguistically interesting since the ethnic insult takes the form of an adjective. As aforementioned, this is possible due to the grammatical flexibility of racial insults. Furthermore, the noun it modifies is also a highly charged swearword and therefore the combination of the two is even more derogatory. In example (495), *gooks* is employed in its original part of speech, namely noun.

As can be observed above, Pumpkin generally talks negatively about other ethnic groups. Nevertheless, I doubt that he is a true racist. He is definitely ignorant and xenophobic, but I would not go as far as to call him racist. Captain Koons on the other hand, is possibly a racist, at least towards Vietnamese. This may be explained due to his

²³ It was also in use in Australia during the Vietnam War, but it has not been established in Australian English since (Hughes 2006: 208).

personal experiences in the Vietnam War. His contemptuous attitude is apparent in his account of his and Butch's father's time in Hanoi and the latter's gold watch:

(496) He knew that if the *gooks* ever saw the watch it'd be confiscated and taken away.

(497) He'd be damned if any *slopes* gonna put their greasy, yellow hands on his boy's birthright.

The use of the plural noun *gooks* in (496) is similar to the one cited in (495). But example (497) features another racial insult, namely *slope(s)*. Though this term has been used to offend oriental people in general, today it usually refers to the Vietnamese (ibid). In the same sentence Koons calls the Vietnamese *slopes*, he also describes their hands as 'greasy' and 'yellow', thus revealing his racist disposition.

After talking about such obviously offensive uses of swearwords, I would like to direct the attention to terms and expressions that do the exact opposite of offending. Sounds, words and phrases that avoid or hide swearwords are called disguise mechanism. There are a few cases of euphemisms in the movie and I want to discuss them in the next section of this thesis.

8.1.5. Euphemisms

Although *Pulp Fiction* is known for its abundance of swearwords and shocking dialogues, there are still a few cases of disguised words and phrases. I have found five instances of euphemisms, all referring to sexuality, which I want to analyze here.

Firstly, in Vincent and Jules' conversation about Antwan Rockamora's alleged foot massage on Mia Marsellus, they compare foot massages to oral sex. At first they refer to the act of oral sex in a harshly dysphemistic way. The following example is Jules response to Vincent's comment cited in example (408):

(498) *Eatin' a bitch out*, and givin' a bitch a foot massage ain't even the same fuckin' thing.

After these vulgar remarks, one would not expect a euphemism to come out of any of the two men's mouths, but soon after Jules says the following:

- (499) Now, look maybe your method of massage differs from mine, but you know, touchin' his wife's feet, and stickin' your tongue in her *holiest of holies*, ain't the same fuckin' ballpark.

The expression *holiest of holies* is a metaphorical euphemism for 'vagina' and it stands out in the otherwise offensive choice of words in the dialogue. Of course, Jules' comment as a whole is not completely free from unsavory language, but this only adds to the unexpected effect. Furthermore, the expression stands in blatant contrast to its afore voiced dysphemistic synonym *pussy*.

The third case of euphemism also deals with the Antwan-Mia-situation described above. When Vincent takes out Marsellus' wife for dinner, he brings up the issue of Antwan's fall. At first he avoids mentioning the foot massage, but admits that he heard Mia was the reason it had happened. Getting a bit frustrated with Vincent's holding back, Mia asks:

- (500) Did it involve the *f-word*?

This common one-for-one substitution leaves no questions as to what is referred to.

The last scene I want to analyze here involves two euphemistic expressions. They are exchanged between Butch and his girlfriend Fabienne:

- (501) FABIENNE: Butch? Will you give me *oral pleasure*?
 BUTCH: Will you *kiss it*?

Both utterances above refer to oral sex. Fabienne's substitutive use of *oral pleasure* also stands in contrast to Vincent and Jules' brute expressions mentioned in examples (498)-(499). Now, one might argue that the difference here is that of the speaker's gender. As aforementioned it is often assumed that women curse less than men. Nevertheless, Fabienne is not the only one delicately paraphrasing the act of oral sex in the movie. As seen in example (501), Butch refers to fellatio in a disguised form. Instead of using vulgar language, he asks his girlfriend if she will *kiss it*. Obviously, the object pronoun refers to his penis.

The fifth case of euphemism in *Pulp Fiction* involves the same reference, but once again a female speaker. When at Lance's house Vincent listens to Jody talk about

her numerous piercings and finally asks why she wears a stud in her tongue. Jody answers:

(502) It's a sex thing. It helps *fellatio*.

Here, she uses the technical term instead of vulgar expressions such as *blow job*. Thus, the woman clearly avoids using offensive language in this sentence. All the same, I want to stress that neither of the characters using euphemisms discussed in this section are strangers to foul language. As can be observed by various examples throughout the precedent analyses, each of them uses swearwords throughout the movie.

After this detailed analysis of the original movie script, I want to move on to the German dubbing of the dialogue. This section will be noticeably shorter than the last, concentrating on general issues and giving a summary of swearword usage in the German version of *Pulp Fiction*. Examples from the movie and discussion thereof will ensue in the section following it, wherein the two movie scripts shall be compared and contrasted.

8.2. German translation

I first watched *Pulp Fiction* in its German dubbed version and at the time the many physically violent scenes left me quite shocked. However, the language did not. I do remember hearing a fair amount of curse words, but they did not strike me as excessive nor too offensive. However, when I saw the original for the first time, it was like watching a completely different movie. For me the slang expressions and swearwords, which had been lost in translation, added a new flavor to the movie and altered it entirely in my eyes – or rather ears. Not only are there a lot more cases of swearing in the English script, but the majority of those mentioned in the German translation seem much less offensive than those in the English original.

All the same, when analyzing the German script, I still found 348 expressions that I categorized as swearwords. In order to facilitate the comparison of the two

languages, I have allocated the German swearwords in the same referential categories as the English ones. Of these, the largest group is made up of religious terms, followed by scatological, sexual and social swearwords with almost equal numbers of occurrences and last but not least a smaller group of racist terms. The distribution of these categories can be observed in Table 3:

Table 3: Summary of swearword categories in German movie script

Category / referents		Number of occurrences		Frequency	
Obscenity	Scatology	86	132	24.71 %	37.93 %
	Sexuality	46		13.22 %	
Religion		100		28.74 %	
Social swearwords		87 (+13) ²⁴		25.00 %	
Racism		29 (+1) ²⁵		8.33 %	
TOTAL:		348		100 %	

Prima facie, the allocation of the German terms in Table 3 looks quite similar to that of the English ones.²⁶ Seeing that obscenities are also the largest category in German, one might conclude that *Pulp Fiction* attests to the widespread stereotype about German speakers and the use of scatological terms. However, after closer inspection, one may be surprised to see that scatology is not the largest group of referents at all. As aforementioned, there are more religious terms in the dubbed movie than scatological. (It is just the sum of all obscene words that is larger than the religious terms.)

More precisely, there are exactly 100 offensive expressions referring to religious concepts in the German movie script. Making up 28.74% of all swearwords, religion is the largest subcategory. This fact is mainly attributed to the use of one word, namely *verdammt* ('damn'). This term is featured in various different alterations as for example *gottverdammt* and parts of speech including adjectives, adverbs, expletives, interjections

²⁴ Various terms not counted in this category, because also listed in 'Sexuality'.

²⁵ *Weißer Arsch* ('white ass') not counted in this category, because also listed in 'Scatology'.

²⁶ See Tables 1 and 2 p.80-81

and one verb. Overall it is used 84 times in the German dubbing. In contrast, there are only 47 mentions of the popular scatological term *Scheiße* (including its related terms) – thus being almost half as frequent as *verdammt*.

Hence, contrary to stereotypes and expectations, in *Pulp Fiction* scatology is not the largest group of referents. Nevertheless, with 86 expressions overall they are the second largest and make up close to 25% of all swearwords in the movie script. The most frequent scatological terms are *Scheiße* ('shit') and the related *Scheiß* (meaning 'bullshit' or 'crap'). Counting all their different variants, there is a sum of 47 expressions. They are mostly nouns, compound nouns and expletives, but there are also one verb and one adjective.

However, with a total number of 132 swearwords and consisting of two subcategories (scatology and sexuality), obscenity is the biggest major category of referents in the German movie script. In contrast to the English version, there are more scatological terms than sexual. The latter consist of 46 terms and expressions, deriving from various sexual semantic fields such as sexual practices (including masturbation and oral sex), promiscuity, and different names for genitals. The most frequent sexual term is the insult *Wichser* meaning 'wanker'.

Nevertheless, when considered as separate, independent subcategories, both scatology and sexuality are far from being on first place in the German *Pulp Fiction* frequency rating. There is one more referential group which is larger than the two obscene subcategories, namely social swearwords (excluding ethnic slurs). In total, there are 100 expressions, however 13 of these are also listed in the category 'sexuality' and have been counted there. This leaves us with 87 expressions which can be divided into swearwords of social referents (70 occurrences) and vulgar terms (17 words and expressions). It is noteworthy, that many of the social swearwords have animal referents.

There are many terms on my list that seem quite docile at first sight. Some may not even be considered proper swearwords by someone else. Though not exclusively, this mainly regards swearwords of social referents. For example, the German noun *Bulle* (literally 'bull') usually denominates policemen in a disrespectful manner. However, there are different ways of interpreting the offensiveness of the term and it

may also be used in a neutral manner.²⁷ Undoubtedly, taken out of context, terms such as *Bulle* may seem harmless. But in the specific situations or scenes they are uttered in, they do take on offensive connotations. Also, their offensiveness depends on the speaker and his or her relation to the target of the curse. For example, in *Pulp Fiction* the term *Bullen* (which is the plural of *Bulle*) is only voiced by criminals who regard police enforcement as enemies and threats to their lifestyle. Thus the term is definitely used as insult. In short, in my selection of German swearwords I considered speaker, context and connotations and thus came up with a fairly long list of offensive terms in the German movie script.

More obviously offensive are the 30 racist terms in the German script of *Pulp Fiction*. The majority are mentions of the term *Nigger*, which is obviously a loan word from the English language. As a matter of fact, in real life conversations German speakers would not use this word so frequently. More widely-used and a lot more offensive to native ears is the German equivalent *Neger*. However, in the movie this term is only voiced once. Therefore the high frequency of *Nigger* in the dubbed script is clearly a remainder from the translation of the original American English version.

Last but not least, there are 26 cases of references to animals found in a number of different offensive terms. I have already mentioned that animal referents are common among social swearwords (e.g. *Bulle*). However, they are not restricted to this category. There are also animal terms pertaining to scatology (e.g. *Hühnerärsche*, literally translating to ‘chicken asses’) and sexuality (e.g. *Pussy*). But since all animal terms are without exception listed in their respective second categories, I have not included them as separate category in the distribution table above.

Overall, when analyzing the German movie script, I noticed that there are many similarities between the English and German movie scripts. In order to avoid repetition, I will not discuss the dubbed version in detail here. Nevertheless, interesting German features will be mentioned and commented upon in the following section, the comparison.

²⁷ In German-speaking communities, *Bulle* is sometimes even used as term of endearment. Most notably, this usage has been broadcasted in a popular German TV show entitled ‘Der *Bulle* von Tölz’. While the title suggests a negative character, the protagonist is actually a likeable chief inspector in the Bavarian town Bad Tölz.

8.3. Comparison

Above, I have already mentioned a few similarities and differences between the English and the German movie scripts. However, in this section I want to look more closely at some features. To begin with, I want to draw a general comparison and then discuss certain similarities and differences in more detail.

First and foremost there are considerably more swearwords in the English movie script. According to my calculations, the exact number of difference is 184. This may not sound very much, but furthermore the German words are often less offensive than the English terms. For example, in many cases the adjective *fucking* is replaced by *verdammt* in the dubbed version. While the English term is highly offensive and vulgar, the latter is generally considered is only mildly offensive. I will return to this subject in the detailed discussion below.

Furthermore, there is an interesting discrepancy in the employment of swearwords concerning their referents. To illustrate this, I have summarized the aforementioned referential categories in order of frequency in Table 4. In contrast to former tables, I have decided to divide obscenity into its two subcategories, sexuality and scatology. I have also included animal terms in the table, since there is a considerable amount of different animal referents both in the English and in the German version of the movie (but they are not counted in the total sum due to their cross-categorization). The order of appearance is arranged according to the frequency in the English movie script (most frequent to least frequent). To facilitate the reading of the German order of frequency and hence the comparison, I have included rank numbers in brackets next to the frequency percentage:

Table 4: Summary of categories in English and German movie scripts

Category	English script		German script	
	Number of occurrences	Frequency + rank	Number of occurrences	Frequency + rank
Sexuality	295	55.24 % (1)	46	13.22 % (4)
Scatology	127	23.78 % (2)	86	24.71 % (3)
Social swearwords	44 (+60) ²⁸	8.24 % (3)	87 (+13) ²⁹	25.00 % (2)
Religion	41	7.68 % (4)	100	28.74 % (1)
Racism	27 (+1 ³⁰)	5.06 % (5)	29 (+1 ³¹)	8.33 % (5)
Animal terms	(20)	[3.74 % --]	(26)	[7.47 % --]
TOTAL:	534	100%	348	100%

The distribution of the different categories in both versions of the movie scripts varies greatly. I have made five interesting broad observations. Firstly, the biggest discrepancy is concerned with sexuality. While more than half of the English terms are of sexual referents and thus making it the largest group, it is the second-smallest category in German. In English the great majority of these occurrences are related to the abundantly used f-word in its various forms and parts of speech. Most of these uses have no literal equivalents in German, except for a few terms. There are exactly nine mentions of German f-words in the dubbed movie. Contrasted to the 272 English occurrences this number is tiny. However, if we ignore the words containing *fuck*, we are left with only 23 more sexual terms in English. This number is even smaller than the f-free sexual obscenities in German, counting as many as 37 words.

Secondly, although there are considerably more English scatological terms, than German, their percentage within each language list is almost the same with approximately 24% of the total number of offensive terms.

Thirdly, the categories religion and racism have one thing in common: there are actually less swearwords in the original movie script than in the dubbed version. Most

²⁸ Various terms not counted in this category because also listed in 'Sexuality' and 'Scatology'.

²⁹ Various terms not counted in this category, because also listed in 'Sexuality'.

³⁰ *Hillbilly* not counted in this category, because also listed in 'Social swearwords'.

³¹ *Weißer Arsch* ('white ass') not counted in this category, because also listed in 'Scatology'.

notably, with 100 mentions, religious terms are ranked most frequent in the German script, while they are the second smallest group in the English version with only 41 words and expressions. The number of racist terms is almost equal with a difference of not more than two words.

Fourthly, at first sight it looks as if there are twice as many social swearwords in the German (87 terms) dubbing than in the original dialogue (44 expressions). However, these numbers do not include cross-categorized terms which are counted as part of other categories. Including these cross-categorized terms as well, there are 104 terms in English and 100 in German. Therefore, the total numbers are similar and thus present a completely different picture.

Fifthly, there are 20 offensive references to animals the English and 26 in the German movie scripts. In English, these make up 3.74% of all offensive terms, while the percentage within German swearwords constitutes 7.47%. This considerable difference is due to the big difference in total numbers of swearwords within one language.

Now that I have given an overview of broad similarities and differences, I want to turn to a more detailed comparison. The following subsections will deal with specific features and also exemplify some of the facts given in this introduction with citations from the movie scripts.

8.3.1. Similarities

When analyzing the German movie script I found a number of features which I have also observed in the English original. Some words and expressions are so similar that they could be considered literal equivalents. Often they are even equally offensive, thus suggesting similar types of taboo in English and German. Apart from equivalents, there are also terms which may not be literally the same, but still share certain characteristics. In this section I want to discuss cases of similarities between the English and German movie scripts.

However, as aforementioned this thesis does not aim at analyzing translation techniques and dubbing. Although I will compare some interesting scenes in both language versions, the main focus is to look at similar uses of swearwords on a larger scale. Whenever possible I will use examples from the same movie scenes in order to secure the best comparison. However, in some cases this is not possible and therefore I also compare equivalent parts of speech that are to be found in different scenes.

8.3.1.1. *Fuck, ficken and abgefickt*

Fuck is one of the most popular and most common swearwords (maybe even the most frequent) in the English language. This is not least due to its grammatical flexibility and the resulting numerous forms and functions it can take on. I have already illustrated some of the 272 occurrences of the term in *Pulp Fiction* as noun, compound noun, verb, adjective, adverb, expletive and interjection. Nowadays the term is also used in many other languages, including German, as unaltered loan word and also in new forms modified to adapt to the grammatical rules and restriction of the borrowing language. In the German *Pulp Fiction* script there is not one unaltered occurrence of the f-word, but only two modified versions and seven mentions of its vulgar German counterpart as verb, *ficken*.

For once, there are two occurrences of the adjective *abgefickt* which obviously stems from *fuck* and can be translated to ‘fucked up’. Firstly, it is said by Lance when talking to Vincent on the phone, previously mentioned in example (434):

(503) Do not be bringing some *fucked up* pooh-butt to my house!

(504) Schleppe mir nicht irgend’ne *abgefickte* Nutte ins Haus!

Here, the adjective is a literal translation from the English original ‘fucked up’ as seen in example (434) and (503) wherein Lance refers to Mia as ‘*fucked up* pooh-butt’.

Secondly, the term is also voiced by Marsellus and directed towards Butch. The following two examples are the English original and the dubbed version of Marsellus’ reaction when he sees Butch while crossing a street after the latter had betrayed him:

(505) *Motherfucker!*

(506) *Abgefuckte Mistratte!*

Here, *motherfucker* has been replaced by two German swearwords, *abgefuckt* and the compound noun *Mistratte*. The compound noun consists of two disparaging terms, *Mist* ('rubbish' or 'crap') and *Ratte* ('rat'). Thus, the literal translation of the insult in (505) is 'fucked up crap rat'. The reason for this dissimilar translation is that there is no German correspondent for the compound noun *motherfucker*. Most of its 33 occurrences in *Pulp Fiction* have been replaced by other German terms from different semantic fields during the dubbing process. However, the dubbed expression in (506) is at least related to the original insult. Though it does not bear an obvious resemblance to its original counterpart in (505), it does mention the f-word too.

As mentioned above, in the German dubbing there are also seven mentions of the term *ficken* which is the German equivalent to the verb 'to fuck'. Only three of these refer to sexual intercourse, while four are used metaphorically. Here is an example referring to copulation also discussed in example (356):

(507) So, what'd he do? *Fuck* her?

(508) Na schön. Hat er sie *gefickt*?

The German f-word in (508) is one of the three occurrences actually referring to sex. It is voiced by Vincent when he asks Jules about what has happened between Mia and Antwan. Although the whole statement has not been translated literally, the use of *fuck* and *ficken* are equivalents.

The following example has also been discussed above, indeed in much detail in examples (358) and (359):

(509) You tried to *fuck* 'em. But Marsellus Wallace don't like to be *fucked* by anybody except Mrs. Wallace.

(510) Du hast versucht ihn zu *ficken*. Und Marsellus Wallace lässt sich nun mal nicht gerne *ficken*, es sein denn von Mrs. Wallace!

These sentences are taken from the conversation between Jules and Brett in which Jules plays with the ambiguity of the f-word. As in the English version, the first *ficken* in example (510) means 'betray' and the second 'copulate'.

8.3.1.2. *Shit, Scheiße and Scheiß*

Above, I have analyzed the English swearword *shit* in much detail and mentioned its numerous functions and parts of speech. Once again, in *Pulp Fiction* it is used as noun, expletive, compound noun, adjective and interjection. As a matter of fact, in German there are two terms which function as literal equivalents of *shit*: *Scheiße* and *Scheiß*. With a few exceptions, these two words can be applied in exactly the same way as the English term.

Firstly, they can both be used as nouns, but not always interchangeably. For example, when referring to actual feces, only *Scheiße* can be employed. Here are two examples of nouns:

(511) Ich meine, die haben den gleichen *Scheiß*, der hier läuft, aber da... da läuft's 'ne Spur anders.

(512) Ein Schwein schläft und vögelt in seiner eigenen *Scheiße*. Das ist ein schmutziges Tier.

The comment cited in (511) is taken from the well-known conversation between Vincent and Jules about Europe and its differences to America also discussed in example (414). Here, Vincent says that in Europe people have the same things as in America, but that they are different over there. Instead of 'things', he uses *Scheiß* (translated directly from *shit* in the original). In this example, *Scheiße* could also be used instead of *Scheiß* without changing the meaning of the statement.

Just like in the English movie script, in the German most mentions of *Scheiße* or *Scheiß* are metaphorical. There is actually only one instance in which *Scheiße* denominates actual feces and it is cited in (512). This is the German version of the scene already mentioned in English in example (411), wherein Jules talks about pigs and their habit of sleeping and copulating in their own excrement. As aforementioned, in this case only *Scheiße* can be employed.

Furthermore, another use restricted to *Scheiße* is that of expletive when standing on its own. With 13 occurrences this is also the most frequent form and function of a scatological term in the German version of *Pulp Fiction*. However, only two of these are direct translations from English. The remaining nine are alternatives to various other

swearwords in English – some of which shall be discussed later on. Anyhow, the following example is one of the two direct translations portraying *Scheiße* as expletive:

(513) Let's go, nigga. C'mon! *Shit!*

(514) Wir gehen, Nigger. Na komm schon. *Scheiße!*

Here, the expletive is voiced by Jules who is the last one leaving the young men's apartment after the shooting incident wherein he and Vincent had been left unharmed. After prompting Marvin to go and himself still taken aback by what has happened, he curses while walking out the door. When doing so, he talks to himself, thus expressing his bafflement with the use of the scatological swearword. Again, *Scheiß* could not be used in this sentence.

As a matter of fact, in the German *Pulp Fiction* script *Scheiß* is never used as an expletive, but only as a noun. However, there is one scene in which *Scheiße* is used that would also allow for *Scheiß* as an expletive:

(515) So eine *Scheiße!* So eine verdammte *Scheiße!*

(516) So eine *Scheiß!* So ein verdammter *Scheiß!*

The exclamations in (515) are part of Butch's rant when he realizes that Fabienne has left his father's watch in the old apartment. The reason why it would be possible to use *Scheiß* instead of *Scheiße* in this example is that the expletive is accompanied by other words. Thus the version cited in (516) would also be viable.

As aforementioned, the English movie script contains two occurrences of *shit* as part of a compound noun (*bullshit* and *chickenshit*). In German, there are even 15 occurrences of *Scheiß* in this type of word formation. However, in the German compounds, the scatological term usually has no semantic value and functions as **prefix** or **suffix** to the meaning carrying noun. These are special cases of swearword formation in which a negatively charged syllable is added at the beginning or end of another, neutral word thus transforming the neutral term into a swearword (Aman 1996: 172-174 and Popp 2004: 93-94). The following examples both include compound nouns of this kind and their counterparts in English:

(517) You were talking about *drug shit* on the phone.

(518) Wie kannst du am Funktelefon über *Drongescheiß* reden?

(519) Sounds like a *shit job*.

(520) Klingt nach einem *Scheißjob*.

Example (517) is voiced by Lance who is scolding Vincent for calling him and telling him about Mia and her overdose on the phone. Here, *Scheiß* is a **suffix**, adding a negative connotation to *Drogen* ('drugs'). However, the meaning of the word is not changed.

In (519) Pumpkin makes a condescending remark about Jules' job during the diner scene in the movie's epilogue. In this case, the derogatory scatological noun takes on the form of a **prefix**, transforming the neutral term 'Job' into a swearword. In contrast to the precedent example, here *Scheiß* actually changes the semantic value of the word. The compound noun translates to '*shit job*', which is the one use of the English *shit* in adjective position already discussed in example (419).

When looking at the English version of *Drogenscheiß* and *Scheißjob*, '*drug shit*' and '*shit job*' respectively, it is interesting to see that semantically, they are equivalents while their grammatical form differs. While they are compound nouns in German, they are two independent nouns forming a semantic entity in English.

8.3.1.3. Ass and *Arsch*

Now I want to direct my focus to words and expressions referring to people's rears. While there are 35 mentions of the noun *ass* in the original movie script, its German equivalent *Arsch* is mentioned 17 times in the dubbed version. Some of these shall be discussed in this section.

In English, seven utterances of *ass* refer to the actual body part and in German five. All five mentions of *Arsch* denominating people's rears are direct translations of *ass* in the English movie script. For instance, the three mentions cited in example (430) by Captain Koons when talking about Butch's father's watch, are all translated literally as *Arsch*. Another similar example is voiced by Wolf when he tells Jules and Vincent to take their blood-soaked clothes off and undress all the way:

(521) To your bare *ass*.

(522) Bis auf den blanken *Arsch*.

Nevertheless, the most frequent uses of *ass* and *Arsch* do not refer to bottoms directly, but are of metaphorical nature. In both languages, the combination of personal pronouns and the scatological term are pars pro toto metaphors referring to people. This is exemplified below where Marsellus orders Vincent to come to him:

(523) Get *your ass* over here!

(524) Schieb *deinen Arsch* hier rüber.

Furthermore, in the German dubbing the same metaphor is used in combination with definite articles too:

(525) Take him to the kennel, sick the dogs on *his ass* - we'll find out for gooddamn sure what he knows and what he don't.

(526) Schaff ihn in den Zwinger, hetz ihm die Hunde auf *den Arsch* - ich will unter allen Umständen herausfinden, was er weiß und was nicht.

In (525) and (526), Marsellus orders English Bob, one of his handymen, to put Butch's trainer into a kennel and set the dogs on him, except that in the German version he says 'the *ass*' instead of 'his'.

The original movie script contains another mention of *ass*, which can also be observed in the German script, except that it is as less overt in the dubbing:

(527) If that favor means that I gotta take shit, then he can *stick* that favor *straight up his ass*.

(528) Wenn dieser Gefallen bedeutet, dass ich mich anwachsen lassen soll, dann kann er sich seinen Gefallen *sonst wo hinschieben*.

This comment is taken from the scene in Jimmie's bathroom where Jules and Vincent talk about their situation which has already been dealt with in (410). While Vincent pronounces the word *ass* in the English version, there is no direct mention of the word in German, but instead it is substituted by *sonst wo* ('elsewhere'). Nevertheless, because this is a German idiom, the scatological reference is commonly known and thus obvious.

Although *ass* on its own is also a common English insult, there is no occurrence of it in this form in *Pulp Fiction*. However, in German there are two utterances of *Arsch* as insults and one of these is similar to the English original:

(529) Wer das gesagt hat, musste nie winzig kleine Schädelsplitter zusammensuchen, nur weil du so'n ein *blöder Arsch* bist!

(530) The motherfucker said that shit never had to pick up itty-bitty pieces of skull on account of *your dumb ass*.

Here, Jules complains to Vincent for having to clean the bloody car because of Vincent's accidental shooting of Marvin. The only difference between the two expressions is that the English one includes the personal pronoun 'your', thus being part of the previously mentioned *pars pro toto* metaphors, while the German insult is more direct.

Moreover, both movie scripts feature four mentions of the popular compound noun *asshole* and accordingly its literal equivalent *Arschloch*. To me, it was surprising to find only four uses of *Arschloch* in the whole German dubbing of *Pulp Fiction* since it is actually one of the most frequently used swearwords and epithets in German. However, only two of them are direct translations from the original. One of these is the insult cited in (431) wherein Vincent affronts English Bob directly. The other is also voiced by Vincent when complaining about the scratching of his car:

(531) I'd have given anything to catch that *asshole* doing it.

(532) Ich hätte alles dafür gegeben, das *Arschloch* dabei zu erwischen.

In contrast to (431), this is not a direct insult, but a disparaging denomination of the unknown doer who is not present.

Additionally, *ass* and *Arsch* are both used as intensifying parts of adjectives. Although the scenes in which this is the case differ, the grammatical and semantic functions are similar:

(533) I've seen a lot of *crazy-ass* shit in my time, but this –

(534) Verdammt, diese Morgenluft ist *arschkalt*.

The comment in (533) is voiced by Jules in his car after Vincent has shot Marvin and thus smudging his car. It has already been discussed in (433) where I established that *ass* does not alter the adjective's meaning, but it is rather an expression of the speaker's

discontent with the situation. The combination of two offensive terms in *crazy-ass* makes the adjective particularly dysphemistic.

Similarly, the prefix *arsch-* in (534) functions as intensifier, transforming the neutral adjective *kalt* into a vulgar expression. In contrast to the precedent example, it also changes the adjective's meaning from 'cold' to 'freezing'. As seen in this example, adjectives that are intensified with swearword prefixes, are always an expression of personal feelings. Therefore they are always the results of subjective evaluation.

8.3.1.4. *Damn, verdammt and verflucht*

In the original movie script, there are 33 occurrences of *damn* including variants such as *goddamn* and *goddammit*. Interestingly, their German equivalent of *verdammt* and *gottverdammt* are used 84 times in the dubbed version of the movie. Moreover, there are twelve more variants of its synonym *verflucht*. Concerning parts of speech, both scripts include adjectives, adverbs, expletives and verb phrases containing swearwords referring to damnation. Obviously, most of the German terms are translations of other words to which I will return below. However, some are actually translated directly or at least similarly. These shall be discussed in this section.

The first two pairs of examples feature *damn* in its most common part of speech, namely adjective. They are also literal equivalents and the German terms have been translated directly:

(535) That's a *damn* shame.

(536) Is 'n *verdammt* Jammer.

(537) Did you forget someone was in there with a *goddamn* hand cannon?

(538) Hattest du vergessen, dass da jemand mit einer *gottverdammt*en Kanone drinhockt?

Both comments above are voiced by Vincent. In (535) he comments on Antwan's speech impediment caused by falling out of a window. The adjective in this example is one of two occurrences in the whole English script. However, in German its equivalent is used 39 times, thus being the most frequent variant of *verdammt*. There are more

adjectives referring to damnation in English as well, namely in the form of *goddamn* (eleven occurrences). One of these is cited in (537) wherein Vincent asks Marvin about the presence of the fourth man who had been hiding in the bathroom, translated as *gottverdammt* in (538). Like its English brother *goddamn*, *gottverdammt* also possesses a special force due to the two opposing religious entities God and damnation. Contrariwise to the case of *damn/verdammt*, *goddamn/gottverdammt* are more common in the English script.

The second most frequent use of *damn* is as expletive. In the English movie script, there are four different forms of the term as exclamation, whereas the German version contains no less than seven. These are all listed in Table 5, including their number of occurrences:

Table 5: Variants of *damn* as expletive in English and German

English expletives	Number of occurrences	German expletives	Number of occurrences
damn	1	verdammt	13
		verdammt noch mal	18
		verflucht	6
		verflucht noch mal	4
goddamn	9	gottverdammt	1
goddammit	4	gottverdammt noch mal	2
I'll be damned!	1	Ich will verdammt sein!	1
TOTAL	15		45

As can be observed in Table 5, all English expletives consist of one word, except for one verb phrase. But the German versions also include idioms made up of three words. Moreover, only very few of these are direct or similar translations. Here are some examples:

(539) *Goddamn!* That's a pretty fuckin' good milk shake.

(540) *Gottverdammt!* Das ist ein höllisch guter Milchshake.

(541) *Goddamn!* What's up with those clothes?

- (542) *Verflucht noch mal*, Jungs, was is mit euren Klamotten los?
 (543) *Goddammit*, Jules –
 (544) *Gottverdammt noch mal*, Jules –
 (545) I'll be *damned*!
 (546) Ich will *verdammt sein*!

In (539), Vincent evaluates Mia's Five-dollar-milk shake during their dinner at Jack Rabbit Slim's. Here, *goddamn* is translated literally into *gottverdammt*. While in the English version of the term is the most frequent religious expletive in *Pulp Fiction*, the German equivalent only occurs once.

Example (541) is voiced by English Bob who remarks on Vincent and Jules' clothes which they had borrowed from Jimmie before. The German dubbing in (542) contains an interesting translation of *goddamn*: on the one hand, the German synonym *verflucht* is used and, on the other hand, the single English term is expressed via an idiom in German. The additional words 'noch mal' literally translate to '(once) again', but they do not carry any semantic meaning in the adjective phrase.

Similarly, the English expletive *goddammit* is expressed as *gottverdammt noch mal* in (544). This is the scene previously discussed in (435) wherein Vincent gets impatient with Jules for wanting to quit the criminal life which in turn angers Jules because he does not appreciate Vincent's use of a religious curse.

Finally, the verb phrase in (545) is uttered by Marsellus when describing Butch after being run over by Butch's car. I have already analyzed the English version, which is a popular American idiom for surprise, in (440). However, though common in English, the German translation *Ich will verdammt sein!*, sounds rather odd and unnatural because it means 'I'll be doomed' and this expression is not idiomatic in German.

Another discrepancy which is the result of the translation process is Mia's exclamation when 'powdering her nose' at the Jack Rabbit Slim's lady's room:

- (547) I said *goddamn! Goddamn! Goddamn!*
 (548) Ich hab gesagt verdammt noch mal! Verdammt noch mal! Verdammt!

Here the previously mentioned pop culture reference to the song lyrics of Steppenwolf's 'The Pusher' (see example (446)) was lost in translation.

Finally, both movie scripts contain adverbial uses of *damn* (two occurrences) and *verdammt* and *verflucht* (eight) accordingly. The following example is voiced by Butch during his phone call with Scotty and has already been discussed in (445):

(549) OK, my brother. – You’re right, you’re *goddamn* right.

(550) OK, mein Bruder. Du hast recht, du hast *gottverdammt noch mal* recht.

8.3.2. Differences

I have mentioned above that in *Pulp Fiction*, many (or rather most) uses of words such as *verdammt* and *Scheiße* are often translations of completely different words coming from other semantic fields. These and more cases of differences in swearword usage will be discussed in this chapter.

8.3.2.1. Alternatives to *fuck*

With 272 total occurrences, the 14 different variants of the word *fuck* are by far the largest group of swearwords in the original version of *Pulp Fiction*. The reason of its high frequency is definitely its multifunctional character producing adjectives, adverbs, nouns, verbs, expletives and interjections. However, while the English f-word is very versatile, its German equivalents and modified versions are restricted – which has already been established above. There is no literal equivalent for this word in German which fulfills all of the named parts of speech. Therefore, f-words were either left out completely or had to be translated by words from other semantic fields. Some prominent cases of such differences will be discussed in this section.

In German, one of the most frequent alternatives to *fuck* is *verdammt*. In *Pulp Fiction*, it is used as adjective and adverb instead of *fucking* and as interjection in place of *the fuck*:

(551) Tell that *fucking* bitch to chill!

- (552) Die *verdammte* Nutte soll sich abregen!
- (553) Of all the *fuckin'* things she coulda *fuckin'* forget, she forgets my father's watch.
- (554) Von allen Sachen, die sie *verdammt* vergessen konnte, vergisst sie die Uhr meines Vaters!
- (555) Mexicans outta the *fucking* kitchen! Get *the fuck* down!
- (556) Ich will die Mexikaner aus der *verdammten* Küche raushaben! Auf den Boden *verdammt noch mal*!

Example (551) is a comment by Jules during the diner robbery scene in the epilogue. He is telling Pumpkin to calm down his agitated girlfriend Yolanda, nominating the woman a '*fucking* bitch'. In German this insult has been translated to '*verdammte* Nutte', literally meaning '*damn* whore'. These are instances of the most prevalent use of both *fuck* and *verdammt*, namely as adjectives. In the original there are 97 occurrences of the adjective *fucking* and a lot of these have been translated to *verdammt*, as can be observed in the examples above.

The next example, (553), is part of Butch's rant soliloquizing and complaining about the fact that Fabienne has forgotten his father's watch at the old apartment. It contains two mentions of *fucking*, one as adjective and the second as adverb. Like many others, the former has been omitted in the dubbed version, whereas the latter is expressed as *verdammt*.

Examples (555) and (556) are the two versions of something Pumpkin shouts while raiding the diner together with his girlfriend. First, he orders the kitchen staff out of the kitchen and then he shouts at customs, telling them to get down. Once again, *fucking* and *verdammt* are used as adjectives. Furthermore, he uses the intensifying interjection *the fuck* which is translated into the idiom *verdammt noch mal*.

Overall, the uses of the religious term *verdammt* in German are a lot less offensive than the sexual *fuck* in English. Nevertheless, it is not the only swearword used to replace the f-word. Other terms employed are the scatological *Scheiß* and *Scheiße*:

- (557) *Fuck!*
- (558) *Scheiße!*

- (559) Knucklehead walks into a bank with a telephone, no' a pistol, no' a shotgun, bu' a *fuckin'* phone, cleans the place out, and they don't lift a *fuckin'* finger.
- (560) Dieser Penner wackelt in die Bank mit einem Telefon, nicht mit 'ner Pistole, nicht mit einem Gewehr, nur mit einem *Scheißtelefon*! Er räumt den Laden aus und die rühren keinen *Scheißfinger*!
- (561) I'm prepared to scour the earth for that *motherfucker*.
- (562) Ich bin gewillt die ganze Welt nach dem *Scheißkerl* zu durchkämmen.
- (563) *Fuck* pride!
- (564) *Scheiß auf* den Stolz!

The use of the expletive *fuck* in (557) is voiced by Zed as a reaction to being shot in the crouch by Marsellus. Thus, it is an expression of pain. In German this exclamation takes the form of *Scheiße*.

In (559), Pumpkin relates the story of a bank robbery to Honey Bunny using the adjective *fucking* twice. In the German dubbing, the sexual adjective is replaced by the scatological prefix *Scheiß-* as seen in (562). This is another case of swearword formation via the addition of an offensive syllable: *Scheiß-* alters the neutral terms 'Finger' and 'Telefon', thus transforming them into swearwords.

The following comment in (561) is uttered by Marsellus when asked about Butch who has betrayed him and escaped afterwards. In both versions, Marsellus refers to Butch by employing a compound noun. In English it is the sexual *motherfucker* and in German the scatological *Scheißkerl*. The former compound contains two complete nouns, *mother* and *fucker*. The latter, similar to the terms in (560), is made up of the prefix *Scheiß-* and the neutral term *Kerl* ('guy'). Literally, *Scheißkerl* means 'shit guy', but it translates into 'prick'.

In example (563) Marsellus tells Butch to forget about his pride when cheating in a boxing fight. This scene has also been discussed before, in (369). In the dubbed version the speaker literally tells his interlocutor to 'shit on pride'. Here, *scheiß* is a verb in imperative form and part of a phrasal verb together with the preposition *auf* ('on'). It should not be confused with the noun *Scheiß*. The verb's infinitive form is '*scheissen auf*'. Apart from the lexical difference, the metaphorical meaning ('forget') stays the same.

Furthermore, in the German dubbing the f-word is also replaced by other references to scatology. The following examples include covert, but obvious references to the German term *Arsch*:

(565) *Fuck you! [...] Fuck you!*

(566) *Leck mich! [...] Leck mich!*

(567) *Fuck you! Fuck you too!*

(568) *Du kannst mich mal! Und du kannst mich auch mal!*

The German versions of the examples above are all uses of implied references to *ass*. In both cases, the swearword is not actually spelled out, but the implied meaning is still obvious. Examples (566) and (568) refer to the same concept, namely ‘licking someone else’s ass’ commonly used in German in imperative form. Here is the original version of the curse words:

(569) *Leck mich am Arsch!*

The full version of this popular expression is not mentioned in the movie script. Literally it means ‘lick my ass’, but its English equivalent are ‘kiss my ass’ or ‘bugger off’. Thus its meaning is to tell others to leave them alone. In some regions of South Germany and Austria it can also be used to express positive feelings such as surprise (Zintl 1980: 91-92). However, in *Pulp Fiction* it is only employed in its original, derogatory manner. Due to its frequent use, it is often abbreviated as seen in (566). In this example Jules is getting angry with Vincent in their foot massage discussion when Vincent asks him if he also massages men’s feet. Although *Arsch* is not mentioned in the expletive and it merely reads ‘lick me’, the implied meaning is evident.

Similarly, in (568) Jody is telling Lance and Vincent to leave her alone when they tell her to get the adrenalin shot for Mia. Here, the expletive is altered with the modal verb *können* (‘can’) instead of ‘lick’. Thus both words which carry meaning, *lick* and *ass*, are not present. Nonetheless, the implied meaning is still apparent.

8.3.2.2. Ethnic slurs

Regarding racism, there are a few interesting discrepancies between the English and German movie scripts. Foremost, there are more ethnic slurs in the dubbing (30 expressions) than in the original version (28 terms)³². This is the result of omissions and additions during the translation process. Some of these will be dealt with in this section.

To begin with, African-Americans are the most frequent referents of racial slurs in both scripts. While there are thirteen occurrences of the in-group term *nigga* and seven of the out-group insult *nigger* in English, the German version contains 18 utterances of *Nigger*. There is no differentiation in pronunciation between in- and out-group uses of the word in German. Also, the high frequency of the term in the dubbing is curious since the term is a loan word from English and actually not very common in German language use.

Furthermore, the German equivalent for *nigger* is *Neger*, but this word is only used once in the dubbing as part of the racist counting rhyme previously discussed in example (493):

(570) Eeny, meeny, miny, moe, catch a *nigger* by his toe. If he hollers, let him go. Eeny, meeny, miny, moe. My mother said pick the perfect one and you are it.

(571) Ene mene meh, fang'n *Neger* am Zeh. Wenn er brüllt lass ihn los. Ene mene muss. Meine Mutter sagt jetzt bist du dran, das heißt ich nehme dich heut ran.

The German version of the counting rhyme was invented by the dubbing authors of the movie and seems to have been adjusted in order to fit the scene without losing the racist swearword. However, to my native ear it sounds rather odd and unnatural. Moreover, I wonder why *Neger* is not used instead of *Nigger* in the translation.

In German, there are also other ethnic swearwords referring to African-Americans. For instance, following the counting rhyme above, Zed says the following:

(572) Guess that means you, big boy.

³² Both numbers differ from the official count (29 German and 27 English), because each category contains one expression which is also listed in other categories ('Scatology' and 'Social swearwords' respectively).

(573) Ja, das bedeutet du, *schwarzer Mann*.

As can be seen above, there is no racial slur in the original version of this comment, but in German Marsellus is addressed as *schwarzer Mann* ('black man'). Here, the mention of Marsellus' skin color is a racist out-group insult.

There are three further mentions of the adjective *schwarz* in relation to skin color in the German dubbing which are not to be found in the English script. They are all voiced by Jules and thus one might assume they are not racist. However, in one statement Jules does play with ethnic prejudices:

(574) It's the one that says "*Bad Motherfucker*". – That's it. That's my *bad motherfucker*.

(575) Die auf der "*Böser Schwarzer Mann*" steht. – Das ist sie. Ich bin ein *böser schwarzer Mann*.

In (574) Jules is telling Pumpkin to look for his wallet which is embroidered with the words '*Bad Motherfucker*' in English. Thus there is no ethnic association in the original. As can be seen in (575), the German version is '*Böser Schwarzer Mann*' ('evil black man'). This is a curious translation since it implies the prejudice of 'the black man' as being evil. Sadly, the preconception that black equals bad is common in society and this is also reflected in language use.³³ It is also interesting that Jules only refers to his wallet as *bad motherfucker* in English, but in German he says that he himself is '*ein böser schwarzer Mann*'.

Even so, only moments after the comment cited in (575), Jules also refers to himself as being black in a neutral way in the German dubbing. In this case, it is the original version of the statement which raises an interesting comparison:

(576) And Mr. 9 millimeter here, he's the shepherd protecting *my righteous ass* in the valley of darkness.

(577) Und Mr. 9mm hier ist der Hirte, der *meinen schwarzen Hintern* im Tal der Dunkelheit beschützt.

Here, Jules interprets his favorite bible passage (Ezekiel 25:17) and in German he refers to himself via the metaphorical use of 'my black ass'. At first sight, this seems rather unremarkable, but the fact that the adjective in English is 'righteous' rather than 'black',

³³ Consider expressions such as 'black sheep', 'black money', 'black labor', etc.

adds an interesting flavor to the translation. Also it stands in contrast to his earlier statement when he called himself an ‘evil black man’.

Additionally, both movie scripts contain a racial slur denominating white people. They are to be found in the same scene, voiced by Marsellus and directed towards Zed:

(578) You hear me talkin’, *hillbilly boy*?!

(579) Hast du gehört, was ich gesagt habe, du *weißer Arsch*?!

The comment cited above is the continuation of example (487) wherein Marsellus tells Butch and Zed what he plans to do to Zed as a retribution for being raped by him. The English term *hillbilly boy* in (578) is not as obviously racist as its German translation though. *Hillbilly* refers to people living in rural areas and is often used in a non-derogatory manner³⁴. However, when used by outsiders it is usually employed condescendingly and synonymously to ‘white trash’. More evidently, the German expression *weißer Arsch* (‘white ass’) in (579) is a contemptuous insult referring to skin color.

Another group of victims of racial prejudice in *Pulp Fiction* are people of Asian heritage. As aforementioned, derogatory words in the original script are *gook* and *slope*. However, the German dubbing contains more figurative alternatives to these swearwords as seen in the following examples:

(580) He knew that if the *gooks* ever saw the watch it’d be confiscated and taken away. [...] He’d be damned if any *slopes* gonna put their greasy, yellow hands on his boy’s birthright.

(581) Er wusste, wenn die *Reisfresser* die Uhr entdecken würden, würden sie sie konfiszieren, sie ihm wegnehmen. [...] Er wollte verdammt sein, wenn irgendwelche *Schlitzaugen* nach dem Erbe seines Sohnes grapschen würden.

The assertion above is voiced by Captain Koons in Butch’s childhood back-flash where the former tells him the story of his father’s watch previously discussed in examples (441) and (497). The German insults are figurative metaphors referring to stereotypical habits and appearances. *Reisfresser* (literally ‘rice devourer’) alludes to the fact that rice

³⁴ Consider the use of *hillbilly* referring to music.

is a popular dish in Asian culture and *Schlitzauge* ('chinky eyes') refers to the fact that Asians have narrow eyes in a disparaging manner.

Contrariwise, one figurative insult in the English script of the movie has been replaced by another term:

(582) Busboys, some *wetback* getting' paid a dollar fifty an hour really give a fuck you're stealin' from the owner?

(583) Die Tellerabräumer, irgend so ein armer *Chico*, der einen Dollar fünfzig die Stunde kriegt soll sich darüber aufregen, dass du den Besitzer beklaust?

The comment above is uttered by Pumpkin when he tries to persuade his girlfriend Honey Bunny to rob restaurants instead of liqueur stores. In the English version he refers to Mexican as *wetbacks* thus insinuating that they are illegal immigrants who have come to the USA via swimming or wading across the Rio Grande (see also example (479)). In German, he calls them *Chicos* ('boys/guys') which merely refers to their native language, namely Spanish.

8.3.2.3. Animal terms

I have previously mentioned that there are 20 animal references in the English movie script and 26 in the German. While these two numbers are comparable, there are great differences concerning distribution and individual expressions. Some prominent cases will be discussed in this section.

Firstly, although there are 20 animal references in the English script, these are made up of no more than seven terms. While six of them occur only once, *bitch* is mentioned 14 times. Moreover, one of the remaining six swearwords is the expression *son of a bitch*, also containing the she-dog reference. Contrariwise, the 26 German expressions are the sum of 15 individual swearwords. Table 6 summarizes these swearword distributions:

Table 6: Animal terms in English and German

English animal terms	Number of occurrences	German animal terms	Number of occurrences
bitch	14	Bulle(n)	6
son of a bitch	1	Drecksvieh / -viecher	2
pig	1	Schwein	1
chickenshit	1	Schweinerei	2
bullshit	1	schweinekalt	1
flock of seagulls	1	vögeln	1
pussy	1	Pussy	2
		Muschi	1
		Hühnerärsche	1
		Ratte	1
		Mistratte	1
		Mistkuh	1
		Spinner	1
		Eier	4
		zum Geier	1
TOTAL	20		26

Interestingly, all of the animal terms in English are nouns, whereas in German there are not only nouns but also one adjective (*schweinekalt*, literally ‘pig cold’ meaning ‘freezing cold’), one verb (*vögeln*, ‘to fuck’ with reference to birds) and one interjection (*zum Geier*, literally ‘the vulture’).

As a matter of fact, with a few exceptions, most of the English animal terms have been lost in translation and vice versa, the greater part of the German terms have been added to scenes where there were no animal referents in the original. For instance, the following example and its German translation portray one of the removals:

(584) Does he look like a *bitch*?

(585) Sieht er aus wie eine *Schlampe*?

The examples above are voiced by Jules when he interrogates Brett asking the young man if Marsellus looks like a ‘*bitch*’ to him. Although the German *Schlampe*, which

also refers to female promiscuity, is considered a semantic equivalent of *bitch*, it does not contain any references to animals.

Contrariwise, the following examples show the addition of an animal reference:

(586) What a *fucker*!

(587) Was für eine *Ratte*!

Here, the speaker is Lance, who is supporting Vincent's bad attitude towards the person who has ruined his car. Obviously, (587) is one of the many German alternatives to an f-word in the original movie script. The word *Ratte* means 'rat' and is a common insult implying that someone is sneaky and cowardly. Therefore it fits the description of the unknown doer since he has done his crime anonymously.

Another interesting addition is found in Honey Bunny's exclamation at the beginning of the diner robbery.

(588) Any of you fuckin' pricks move and I'll execute every motherfucking last one of ya!

(589) Wenn sich auch nur einer von euch stinkenden Schwänzen rührt, verspreche ich euch, ich werde ihm die *Eier* einzeln abschießen!

Aforesaid, this scene is repeated in the movie with slightly different wording as can be seen in examples (379) and (385). However, the quote above is identical with (385), namely the prologue version. Whereas Honey Bunny menaces to kill everyone in the diner in English, she threatens to 'shoot down balls' in German. The animal referent lies within *Eier*, the popular German equivalent for *balls*. Literally, the word translates to 'eggs' and thus alluding to chickens.

8.3.2.4. Interjections

Apart from the semantic referential fields discussed above, I have also made some interesting observations concerning a specific grammatical category, namely interjections. There are some distinct characteristics in each language which shall be discussed in this section.

As mentioned above, the interjections found in the English script of *Pulp Fiction* are *the fuck*, *the hell*, *fuck* and *shit*. In total, these four expressions are used 38 times. While there are considerably fewer interjections in the German movie script, that is to say 24, these occurrences are made up of six different word combinations. Table 7 lists all interjections found in both languages:

Table 7: Interjections in English and German

English interjections	Number of occurrences	German interjections	Number of occurrences
the fuck	33	verdammt noch mal	13
fuck	2	gottverdammt noch mal	1
the hell	2	verflucht noch mal	1
shit	1	zum Henker	5
		zum Teufel	3
		zum Geier	1
TOTAL	38		24

In the *Pulp Fiction* scripts, many interjections have been lost in translation or added elsewhere during the dubbing process. However, in this section I will only use examples wherein both languages include interjections that can be compared and contrasted.

There are structural similarities between some of the interjections in both languages. As previously mentioned, the greater part of English interjections is made up of a swearword combined with the definite article ‘the’. In the original movie script, this kind of interjection includes the words *fuck* and *hell*. In German, there is a similar structure wherein the function of ‘the’ is expressed via ‘zum’ (literally ‘to the’) and the German nouns used in *Pulp Fiction* are *Henker* (‘hangman’), *Teufel* (‘devil’) and *Geier* (‘vulture’). As in English, these offensive German interjections are often found in combination with question words. Furthermore, they are also common idioms. Anyhow, here is a comment by Vincent wherein both languages feature an interjection:

(590) *What the fuck* is this place?

(591) *Was zum Henker* ist das für’n Laden?

The statement above is Vincent's reaction to seeing the Jack Rabbit Slim's restaurant for the first time. Though referring to different semantic fields (sexuality and society), both the English and German interjections fulfill the same dialogic and grammatical functions.

Another distinctive structural element is the use of adjectival phrases in German wherein adjectives are combined with the adverb *noch mal* (short for 'noch einmal', which translates to 'once more' or 'again'). In *Pulp Fiction*, they always include a religious swearword related to 'damn'. These are interjections which are also frequently used by native speakers. I have previously mentioned examples of interjections of this kind, namely in (555)-(556). Here Pumpkin is shouting while raiding the diner during the movie's epilogue:

(592) Get *the fuck* down!

(593) Auf den Boden, *verdammt noch mal*!

Again, though referentially and also grammatically different, the interjections are employed in the same way as the interjections previously discussed.

Last but not least, in English there are also interjections consisting of only one swearword. Though this feature is also part of German language use, in *Pulp Fiction* there are no interjections of this kind which can be considered offensive. Here is one English example and its German translation:

(594) Now, man, you know, *fuck*, I mean, I wanna help you, but I don't wanna lose my wife doin' it, alright?

(595) Also, Mann, weißt du, *Schande*, ich mein, ich will dir helfen, aber ich will dafür nicht meine Frau verlieren, ok?

Here, Jimmie expresses his will of wanting to help Jules and Vincent and also his reservations. As an expression of being torn between the two states of mind, he interjects the f-word into his comments. In German, the interjection is translated to *Schande* ('shame'), which is a euphemism for 'Scheiße'. The use of *Schande* leads back to the previously raised question if euphemisms should be considered offensive as well. I would like to return to this topic in the following section, which deals with disguise mechanisms.

8.3.2.5. Omissions, additions and other disguise mechanisms

Above, I have repeatedly mentioned that there are many differences between the English and German *Pulp Fiction* movie scripts. This mainly concerns omissions as a result of the dubbing process. However, there are also a few additions as well as similarities and differences concerning other disguise mechanisms. All of these features shall be exemplified further in this section.

To begin with, the most obvious difference is the omission of swearwords in the German translation. I have previously quoted scenes in which this is the case and would like to add two examples which strike me as particularly interesting:

(596) No, they got the metric system there. They wouldn't know what *the fuck* a Quarter Pounder is.

(597) Nein, Mann, die haben das metrische System. Die wissen gar nicht was ein Viertelpfunder ist.

(598) We should have *fuckin'* shotguns.

(599) Gewehre wären angesagt.

All of the statements above are voiced by Vincent when talking to Jules. The comment in (596) is part of his recount of the differences between Europe and America already mentioned in example (399). In this case, the interjection *the fuck* has been replaced by the inoffensive adverb *gar nicht* ('not at all') in German.

Moreover, (598) and (599) portray a complete omission of the f-word. This is Vincent's last remark before he and Jules enter the young men's apartment building. While he uses the adjective *fucking* in the original movie script, there is no replacement, neither offending nor unoffending, in the German script.

However, the dubbing process of *Pulp Fiction* did not just lead to omissions of swearwords. In fact it also produced a few additions. To me, these changes are inexplicable, but I suppose that they were individual choices of the dubbing authors. Here are two scenes in which this is the case:

(600) This place? A coffee shop?

(601) Dieser Laden? Ein *verdammtes* Restaurant?

(602) I don't feel the least bit bad about it.

(603) Ich fühl mich jedenfalls nicht *beschissen* deswegen.

In (600) Honey Bunny reacts to Pumpkin's suggestion of robbing restaurants instead of liquor stores. While there is no swearword in the original text, the German version includes the religious adjective *verdammt*. However, in English Honey Bunny's intonation suggests repudiation.

Nevertheless, the additions in (603) has no grounds in the English script whatsoever. Here, Butch comments on the news that his boxing opponent is dead and in the original, cited in (602), he says that he does not feel 'bad' about it. In German, he uses the adjective *beschissen*, which derives from *Scheiße*. The adjective can be compared to 'crappy' in English, although the German term is much stronger. This word is an addition made during the translation process, because the original sentence does not include any swearwords. Moreover, the use of the offensive adjective sounds a little out of place, even unnatural, in this statement.

Regarding disguise mechanisms, all of the euphemisms mentioned in the analysis of the English movie script, are also to be found in the German one. For instance:

(604) Did it involve the *f-word*?

(605) Fiel vielleicht auch *dieses Wort mit F*?

(606) It's a sex thing. It helps *fellatio*.

(607) Ist so'n Sexding. Hilft bei *Fellatio*.

Examples (604) and (605) involve one-for-one substitutions for *fuck* and *ficken* respectively. In (606) and (607) the technical term is used instead of offensive versions of the act of *fellatio*.

The last case of euphemisms I would like to discuss is the employment of *Schande* mentioned in example (595). As stated above, the word is used as German interjection in a scene that features *fuck* in the original dialogue. *Schande* ('shame') is a euphemistic expression substituting the offensive *Scheiße*. It features the characteristics of rhythm since the two words follow the same rhythmic pattern. Furthermore, it can be considered as a case of remodeling, because not only the rhythm but also the sound /ʃ/ at the beginning of the word is kept in the euphemistic alternative.

9. Discussion

As the previous chapter has shown, there are considerably more swearwords in the English *Pulp Fiction* script than in its German dubbing. To be exact, with 534 English swearword occurrences and 348 German, this makes a difference of 184. The main reason for this is the loss of offensive terms in the translation process. As aforementioned, this may be the result of certain dubbing restrictions such as lip movements. Arguing along these lines, Rowe (1960: 118) claims:

The semantic partners of English in a foreign language are with perverse regularity phonetic enemies. [...] Many lip and mouth movements occur rarely or not at all in a foreign tongue.

Another obstacle dubbing authors may be faced with, is censorship obligations inflicted by producers (ibid: 120). However, I have not found any evidence which would support this possibility in the case of the dubbing of *Pulp Fiction*. Also, the author(s) themselves may have chosen to censor some of the offensive language. Again, this is merely a suggestion which I cannot prove.

With 272 occurrences, variants of the obscene term *fuck* make up more than half the swearwords in the original script. There is no literal equivalent for this term in German that could function in all of the parts of speech as the English one can. In comparison, the most frequent German term, *verdammt*, occurs 84 times. It is mostly used as adjective and interjection and often in place of *fuck*. However, it is definitely less offensive than the f-word. The latter is considered highly insulting and the former only mildly. This last observation not only applies to *verdammt* but rather most of the German terms and expressions. The greater part of the English terms is noticeably more offensive than the German expressions.

Moreover, *fuck* is an obscenity referring to sexuality, whereas *verdammt* is a term of religious origin. These two categories are also the largest ones in the two respective languages. Therefore, *Pulp Fiction* only partially attests Jay's assumption mentioned at the beginning of my analysis³⁵ in which he claims that Americans prefer sexual and religious terms and Germans scatological (1992: 9). In the English script religion only comes fourth, being less frequent than scatology and social swearwords

³⁵ See page 79.

too. In the other hand, in German scatology comes third with social swearwords ranking number two.

However, apart from the differences between the two movie scripts, there are also a number of similarities. For example, there are some words which I consider literal equivalents like *ass* and *Arsch* or *shit* and *Scheiße*. However, Steiner (1980: 29) argues that there is no such thing as literal correspondents:

In reality, no word in one language has an exact translation in another language. This stems not only from a difference of cultures but from a difference in linguistic stock.

Although I agree with Steiner, I still consider terms like the ones mentioned above, ‘literal equivalents’. Especially since German and English are both Germanic languages and thus it stands to reason that their linguistic stocks contain some similarities.³⁶

Moreover, in times of globalization one must not overlook the influence languages have on each other. Especially English has been changing foreign languages greatly. Both American music and Hollywood movies have had their share of impact. Many languages have incorporated English loan words into their vocabulary. In *Pulp Fiction*, this is reflected in the use of the obscene adjective *abgefickt* which clearly stems from *fucked up*. Or more obviously, in the frequent use of the ethnic slur *Nigger* in German.

Concluding this discussion, I would like to mention that my analysis has confirmed all my hypotheses. The comparison of the original and the dubbed *Pulp Fiction* scripts has endorsed my expectation of a higher quantity of English swearwords. Overall, the English terms have proven to be more offensive than the German translations. There are some lexical similarities and I have found several English loan words in the German dubbing.

³⁶ Furthermore, one has to be aware of ‘false friends’ which may cause inter-lingual comprehension problems.

10. Conclusion

In this thesis I have discussed a number of different issues relating to swearing. In the theoretical part I have explored the evolution of swearwords from their ancient origins lying within the belief of word magic, explained their connection to societal taboos and censorship and traced the historical development of swearwords in English. I have mentioned different linguistic approaches of defining offensive language and looked at modes and functions of swearing. Furthermore, I have listed four major referential categories, including obscenity (sexuality and scatology), religion (profanity and blasphemy), social referents (intellect, gender and ethnicity) and animals. Then I have discussed different disguise mechanisms like euphemism and dysphemism.

The empirical part has dealt with the lexical analysis of Quentin Tarantino's movie *Pulp Fiction* in its original, American-English version and German dubbing. I have confirmed my hypothesis that there are considerably more swearwords in the original script than in the German translation and that most English terms are considered more offending than their German counterparts. I have shown certain lexical similarities in these two Germanic languages including literal equivalents and also pointed out interesting discrepancies. Furthermore, I have hinted at the possible censorship during the translation process.

As for future investigation, it would be an interesting task to analyze more recent movies and see in how far dubbing authors have changed their techniques as regards to swearwords. On numerous occasions, I have noticed that modern movie dubbings include words which sound quite unnatural and foreign to the native ear. For instance, the use of *fucking* as part of an otherwise German sentence in the dubbing of the 2010 movie *Get him to the Greek*:

(608) Schmeiß das *fucking* Handy aus meinem Büro!

Examples like the one cited above are results of the omnipresence of English words in many European languages due to globalization. It would be interesting to investigate the influence such dubbings have on other languages. Do they contribute to the incorporation of unnatural sounding loan words into foreign languages?

Another line of possible investigation would be to compare movies filmed in their native languages instead of dubbed versions. Although this would exclude the analysis of censorship in translation, it would open doors to the investigation of a more ‘authentic’ language use.

Last but not least, the comparison of swearwords in different languages could probably be best carried out by using language corpora, interviews and/or questionnaires. Of all the possible lines of future research I have mentioned here, this technique would probably generate the most authentic results. Summing up, there is still a lot of possible ways of investigating cross-cultural uses of swearing.

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12. Appendix

12.1. Exemplary extract from English *Pulp Fiction* script

The following dialogue is taken from the scene in Jules' car when he and Vincent are on the way to the young men's apartment and talking about the differences between Europe and America. For means of comparison, the same scene is cited below in German.

I have transcribed the dialogue trying to preserve slang and differences to standard pronunciation. The swearwords are highlighted in bold script.

JULES

Okay, so tell me again about the hash bars.

VINCENT

Okay, whatch you wanna know?

JULES

Hash is legal there, right?

VINCENT

Yeah, it's legal, but it ain't a hundred percent legal. I mean, you just can't walk into a restaurant, roll a joint, and start puffin' away. I mean they want you to smoke in your home or certain designated places.

JULES

'N those are hash bars?

VINCENT

Yeah, it breaks down like this, okay: it's –it's legal to buy it, it's legal to own it and, if you're the proprietor of a hash bar, it's legal to sell it. It's legal to carry it, but, but – but that doesn't matter 'cause – get a load of this – alright: if you get stopped by a cop in Amsterdam, it's illegal for them to search you. I mean, that's a right the cops in Amsterdam don't have.

JULES

Oh man, I'm goin'. That's all there is to it. I'm **fuckin'** goin'!

VINCENT

Oh baby, you'd dig it the most. But you know what the funniest thing about Europe is?

JULES

What?

VINCENT

It's the little differences. I mean they got the same **shit** over there that they got here, but it's just – it's just there is a little different.

JULES

Examples?

VINCENT

Alright. Well, you can walk in a movie theatre in Amsterdam and buy a beer. And I don't mean just an old paper cup. I'm talkin' about a glass of beer. And in Paris, you can buy a beer at MacDonald's. 'N you know what they call a Quarter Pounder with Cheese in Paris?

JULES

They don't call it a Quarter Pounder with Cheese?

VINCENT

No, they got the metric system there. They wouldn't know what **the fuck** a Quarter Pounder is.

JULES

What do they call it?

VINCENT

They call it a 'Royale with Cheese'.

JULES

Royale with Cheese. What'd they call a Big Mac?

VINCENT

Big Mac's a Big Mac, but they call it Le Big Mac.

JULES

Le Big Mac. Hahaha! What do they call a Whopper?

VINCENT

I dunno, I didn't go into a Burger King. But you know what they put on French fries in Holland instead of ketchup?

JULES

What?

VINCENT

Mayonnaise.

JULES

Uuccch!

VINCENT

I seen 'em do it, man. They **fuckin'** drown 'em in this **shit**.

JULES

Ugh!

12.2. Exemplary extract from German *Pulp Fiction* script

JULES

Okay, los, erzähl mir noch mal von den Haschisch Bars.

VINCENT

Alles klar. Was willst du wissen?

JULES

Der Stoff ist da legal, ja?

VINCENT

Ja schon legal, aber nicht hundert prozentig legal. Du kannst unmöglich in'n Restaurant gehen, dir 'nen Joint rollen und drauf lospaffen. Ich meine, die wollen, dass du zuhause oder nur in bestimmten Plätzen rauchst.

JULES

Und das sind diese Hasch Bars?

VINCENT

Ja. Das funktioniert ungefähr so: Es ist legal den Stoff zu kaufen, es ist legal ihn zu besitzen und wenn du der Besitzer so einer Hasch Bar bist, ist der Verkauf legal. Es ist legal das Zeug bei sich zu haben, aber – aber das ist eigentlich unwichtig. Zieh dir das rein, okay: Wenn du von einem **Bullen** in Amsterdam festgehalten wirst, hat der nicht das Recht dich zu durchsuchen. Die Bullen in Amsterdam haben nicht das Recht dazu!

JULES

Oh Mann! Da muss ich hin. Das ist doch ganz klar. Was mach ich noch hier?

VINCENT

Ich weiß, Baby. Du würdest tierisch drauf stehen. Aber weißt du was das Abgefahrenste an Europa ist?

JULES

Was?

VINCENT

Das sind die kleinen Unterschiede. Ich meine, die haben den gleichen **Scheiß**, der hier läuft, aber da – da läuft's 'ne Spur anders.

JULES

Zum Beispiel?

VINCENT

Zum Beispiel wenn du in Amsterdam ins Kino gehst, kaufst du dir'n Bier. Und ich meine nicht so'n billigen Pappbecher, ich rede von einem Glas Bier. Und in Paris kannst du dir bei McDonalds'n Bier kaufen. Und weißt du wie die, äh, einen Quarter Pounder mit Käse in Paris nennen?

JULES

Die nennen ihn nicht einen „Quarter Punder mit Käse“?

VINCENT

Nein, Mann, die haben das metrische System. Die wissen gar nicht was ein Viertelpfünder ist.

JULES

Wie nennen die ihn?

VINCENT

Die nennen ihn „Royal mit Käse“.

JULES

Royal mit Käse?

VINCENT

So ist es.

JULES

Wie nennen die einen Big Mac?

VINCENT

Big Mac ist ein Big Mac, aber die nennen ihn „Le Big Mac“.

JULES

Le Big Macke. Hahaha! Wie nennen die einen Whopper?

VINCENT

Keinen Ahnung, in Burger King war ich nicht. Weißt du, was die in Holland anstatt Ketchup auf die Pommes tun?

JULES

Was?

VINCENT

Majonäse.

JULES

Ih! Ist das eklig!

VINCENT

Hab ich selbst gesehen, Mann! Die ersäufen die in der Tunke.

JULES

Würg!

12.3. List of swearwords in English *Pulp Fiction* script

Obscenity

Fuck

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
fucking	adjective	97
	adverb	34
the fuck	interjection (intensifier)	33
to fuck (including: fuck me/you/it/them)	verb (meaning 'to copulate' and other meanings: 'to betray', 'to play', 'to forget', 'to destroy', 'to bother', 'to mouth off', 'leave me alone', etc.)	27 (4+12+11)
fuck	expletive	13
	interjection	3
to fuck up	verb (meaning 'to destroy', 'to overdose')	8
fucked up	adjective	5
to give a fuck	verb ('to care')	5
fucker(s)	noun	3
fucked	adjective (meaning 'in trouble')	1
fuckhead	noun	1
motherfucker(s)	noun	33
motherfucking	adjective	9
TOTAL		272

Other sexual obscenities

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
bitch	noun	14
son of a bitch	noun	1
pussy	noun (meaning 'vagina')	1

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
prick(s)	noun (denominating people, not the body part)	2
dick	noun (denominating the body part, not people)	1
dickless	adjective	1
to eat out	verb	2
to jerk off	verb	1
TOTAL		23

Scatology

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
shit	noun	69
	expletive	8
	adjective	1
	interjection	1
bullshit	noun	1
chickenshit	noun	1
pooh-butt	noun	1
merde	noun (French, meaning 'shit')	1
ass(es)	possessive pronoun + ass(es) (my/your/his ass, their asses); (denominating people and substituting words such as 'me', 'you' etc.)	28
	noun (meaning the actual body part)	7
asshole(s)	noun	4
crazy-ass	adjective	1
to get pissed	verb (meaning 'to get angry')	2
piss	noun	1
to piss	verb	1
TOTAL		127

Religion

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
goddamn	adjective	11
	expletive	9
	adverb	2
goddammit	expletive	4
damn	adjective	2
	expletive	1
to be damned	adjective in verb phrase	2
to not give a damn	verb	2
hell	noun	3
the hell	interjection (intensifier)	2
Jesus Christ	expletive	3
TOTAL		41

Social swearwords

Intellect

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
retard	noun	3
stupid	adjective	3
dork(s)	noun	2
dumb	adjective	2
gimp	noun, used as proper noun / name for character	2
bubblegummers	noun	1
hillbilly	noun	1
imbecile	noun	1
knucklehead	noun	1
nimrod	noun	1

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
palooka	noun	1
fuckhead	noun	(1) ³⁷
TOTAL		18 (+1)

Social stigmas and conditions

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
bum	noun (American meaning denominating people, not British for body part)	4
crazy	adjective	1
maniac	noun	1
weirdo	noun	1
motherfucker(s)	noun	(33) ³⁸
motherfucking	adjective	(9) ³⁹
bitch	noun	(14) ⁴⁰
son of a bitch	noun	(1) ⁴¹
pooh-butt	noun	(1) ⁴²
crazy-ass	adjective	(1) ⁴³
TOTAL		7 (+59)

Physical appearance

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
fat	adjective	3

³⁷ Also listed under 'Obscenity: Fuck' and therefore not counted here.

³⁸ Also listed under 'Obscenity: Fuck' and therefore not counted here.

³⁹ Also listed under 'Obscenity: Fuck' and therefore not counted here.

⁴⁰ Also listed under 'Obscenity: Other sexual obscenities' and therefore not counted here.

⁴¹ Also listed under 'Obscenity: Other sexual obscenities' and therefore not counted here.

⁴² Also listed under 'Obscenity: Scatology' and therefore not counted here.

⁴³ Also listed under 'Obscenity: Scatology' and therefore not counted here.

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
fatso	noun	1
flock of seagulls	noun	1
TOTAL		5

Other

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
to shut up	verb	11
pig	noun	1
punchy	noun	1
scamp(s)	noun	1
TOTAL		14

Racism

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
nigga(s)	noun	13
nigger(s)	noun	7
Negro	noun	1
gook(s)	noun	2
gook	adjective	1
slope(s)	noun	1
wetback	noun	1
gyp	noun (short for 'gypsy')	1
hillbilly	noun	(1) ⁴⁴
TOTAL		27 (+1)

⁴⁴ Also listed under 'Social referents: Intellect' and therefore not counted here.

Animals

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
bitch	noun	14
son of a bitch	noun	1
pussy	noun (meaning 'vagina')	1
chickenshit	noun	1
bullshit	noun	1
flock of seagulls	noun	1
pig	noun	1
TOTAL		(20)

12.4. List of swearwords in German *Pulp Fiction* script

Religion

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
verdammt / verdammt/er/e/es	adjective	39
	adverb	7
	expletive	13
verdammt noch mal	interjection (intensifier)	13
	expletive	5
gottverdammt noch mal	interjection (intensifier)	1
	expletive	1
gottverdammt / gottverdammt/er/e/es	expletive	1
	adjective	2
verdammt sein	verb	2
verflucht / verflucht/er/e/es	expletive	6
	adjective	1
	adverb	1
verflucht noch mal	expletive	3
	interjection (intensifier)	1
zum Teufel	interjection	3
großer Gott	expletive	1
TOTAL		100

Obscenity

Scatology

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
Scheiße	expletive	13
	noun, referring to everything but actual feces	9
	noun, denominating actual feces	1
Scheiß	noun	7
Scheißkerl	noun	4
Scheißuhr	noun	2

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
Scheißtelefon	noun	1
Scheißfinger	noun	1
Scheißjob	noun	1
Scheißauto	noun	1
Scheißleben	noun	1
Scheißtag	noun	1
Scheißstadt	noun	1
Drogenscheiß	noun	1
Jimmiescheiße	noun	1
scheißen auf	verb	1
beschissen	adjective	1
Kacke	expletive	1
kacken	verb	1
Merde (French)	noun	1
Arsch	noun, denominating the actual body part	5
	possessive pronoun + Arsch (mein/dein Arsch, ihre Arsch); (denominating people and substituting words such as ‘ich’, ‘du’ etc.)	8
	definite article + Arsch (den Arsch); (denominating people and substituting ‘ihm’)	2
	noun, insult; no direct reference to body part	2
Arschloch	noun	4
Arschtritt	noun	1
arschkalt	noun	1
Hühnerarsch / -ärsche	noun	1
jemanden lecken (Leck mich!)	verb	2
jemanden können (Du kannst mich mal!)	verb	2
sonst wohin schieben	verb phrase	1
Pisser	noun	2
pissen	verb	1
sich verpissen	verb	1
pinkeln	verb	2

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
jemanden anmachen	verb, meaning 'provoke', 'annoy' (not romantic sense)	1
TOTAL		86

Sexuality

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
Wichser	noun	8
anwachsen	verb (= annoy)	2
ficken	verb, referring to anything but sex	4
	verb, meaning 'copulate'	3
abgefickt/er/e/es	adjective	2
vögeln	verb	1
Pussy	noun	2
Muschi	noun	1
ausschlecken	verb	2
Schlampe	noun	6
Nutte	noun	5
Hurensohn	noun	1
Eier	noun	4
Sack / Säcke	noun	1
Schanz / Schwänze	noun	2
Schwanzlutscher	noun	1
sich einen runterholen	verb phrase	1
TOTAL		46

Social swearwords

Social referents

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
Idiot/in	noun	4
Vollidiot/in	noun	1
blöd/er/e/es	adjective	3

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
vertrottelt	adjective	1
bescheuert/-er/-e/-es	adjective	1
dämlich	adjective	1
Dummkopf	noun	1
Irrer	noun	2
Spinner	noun	1
fett	adjective	2
Fettsack	noun	1
fettgrinsend	adjective	1
Penner	noun, insult	5
	noun, insult referring to actual homeless persons	4
Bulle(n)	noun	6
Schwein	noun	1
Schweineerei	noun	2
schweine kalt	adjective	1
Ratte	noun	1
Bastard	noun	1
Knacki(s)	noun	2
Yuppie	noun	1
Stinker	noun	1
stinkend/er/e/es	adjective	2
mies/er/e/es	adjective	1
Schrott	noun	2
Mist	noun	7
Mistkerl	noun	3
Mistkuh	noun	1
Mistratte	noun	1
Dreck	noun	4
Dreckskerl	noun	1
Drecksvieh / -viecher	noun	2
Hinkebein	noun	2
Schlampe	noun	(6) ⁴⁵
Nutte	noun	(5) ⁴⁶
Hurensohn	noun	(1) ⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Also listed under 'Sexuality' and therefore not counted here.

⁴⁶ Also listed under 'Sexuality' and therefore not counted here.

⁴⁷ Also listed under 'Sexuality' and therefore not counted here.

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
Schwanzlutscher	noun	(1) ⁴⁸
TOTAL		70 (+13)

Vulgarity

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
Klappe halten	verb phrase	3
Maul halten	verb phrase	4
Schnauze halten	verb phrase	2
zum Henker	interjection	5
zum Henker mit jemanden	expression, idiom	1
zum Geier	interjection	1
Schmierbacke	noun	1
TOTAL		17

Racism

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
Nigger	noun	18
Neger	noun	1
Crack-Nigger	noun	1
schwarzer Mann	adjective + noun	3
schwarzer Hintern	adjective + noun	1
weißer Arsch	adjective + noun	(1) ⁴⁹
Reisfresser	noun	2
Schlitzauge(n)	noun	2
Chico	noun	1
TOTAL		28 +1)

⁴⁸ Also listed under 'Sexuality' and therefore not counted here.

⁴⁹ Also listed under 'Scatology' and therefore not counted here.

Animal terms

Swearword	Part of speech (and meanings)	Number of occurrences
Drecksvieh / -viecher	noun	2
Bulle(n)	noun	6
Schwein	noun	1
Schweinerei	noun	2
schweinekalt	adjective	1
vögeln	verb	1
Pussy	noun	2
Muschi	noun	1
Hühnerarsch / -ärsche	noun	1
Ratte	noun	1
Mistratte	noun	1
Mistkuh	noun	1
Spinner	noun	1
Eier	noun	4
zum Geier	interjection	1
TOTAL		(26)

12.5. Abstract

This thesis treats a number of different issues relating to swearing. In the theoretical part I explore the evolution of swearwords from their ancient origins lying within the belief of word magic, explain their connection to societal taboos and censorship. In order to exemplify the latter, I specify the historical development of swearwords in English. I discuss different linguistic approaches of defining offensive language and distinguish modes and functions of swearing. As basis for my analysis I talk about four major referential categories, including obscenity (sexuality and scatology), religion (profanity and blasphemy), social referents (intellect, gender and ethnicity) and animals. Furthermore, I detail different disguise mechanism like euphemism and dysphemism.

The empirical part deals with the lexical analysis of Quentin Tarantino's movie *Pulp Fiction* in its original, American-English version and German dubbing. I look at a number of similarities and differences between the two movie scripts. These include literal equivalents, terms and expressions which share certain characteristics as well as discrepancies, additions, omissions and disguise mechanisms. Among other topics I will also discuss restriction of audio-visual translation and the possibility of censorship during the dubbing process.

12.6. German summary

In dieser Diplomarbeit beschäftige ich mich mit einigen Themen in Bezug auf das Fluchen. Hierbei beziehe ich mich auf den modernen Sprechakt, in welchem meist Schimpfwörter zum Ausdruck gebracht werden und nicht das rituelle Verwünschen anderer. Das Ziel meiner Arbeit ist ein sprachwissenschaftlicher Vergleich zwischen Fluchworten auf Deutsch und Englisch anhand der Analyse eines Filmes, nämlich Quentin Tarantinos *Pulp Fiction*.

Der theoretische Teil dient der Einleitung in das Thema Fluchen. Darin skizziere ich die Entstehung und Entwicklung von Fluchworten und führe ihren Ursprung auf den historischen Glauben an Magie, die Wörtern inne liegt und Einfluss auf das Leben der Menschen haben soll, zurück. Weiters erkläre ich ihre Verbindung zu gesellschaftlichen Tabus sowie Zensur und liste die historische Entwicklung englischer Fluchworte auf. Außerdem erwähne ich verschiedene sprachwissenschaftliche Ansätze mit dem Ziel der Definition von diesen, so genannten „anstößigen“ Worten, und beschreibe Arten sowie Funktionen von Fluchen. Als Basis für meinen praktischen Teil bespreche ich vier lexikale Referenz-Hauptkategorien von Fluchworten: Obszönitäten (sexueller und skatologischer Natur), religiöses Fluchen (Respektlosigkeit und Blasphemie), soziale Fluchworte (in Bezug auf Intellekt, Geschlecht und Ethnizität) und Tiernamen. Abschließend befasse ich mich mit Euphemismen und Dysphemismen in schriftlicher, aber vor allem gesprochener Sprache.

Der empirische Teil beschäftigt sich mit der lexikalischen Analyse von Fluchworten in Quentin Tarantinos *Pulp Fiction* in der englischen Originalfassung und deutschen Synchronisation. Dabei bestätigen sich meine Hypothesen, dass die englische Fassung weitaus mehr Fluchworte beinhaltet und diese auch insgesamt als „anstößiger“ zu charakterisieren sind als die deutschen. Jedoch weise ich auch darauf hin, dass diese großen Unterschiede durchaus durch Einschränkungen bei der Synchronisation (wie etwa Lippenbewegungen, Gestik und Körpersprache) und durch persönliche Entscheidungen seitens der Übersetzer entstanden sein könnten.

Weiters stelle ich fest, dass die lexikalischen Referenz-Kategorien zwar in beiden Sprachen gleich sind, aber mit unterschiedlicher Häufigkeit vorkommen. Der Großteil (sogar mehr die Hälfte) der englischen Wörter bezieht sich auf Sexualität,

nächstfolgend sind Skatologie und soziale Fluchworte. In der deutschen Version führen religiöse Ausdrücke die Liste an, gefolgt von sozialen Fluchworten und Skatologie. Weitere, weniger häufige Kategorien (in beiden Sprachen) sind Rassismus und Tiernamen.

Die Häufigkeit der Referenz-Kategorien spiegelt sich in den beiden häufigsten Ausdrücken wider, nämlich *fuck* und *verdammt*. Während *fuck* 272 Mal in vielseitigen Varianten vorkommt und in sechs verschiedenen Wortarten vertreten ist (Adjektiv, Adverb, Interjektion, Verb, Ausruf und Nomen), kommt *verdammt* nur 84 Mal und in vier Wortarten (Adjektiv, Adverb, Interjektion und Ausruf) vor. Allerdings sind die beiden in den überschneidenden Wortarten austauschbar und werden auch oft so verwendet.

Abgesehen von Unterschieden weisen die beiden Filmskripte auch Gemeinsamkeiten auf. Zum Beispiel habe ich einige (zum Teil wörtliche) Entsprechungen gefunden. Dazu zählen in etwa *ass* und *Arsch* oder *shit* und *Scheiße*. Diese lassen sich wohl durch die gemeinsamen germanischen Sprachwurzeln erklären. Außerdem hat Englisch in Zeiten der Globalisierung allgemein einen großen Einfluss auf Deutsch. Dies ist auch der Grund für englische Lehnwörter im Deutschen wie zum Beispiel das Adjektiv *abgefickt*, welches in der *Pulp Fiction* Synchronisation vorkommt.

Ich komme also zu dem Schluss, dass die beiden *Pulp Fiction* Skripte sowohl lexikalische Gemeinsamkeiten als auch Unterschiede aufweisen. Meine Analyse hat weiters meine zuvor aufgestellten Hypothesen bezüglich Häufigkeit und Grad an „Anstößigkeit“ von Fluchen im Englischen und Deutschen bestätigt.

12.7. Curriculum Vitae

Persönliche Daten

Name: Sonja Pühringer

Geburtsdatum / -ort: 27.1.1985 in Linz, Oberösterreich.

Staatsbürgerschaft: Österreich

Ausbildung

1991 – 1995 Volksschule Thalheim bei Wels, Oberösterreich

1995 – 2003 BG/BRG Dr. Schauer Straße Wels, Oberösterreich

2001 – 2002 Rotary Stipendium für Auslandsjahr an der Reynolds Secondary School in Victoria, British Columbia, Kanada

20.6.2003 Matura mit ausgezeichnetem Erfolg

Seit 2003 Lehramtsstudium der Unterrichtsfächer Englisch und Spanisch an der Universität Wien

2006 – 2007 Erasmus Stipendium für Auslandsjahr an der Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Galizien, Spanien

2008 Joint Study Stipendium für Auslandssemester an der Macquarie University in Sydney, New South Wales, Australien

Seit 2007 Modul Deutsch als Fremd- und Zweitsprache (DAF/DAZ) an der Universität Wien

2009 – 2011 Modul English for specific purposes (ESP) an der Universität Wien