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Diplomová práce

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Evolution of Female Characters' Language: Profanity in Film and TV

Vývoj jazyka ženských postav: vulgarismy ve filmu a televizi

Poděkování

Velké díky patří vedoucí mé diplomové práce, Mrg. Veronice Raušové, Ph.D., za cenné rady a ochotu při konzultacích. Ráda bych také poděkovala své rodině a přátelům za podporu po celou dobu mého studia.

Prohlášení

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Prohlašuji, že umělá inteligence nebyla použita k vygenerování žádné části obsahu této práce.

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to determine whether use of profanity in the language of female film characters has changed in the past 40 years. Due to the reported increase in women's use of profanity and the development of media's treatment of language and gender, the study presumed that there would be more occurrences of vulgar expressions in the speech of women in recent films in comparison to older ones. The data used for the analysis are transcripts of 25 American romantic comedies released between the years 1984 and 2024. 314 female-uttered expressions of profanity were identified in the corpus. The research revealed there is a gradual increase in the frequency and strength of vulgarisms used by female characters, with the most significant increase found from the 2000s to the 2010s. The thesis also examined the relative value of offensiveness of the expressions, and found an increase of popularity of stronger vulgarisms. The ratio of vulgarisms uttered by female characters in comparison to male characters has also increased from the earliest to the most recent films. The analysis overall suggests that language of female characters in film has evolved towards being less restrained and more realistic.

Keywords: profanity, language and gender, film language

Abstrakt

Cílem této diplomové práce zjistit, jestli se užívání vulgárního jazyka ženských filmových postav změnilo za posledních 40 let. Vzhledem k doloženému zvýšení vulgarismů v mluvě žen a vývoji v zacházení s genderem a jazykem v médiích tato studie předpokládala, že se výskyt vulgarismů v jazyce ženských postav zvýší v novějších filmech oproti těm starším. Praktická část analyzuje transkripce 25 romantických komedií vydaných mezi roky 1984 a 2024. V replikách ženských postav bylo nalezeno 314 vulgarismů. Výzkum ukázal, že se frekvence vulgarismů v jazyce ženských postav postupně zvýšila, nejvýznamněji mezi obdobími 2000-2010 a 2010-2020. Dále byla zkoumána relativní síla vulgárních projevů, která potvrdila zvýšenou popularitu silnějších vulgarismů v pozdějších filmech. Podíl vulgarismů v jazyce ženských postav oproti mužským se během těchto let také zvýšila. Výsledky analýzy naznačují, že se projev ženských postav ve filmu postupně vyvíjí směrem k realističtějšímu a méně zdrženlivému.

Klíčová slova: vulgarismy, gender v jazyce, filmový jazyk

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List of abbreviations

LGR	Language and gender research
BLW	Bad language word
MPPC	Motion Picture Production Code
MPA	Motion Picture Association

1. Introduction

This diploma thesis is concerned with the depiction of female characters in film since the 1980's to the present time. The study aims to analyse their spoken language with the focus on frequency and strength of their expressions of profanity and find out whether they had changed within the last 40 years. There is a prevailing theory in language and gender research (LGR) claiming women use less vulgarisms in their speech or choose weaker expressions when they do (Lakoff, 1975; Coates, 2015), and this folk-linguistic belief remains common, resulting in women being subjected to harsher judgment for impoliteness (McEnery, 2006; Beers Fägersten & Stapleton, 2017). However, recent studies report an increasing use of expletives in women's speech (Stapleton, 2003; Thelwall, 2008), and with the shift towards higher tolerance of profanity and taboo topics in the media and continuous change in sociocultural conceptions of femininity and masculinity, it is likely that the portrayal of gender in film changed as well. These assumptions will be tested in the practical part of this study by analysing female film characters' language and their use of profanity, and finding out whether they use vulgarisms more frequently and opt for terms with higher strength in contemporary films when compared to older works.

The interest in communicative style of women and men and their potential differences has a tradition in linguistic research, but as Montell (2019) pointed out, only recently have scholars gain "both the concrete linguistic data and the emotional momentum to inspire tangible differences in how we talk about gender" (p. 15). A significant number of studies emerging since the 1970s focused on the gender and its role in language, claiming women's speech is inherently politer and more powerless in comparison to men's, and tends to avoid confrontation or disagreement (Lakoff, 1975; Butler 1990; Tannen 1990), which includes their use of swearing. Contemporary LGR turns away from the 'gender differences' to explore which other variables influence language use in context, and highlights the ongoing stigmatization of specific ways of expression expected of both women and men (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003).

Among the studies conducted about fictional film and television, most have focused on content analysis, and it remains overlooked in linguistics. Although the scripted nature of film characters' speech does not allow generalization to real spontaneous language, it does provide valuable data of spoken informal conversation important for pragmatic analysis. More importantly, it shows how certain types of characters are expected to speak according to the current linguistic standards, which then becomes a model of language for the film's viewers

(Beers Fägersten, 2016, p. 6). Because of the reliance on simplification and archetypes in cinematic speech (Bednarek, 2010), the audience is often presented with a stereotypical way of speaking including in terms of gender roles (Busso & Vignozzi, 2017).

Similarly, while the taboo nature of swearing is now decreasing and the use of profanity in language is considered a worthy subject, it remains underrepresented in research in comparison to other aspects of language (Beers Fägersten & Stapleton, 2017). While there had been studies about swearing in film including its differences based on gender (Jay, 1992), it is worth to explore the situation in contemporary entertainment media and in terms of specific genres. Romantic comedy is traditionally associated with female audience (San Filippo, 2021), which is a crucial factor in its use of language (Kozloff, 2000, p. 137), and the genre's fluctuating popularity and preferred themes present valuable sociolinguistic data, but its language had scarcely been explored.

It is within the aims of this thesis to contribute to these branches of linguistic research. The theoretical part of the thesis is concerned with the use of profanity in language, its functions and role in politeness and language pragmatics. Furthermore, it deals with language and gender research, explaining the theory behind women's use of language with a focus on swearing. Finally, it discusses the features of film language and provides a brief history of treatment of female characters in the media. The practical part of the thesis is a corpus analysis of vulgarisms in the speech of female characters in romantic comedies released since the 1980s to the present time. The data for the analysis are 25 selected romantic comedies and their transcriptions. The frequency of vulgarisms used by female characters is compared relatively to the year of release, as well as to language of male characters in the same films. Additionally, the use of vulgarisms is analysed qualitatively based on the typology provided by McEnery (2006), to find whether the strength and pragmatic function of the expressions has changed.

2. Theoretical background

The theoretical background in this thesis deals with three main points: profanity in language, gender as a linguistic variable, and language in film and television.

2.1 Profanity in language

Swearing and bad language play significant roles in language pragmatics and sociolinguistics, as they can influence communication dynamics as well as social norms by breaking linguistic taboos. In the following chapter, the definition and functions of swearing will be explained, and a typology of vulgarisms based on its linguistic qualities and strength will be provided. In addition, the use of profanity by women will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 2.2.3, and Chapter 2.3.1 discusses the development of bad language and censorship in film and television. Before focusing on the use of profanity in language, several terms relevant in language pragmatics, such as the concept of politeness, cooperative principle and notion of face, need to be explained.

2.1.1 Politeness theory

The Cooperative Principle, introduced by H. P. Grice (1975), states that participants should make their conversational contributions as required by the accepted purpose or direction of the exchange. The principle involves four conversational maxims (quantity, quality, relation, and manner) that speakers generally adhere to for effective communication, that is expected to be informative, truthful, relevant, and clear. In practice, however, speakers often flout these maxims to create implicatures, derived from context and shared knowledge rather than from their literal meaning (Grice, 1975). The conversational maxims are relevant in LGR, being referred to in women's alleged preference to adhere to the rules of politeness and conversational implicatures (Lakoff, 1975, p. 95), but also in film dialogue, as the shared knowledge between the characters differ from what is known by the film's viewer, as will be further discussed in Chapter 2.3.

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987) is based on other pragmatic theories, notably the notion of face (Goffman, 1967). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), speaker's negative face reflects "the want that one's actions be unimpeded by others", and the positive face is "the want for one's wants to be desirable to others" (p. 62). Combined with Grice's theory of implicature (1975) and the speech act theory, their politeness theory introduced a number of strategies speakers can choose when performing a potentially face-threatening act, the degree of face-redress the strategies represent and their hierarchical order,

and the factors which determine which one to select, while taking into account the social power and social distance between themselves and the hearer.

In situations where the speaker's motivation is to cooperate and promote social harmony to prevent threatening the listener's face, offensive behaviours such as swearing should be avoided. However, although the use of expletives is traditionally perceived as "intrinsically forceful or aggressive activity" (Stapleton, 2003, p. 22), more recent studies emphasise the role of contextual variables on whether or not vulgar language is offensive (Jay, 2008, p. 285). Depending on speaker-listener relationship, social and physical setting, and the topic of discussion, swearing may be appropriate in a given situation and not regarded as merely polite or impolite (Jay, 2008, p. 269), and in fact carries a wide range of functions, which will be covered in the following chapters.

2.1.2 Swearing

The essence of swearing or taboo language lays in the addressee's reaction, that is, offensiveness inflicted on them, and therefore includes a certain level of subjectivity and is not a straightforward term to define. Most scholars agree on defining swearing as language use in which the expression refers to something taboo or stigmatised, which expresses strong emotions or attitudes (Andersson & Truggill, 2007; Ljung, 2011; Beers Fägersten & Stapleton, 2017) with the intent to "invoke harm on another person" (Jay, 1992, p. 2). Another proposed criterion for swear words is that they are not to be interpreted literally (Ljung, 2011), however, others argue that literal use of taboo words, or marginal cases such as *boob* or *retard* can qualify as offensive (Beers Fägersten & Stapleton, 2017, p. 9). For example, McEnery (2006) proposed that swear word could be "any word or phrase which, when used in what one might call polite conversation, is likely to cause offence" (p. 1). It appears then the way to identify swearing is the purpose with which it was expressed.

As I stated earlier, swearing has many other functions apart from causing offense. Historically, it was religious institutions, who made the point of punishing the speaker for using 'curse words', such as *goddamn* or *hell* (Jay, 1992). However, it is unlikely that the belief of these curses bringing actual harm on the addressees is the purpose of swearing in modern speech, and recent research claims that swearing also serves as a release of emotion, such as anger or fear, and can produce a pain-lessening effect (Beers Fägersten & Stapleton, 2017, p. 6). These outbursts brought on by intense emotions have been termed "annoyance swearing", and are nevertheless rated as highly offensive (Beers Fägersten & Stapleton, 2017, p. 6). Beers Fägersten and Stapleton (2017) also mention "social swearing", which can be considered

appropriate and has a positive effect on group bonding in an informal setting as a display of humour, solidarity, or intimacy.

Assessing whether the use of profanity is rude or offensive, then, requires determining the participants relationship, their intentions and social norms involved in the discourse. Researches explored the role of social variables on frequency and perception of swearing, such as age, socioeconomic class or gender, but also ethnic background and nationality (Swan, 1980; DeKlerk, 1992; Jacobi, 2014...). While the use of expletives has been associated with lower socioeconomical or working-class culture (Hughes, 1991; Stapleton, 2003), DeKlerk (1992) suggests it is not so much socioeconomic changes but “shifts in social attitudes and lessening inhibitions” (p. 288) which influence the frequency and development of bad language words (BLW) usage. Regarding the role of speaker’s age on the use of vulgarisms, Swan (1980) claims “children usually avoid swearing in front of adults, so as not to shock or annoy them, and adults avoid swearing in front of children for similar reasons” (p. 589) – it is adolescents who seem the least inhibited in swearing and often do not perceive them as taboo (DeKlerk, 1992, p. 287). How swearing will be perceived by the addressee can also be affected by the actual choice of the taboo word (Jay, 2008) and the participants first language, since the effects of taboo words has been proven to be stronger in the speakers’ first language (Harris et. al., 2003).

In addition, the swearing etiquette is changing over time, adding another variable for analysing texts for offensiveness: an objective on what is considered obscene is changing because the law evolves in response to changes in society and the courts decisions (Jay, 1992, p. 195), and the use of profanity in both formal and informal setting is overall increasing (Jay, 2016), significantly because of the pervasive influence of digital media (Twenge et. al., 2019). Since the focus of this thesis is the use of profanity by women, the relation of gender and swearing will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.2.4.

2.1.3 Typology of vulgarisms

Several typologies of vulgarisms had been suggested by scholars. In his study, McEnery (2006, p. 30) claims that the gender distinction in BLW use is generally marked qualitatively, and uses several classifications of vulgarisms, which he originally conducted for the Lancaster Corpus of Abuse (McEnery et. al., 2000). Table 1 shows his first typology, which defines the type of bad language based on its intention and semantics, such as *animal*, *sexist*, *racist* or *homophobic terms of abuse*. He also states that there is an interplay between these broad categories.

Category	Example
Swear words	Fuck, piss, shit
Animal terms of abuse	Pig, cow, bitch
Sexist terms of abuse	Bitch, whore, slut
Intellect-based terms of abuse	Idiot, prat, imbecile
Racist terms of abuse	Paki, nigger, chink
Homophobic terms of abuse	Queer

Table 1. Typology of bad language based on semantics by McEnery (2006, p. 25).

McEnery also introduced a categorisation of bad language based on its linguistic quality, as listed in Table 2, which differentiates for example an idiomatic phrase (*give a fuck*) from a personal insult referring to a defined entity (*you fuck*). In his study, McEnery (2006) found that categories which are not associated with abuse, such as general expletives, literal use and premodifying negative adjectives, were more typical of women's language (p. 31).

Description	Example
Predicative negative adjective	'the film is shit'
Adverbial booster	'Fucking marvellous', 'Fucking awful'
Cursing expletive	'Fuck you!/Me!/Him!/It!'
Destinational usage	'Fuck off!', 'He fucked off'
Emphatic adverb/adjective	'He fucking did it', 'in the fucking car'
Figurative extension of literal meaning	'to fuck about'
General expletive	'(Oh) Fuck'
Idiomatic 'set phrase':	'fuck all', 'give a fuck'
Literal usage denoting taboo referent:	'We fucked'
Imagery based on literal meaning:	'kick shit out of'
Premodifying intensifying negative adjective	'the fucking idiot'
'Pronominal' form with undefined referent:	'got shit to do'
Personal insult referring to defined entity	'You fuck', 'That fuck'
'Reclaimed' usage	no negative intent e.g. Niggers as used by African American rappers
Religious oath used for emphasis	'by God'
Unclassifiable due to insufficient context	-

Table 2. Typology of bad language based on linguistic quality by McEnery (2006, p. 27).

Finally, McEnery categorized vulgarisms into 5 categories based on a scale of offence borrowed from the British Board of Film Classification, and provides a number of examples from each category as seen in Table 3.

Categorisation	Words in the category
Very mild	Bird, bloody, crap, damn, god, hell, hussy, idiot, pig, pillock, sod, son-of-a-bitch, tart
Mild	Arse, balls, bitch, bugger, christ, cow, dickhead, git, jesus, jew, moron, pissed off, screw, shit, slag, slut, sod, tit, tits, tosser
Moderate	Arsehole, bastard, bollocks, gay, nigger, piss, paki, poofter, prick, shag, spactic, twat, wanker, whore
Strong	Fuck
Very strong	Cunt, motherfucker

Table 3. Typology of bad language based on a scale of offense by McEnery (2006, p. 30).

The scale ranges from very mild (*hell*), mild (*shit*), moderate (*shag*), to strong (*fuck*) and very strong (*cunt*), based on how offensive these words might be for the recipient. This classification corresponds with today’s profanity guidelines for film language, but again, requires subjective evaluation based on context, since there may be an overlap between different categories. McEnery (2006) found that male speakers tend to use stronger set of words (p. 30).

McEnery’s typology was since adopted in BLW research (e.g. Love, 2017), while also receiving some criticism, mainly for his inclusion of literal use of swear words. For example, Ljung (2011) argues that “taboo words with literal meaning cannot be regarded as swearing” (p. 12), since these cases can be responsible for inflated frequency rating. The typology used by Ljung (2011) excludes a number of cases which the presented classifications include, such as the use of *shit* in the expression *get one’s shit together*, claiming this meaning of *shit* developed into a neutral one (p. 29). He also proposes new categories including wh-constructions such as in *what the fuck*, to make the classifications more representative (p. 29).

2.2 Gender as a linguistic variable

While terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are often used interchangeably (Oertelt-Prigione et al., 2010), ‘gender’ refers to a complex system of social practices, behaviours, expressions, and identities that a society considers appropriate for men and women (Butler, 1990; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). In the context of linguistics, biological sex is a relevant variable in some disciplines, such as phonetics, but the role of gender on communication style and identity construction is considered a significant area in sociolinguistics and pragmatics (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Masculinity and femininity are now not seen as inherent and fixed character traits, but rather as ongoing processes depending on the current social conventions about how the sexes are expected to speak and behave, which are referred to as ‘performing’ gender (Butler, 1990, p. 185). In this thesis, the term *gender* will refer to the speaker’s identity, which can be explicitly or implicitly conveyed by linguistic means in both real life and film

speech. That being said, in the analytical part of the thesis, all female characters' gender is consistent with their biological sex. Following chapters summarize the development of LGR, and explore the empirical evidence behind some of the features of language that are assumed to be used divergently by women, with the focus on the use of profanity.

2.2.1 Language and gender research

Folk-linguistic beliefs about gendered language can be traced deep into history, with ancient proverbs such as “Ten measures of speech descended on the world; women took nine and men one” (Kozloff, 2000, p. 12). As was mentioned earlier, however, women and men talk to perform their gender expectations, and this behaviour is then evaluated by the hearers' conscious or subconscious ideas of what is traditionally considered to be ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’. Although linguistic research does not support the claim that women talk then men, and there have in fact been numerous studies which indicate the opposite, dating back to the 1950s (Spender, 1990, p. 42), contemporary research also proves that there are still differences in treatment of gender in language, or restraints based on the speaker's gender, affecting both women and men (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Cameron, 2007). LGR can be divided into two areas of interest: investigation of how women and men use language, and how language is used to talk about men and women, and its potential differences (Beers Fägersten & Sveen, 2016, p. 89).

Early reports about women's language, such as Jespersen's (1922), considered their speech not only significantly different to men's, but also inferior to it, reflecting women's allegedly inferior status and lesser abilities. The reasons behind women's subordinate status in language were later explored by the deficit theory, attributed to Lakoff (1975). In her influential book, Lakoff (1975) argues the way women speak reflects their unequal place in society and experience linguistic discrimination “in the way they are taught to use language, and in the way general language use treats them” (p. 39), and she described women's speech as politer, restrained and powerless in comparison to men's (Lakoff, 1975). Since then, many studies have commented on Lakoff's work with often conflicting ideas: The dominance theory (e. g. Zimmerman & West, 1975; Butler, 1990) proposes that in mixed-sex conversations, all participants co-construct a pattern of male dominance, in which men achieve conversational power by means such as interrupting women or not making equal efforts to engage them in the conversation (Butler, 1990). Another approach was expressed by the difference theory (Tannen, 1990), which suggested men and women constitute different cultures each with their own communicative styles, one neither inferior nor subordinate to each other. Men's language

strategy was supposed to reflect an orientation towards communicating information, problem-solving or engaging in confrontation, while women's language was described as avoiding disagreement, showing support, seeking understanding and building relationships (Tannen, 1990).

All these theories are however criticized for being rooted in the idea that men and women represent two distinct binary categories with inherent properties, and reflecting the folk-linguistics beliefs to which empirical evidence was often non-existent or limited (Johnson, 1997; Beers Fägersten, 2016). Today's scholars prefer to follow the social constructionist theory, which assumes not all men and all women speak the same, and there many variables apart from gender which influence language use (Beers Fägersten & Sveen, 2016, p. 92). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) suggest gender does not just influence the way people speak, but how they are spoken about and interpreted based on common background and stereotypes, describing a phenomenon they call 'gender presupposition'. For example, in the utterance 'I consulted a lawyer', the hearer may interpret the lawyer as male without their gender explicitly mentioned, drawing on their assumption that men are more likely to have a respectable job. These beliefs continue to fuel societal stereotypes which lead to stigmatizing both women and men who would use a linguistic feature not associated with their respective gender. Today's focus of LGR is set on abandoning the search for differences between what is believed to be the typically 'male' or 'female' language: as the title of Cameron's study (1992) suggested, the focus must be shifted from "gender difference" to "the difference gender makes".

2.2.2 Women's speech

In first language acquisition, the vast majority of children are taken care of and exposed to language by women or other female caretakers, and therefore imitate 'women's language' (Tannen, 1990). During childhood, then, girls are supposedly encouraged not to diverge from it, while boys are taught to "unlearn their original form of expression" and adopt a new one (Lakoff, 1975, p. 41). Lakoff (1975) claimed that men are not taken seriously or "viewed with suspicion" if their speech is too grammatical or too polite (p. 84), and Cameron (2007) suggested men are just as likely, if not more so, to adjust their language to fit in peer groups or social expectations. Despite that, it is men's language which is consistently considered the norm, while women's speech is being explored for divergence (Johnson, 1997, p. 12). In fact, scholars agree that although 'masculine' language continues to set the standard, it is also marked and should be explored for its specific features (Pauwels, 2003; Coates, 2015).

While Lakoff's (1975) initial theories about female speech have since been challenged by authentic data, it is worth discussing the aspects of language she considered associated with women before focusing on women's use of profanity. Most of the characteristics she listed can only be found in spoken language and informal setting, because they represent personal markers (p. 83). According to Lakoff (1975), women's speech "sounds much more 'polite' than men's", "leaving a decision open, not imposing your mind, or views, or claims on anyone else" (p. 50). The politeness is then achieved by overusing specific linguistic traits, such as the use of hedges or filler words, which are sometimes described as meaningless (p. 43), and are usually not syntactically integrated into the main utterance. Other means of over-politeness ascribed to women's language are the use of 'empty' adjectives (*adorable* instead of *great*) (p. 45), boosters and amplifiers (*I'm so glad you're here*) or diminutives (*panties*) (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 158). All of these so-called 'weakening devices' can be summarized as leading to indirection and hypercorrection, with the purpose of achieving higher distance, conveying the superiority of the addressee over the speaker, and giving the addressee a leeway to decline or propose an alternative (Lakoff, 1975). Although hedging or hesitation markers don't carry a semantic or propositional content of an utterance (Hölker, 1991), they do play an important role in spoken discourse. While politeness is one of their key functions, pragmatic markers can also help the speaker hold the floor or keep the attention of the addressee and add to overall coherence and comprehensibility (Schiffrin, 1987).

Regarding syntax, the tag-question formation is often discussed as overused in women's speech (Lakoff, 1975; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). According to Lakoff (1975), one possibility to interpret a sentence with a 'tag' is that "the speaker has a particular answer in mind – 'yes' or 'no' – but it is reluctant to state it baldly" as it is a "means whereby a speaker can avoid committing himself, and thereby avoid coming into conflict with the addressee" (p. 49). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) also mention women's preference of invariant tags, in which the tag is the same regardless of the statement being positive or negative, e.g. "*we've got a reservation at eight, right?*" (p. 167). However, scholars who explored the use of indirect or 'powerless' language questioned that its use is inherently a female practice, as tags may be used by any speaker of a lower position than their addressee, depending on the context (O'Barr and Atkins, 1980; Cameron et. al., 1988; Johnson, 1997).

A lot of attention has been given to male and female cooperative behaviour in conversation. As Johnson (1997, p. 9) mentions, "men compete, women cooperate" has become a common catch-phrase in LGR. In fact, empirical studies on the role of gendered conversational dynamics support Lakoff's (1975) thesis. Women were found to use more expressive nonverbal cues,

such as smiling, nodding, contributing to a more engaging conversational style (Zimmerman & West, 1975), use positive minimal responses and back-channelling cues more frequently than men and engage in cooperative overlap, where they talk simultaneously to show active engagement, while men are more likely to interrupt and take over the conversation (Holmes 1995, p. 56). Drawing on what Lakoff's (1975) described as speaking 'in italics', women's voice was reported as more dynamic, using more variation in pitch and intonation than men (McConnell-Ginet, 1983). While the rising intonation on declarative, or 'uptalk', is explained as a form of insecurity or "seeking confirmation" (Lakoff, 1975, p. 50), it can signal higher emotional expressiveness and help to maintain conversational flow (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003).

2.2.3 Women and swearing

As was mentioned above, bad language or taboo phrases are some of the features of language which researchers claim are used differently by women. It has been suggested that women avoid profanities by using expression like "*piffle, fudge, or heck*" or "circumlocutions like *go to the bathroom* to avoid 'vulgar' or tabooed expressions such as *pee* or *piss*" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 158). There is a common perception that women use less vulgarisms than men, or opt for expletives which are milder or less offensive. (McEnery, 2006; Hughes, 2006; Coates, 2015), and the research behind women's swearing remains inconclusive until this day. For example, Jay (1992, 2006) consistently reports lower frequency in swearing in women's speech, as well as women rating swearing as more offensive, in comparison to men. However, others have been confronting this belief for decades (Vincent, 1982; Risch, 1987; DeKlerk, 1992; Coates, 2004...). The data show that not only are women familiar with and use taboo language, but the frequency does not significantly differ from men, and they seem to move toward "increasing freedom in the use of impolite terms" (DeKlerk, 1992, p. 288). In fact, swearing among young women is increasing on social media, and Thelwall (2008) even predicted that "gender equality in swearing or a reversal in gender patterns for strong swearing, will slowly become more widespread, at least in social network sites" (p. 102).

While the previously mentioned research (Risch, 1987; DeKlerk, 1992) shows that the difference in frequency of swearing between men and women is reducing, the stereotypes and expectations of women and their speech prevails (DeKlerk, 1992; Stapleton, 2003; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003; McEnery, 2005...), which leads to female use of expletives being perceived differently. As DeKlerk (1992) noted, this "discrepancy between reported attitude and actual practice is an instance of a phenomenon that is of general sociolinguistic importance"

(p. 278). There is an evidence that “both men and women still express discomfort at hearing tabooed words from women’s mouths or in mixed company” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 181). Women who swear can be seen as transgressing cultural stereotypes and are therefore subjected to more censure and judgment about their morals (Beers Fägersten & Stapleton, 2017, p. 7-8) and feel a higher degree of guilt (DeKlerk 1991; Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). Some even see the use of profanity as a sexist or patriarchal tool, since the ability to swear and express anger “is seen as heightening someone’s power” while women’s anger is often downplayed as “non-threatening” or “cute” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 182). Finally, as Montell (2019) explored in her book *Wordslut*, vulgar terms are often derived from stereotypes of gender and sexuality and target women or marginalized social groups more harshly. For example, words like *bitch* and *slut* have evolved from neutral terms and only acquired a pejorative meaning when aimed at female addressees (Montell, 2019, p. 37).

This projection of gender into language may be reflected in women’s swearing, for example, there appear to be functions of swearing exclusive to women. Stapleton (2003) explored reasons for using and avoiding swear words in an informal environment of drinking friends and compared their answers based on the speaker’s gender. She found out that while both men and women use swearing for the purpose of “humour/story-telling”, “to create emphasis”, “anger/tension-release” and “to cover fear/vulnerability”, significantly more men said “habit” or “it’s normal/expected”, and only women replied as “to show intimacy/trust and “part of personality” (p. 28). She also found differences in the speakers’ avoidance of swear words, where both men and women replied it’s “inappropriate in certain company”, only men said they “don’t want to appear sexist”, but significantly more women related to the rest of listed reasons: “sexist/offensive”, “gives negative impression”, “shows a limited vocabulary”, and “feel uncomfortable” (p. 30). Sutton (1995) suggested that reason for swearing for women might also be aspirational, imitating not men, but other women who they find ‘cool’ for contesting social norms of femininity with increased swearing. There may also be a difference in specific curse words use depending on speaker’s and addressee’s gender. Thelwall’s (2008) study reported *cunt* and variations of *fuck* were highly associated with men, who use it more often and in greater range of context, while *bitch* was the swear word statistically significant for women.

Still, as Baker (2014) pointed out, the ongoing stigmatization of female use of profanity should not background the fact that real language women and men use has more similarities than differences (p. 24). Similarly to the other discussed features of ‘female’ speech, expletives are no longer perceived exclusively as a sign of masculinity, and “are increasingly being seen

as symbols of power more generally, equally available to both gender groups” (DeKlerk, 1997, p. 157). Exploring the use of swear words in film and television could provide a way to see how women were expected to speak in a certain time, and how it reflects the progress of film industry along with societal changes. In the following subchapter, I will look closely on the role of language in television and film and how treatment of gender and female characters evolved in terms of representation, language, and use of profanity in particular.

2.3 Language in film and TV

The general consensus that linguistics should be concerned with real, natural language (Pennycook, 2007, p. 61) may raise the question why analyse language which is pre-planned and scripted. However, the influence of film and television on how people speak is undeniable, as this media is a part of our daily life and therefore helps to “shape the sociolinguistic environment” (Bednarek, 2010, p. 10). It has been established that watching films and TV series has a significant influence of learners of English, who might imitate the characters way of speaking as their model (Mittmann, 2006, p. 575), and linguists believe Hollywood has been instrumental in contributing to the worldwide dominance of English (Kozloff, 2000; Olson, 2004; Bednarek, 2010). But it also becomes a model of language for native speakers, as the exposure to language on television gives people an idea of how it should be used, and “often works its way into our everyday interactions and discourses” (Beers Fägersten, 2016, p. 6). This exposure has been consistent since the time a television set became a standard part of a household in the 1960s (McEnery, 2006, p. 105), to Netflix reaching over 260 million paid subscribers as of 2024.¹ As Bednarek (2010) puts it, studying scripted dialogues “advances our understanding of TV writers’ internalized beliefs which are transmitted through the created dialogue into globalized community of TV viewers across the world” (p. 63).

Despite its undeniable influence, film and television dialogue remains neglected in linguistic research (Kozloff, 2000; Bednarek, 2010). Existing studies on film and TV are mostly concerned with genre or content analysis (e.g. San Filippo, 2021) and when language is the focus, they deal with non-fictional genres like news (e.g. Bell and Garrett, 1998), or concern a very narrow scope (e.g. an analysis of conversations in the TV show *Friends* by Quaglio, 2009). The undervaluation of film in linguistics is derived from the idea that film is a visual medium, and should be “supplementing action rather than substituting for it” (Katz, 1998, p. 366), the field’s long-standing antipathy to speech in film (Kozloff, 2000, p. 10), and the fact that big

¹ Netflix 2024 Press Release: <https://ir.netflix.net/investor-news-and-events/financial-releases/press-release-details/2024/Netflix-to-Announce-First-Quarter-2024-Financial-Results/default.aspx>. Accessed 25 May 2024.

blockbusters are less likely to focus on dialogue than low budget independent films (Kozloff, 2000, p. 24). Only this century has seen an emerging interest in film and television dialogue in a broader scope, exploring its typical features and effect on the viewer (e.g. Kozloff, 2000; Bednarek, 2010; Forchini, 2012; Beers Fägersten, 2016).

As I mentioned above, the pre-planned, construed language in film is different from ordinary, naturally occurring conversation (Bednarek, 2010, p. 14). Authenticity of television dialogue is a debated topic; while some highlight the realistic aspects of scripted dialogue compared to a real-life spontaneous conversation (Quaglio, 2009; Baker, 2014), it remains true that these dialogues are carefully designed by production teams as a mere imitation of real speech with a target audience in mind, and cannot substitute empirical data for discourse analysis. For example, while speakers in real life should not tell each other what they already know following the conversational maxim of quantity (Grice, 1975), film dialogue often forces to include it for the viewer (Kozloff, 2000, p. 19). Realism can be also disrupted by the scripts which make characters intentionally out of the ordinary or quirky to create drama and humour (Bednarek, 2010), or specifically tailored to fit to the actor's personalities and verbal abilities (Kozloff, 2000, p. 23)

While the action, visuals and cinematic technique are all influential for the viewer's experience, the characters' speech patterns create their linguistic identity, crucial for distinguishing them from each other. Films will commonly create a "certain linguistic community, a norm, and then employ departures from it for special effect" (Kozloff, 2000, p. 84), which then makes the characters memorable for using idiosyncratic phrases or intonation. Since formulations and their timing are pre-planned, it normally results in a smooth delivery stripped of unintentional pauses, hesitations, interruptions, external disruptions, and instances of misspeaking or misunderstandings (Kozloff, 2000, p. 18), unless that is the intention. For example, stuttering of a character can serve to show nervousness, but also their honesty and transparency, while the articulate and polished speakers are often the villains (Kozloff, 2000, p. 78). Finally, genre conventions are also essential for writing film dialogue, "ultimately equally or even more influential than time period" (Kozloff, 2000, p. 26), and some of the features specific for romantic comedies will be discussed in Chapter 2.3.3.

2.3.1 Bad language and censorship in film

Cinematic speech has been heavily influenced by censorship (Kozloff, 2000, p. 22). Films had been banned for obscenity even in the silent film era, and the church was directly involved in drafting of the Motion Picture Production Code (MPPC) and remained active in reviewing

and recommending films even after its abandonment (Jay, 1992, p. 217). The 1930 Production Code signalled a big change, which apart from moral attitudes and plot developments also dealt with language profanity, and stated for example that “where women and children are to see the film, vulgar expressions (and oaths) should be cut to the absolute essentials required by the situation” (MPPC, 1930, p. 329).

With the gradual loosening of restrictions and defiance of the MPPC, censorship in film was revised quite rapidly. During the 1950s, films had been banned solely for using words such as “virgin” or “contraceptive” (Jay, 1992, p. 219), while only 20 years later, Hollywood film dialogue was noticeably more colloquial (Kozloff, 2000, p. 23) and included strong vulgarisms commonly (Jay, 1992, p. 226). In 1992, Timothy Jay conducted a research with films released from 1939 to 1989, and found a significant increase in the use of swear words for both male and female characters, with a great transition at the end of 1960s. While over all time periods, men outswared women by a ratio over 4 to 1, throughout the 1980s, Jay (1992) found a difference in swearing patterns comparing male-lead and female-lead films: women swear more in films with predominantly female main characters (p. 228).

It has been noted that American culture keeps shifting away from formality and the censorship or controversial topics or obscenity is decreasing (Kozloff, 2000). Today, the rating systems provide general guidelines for film categorization, but do not make definitive statements about individual words as censorship schemes did in the past. Moreover, some of the films used for this analysis are rated by the TV parental guidelines, if they first appeared on television or streaming services. The current Motion Picture Association (MPA) and TV rating categories, their meaning and what kind of profanity they include are shown in Table 4.²

² Full list of MPA and TV parental ratings: <https://www.motionpictures.org/film-ratings/>, <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/v-chip-putting-restrictions-what-your-children-watch>. Accessed 2 April 2024

Code	Meaning	May contain
G	General audience – All ages admitted	Snippets of language that go “beyond polite conversation”, but no stronger words
PG	Parental Guidance Suggested – Some material may not be suitable for children	Some profanity, sexually derived words used only as expletives
PG-13	Parents Strongly Cautioned – Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13	More frequent use of strong or sexually-derived word, crude or sexually suggestive dialogue
R	Restricted – Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian	Multiple occurrences or harsh words or sexually explicit language
NC-17	Adults Only	Explicit and frequent use of very strong or sexually related language
TV-PG	Contains material that parents may find unsuitable for younger children	Infrequent coarse language, some sexual content, suggestive dialogue, or moderate violence
TV-MA	Specifically designed to be viewed by adults and therefore may be unsuitable for children under 17	Crude indecent language, explicit sexual activity and graphic violence

Table 4. MPA and TV ratings and their explanations.

While a script is being written, the production is considering the audience’s knowledge and ability to interpret and draw inferences, including their beliefs and values, which are both reflected and influenced by films. Apart from the regulation of obscenity and bad language, American films are often allegoric (Kozloff, 2000), and can include passages on moral or political themes, family values or other ideologies. In fact, the study of representation and ideology is a major concern in media studies (e.g. Kellner, 1990; Butler, 1990). The next chapter deals with how the characters’ language affects the portrayal of gender roles and stereotypes in film and TV.

2.3.2 Treatment of gender and female character in film

The film industry’s goal of attracting a large audience leads to generalization of characters and often implement conventional dialogue. There seems to be wide agreement on the fact that creating characters’ linguistic identity relies heavily on archetypes and simplification (Culpeper, 2001; Bednarek, 2010). Since the focus of this thesis is the language of female characters, it needs to be pointed out that this is especially true in gender representation, as stereotyping female characters is often implemented for the benefit of simplifying their characteristics for the audience, and can result in an extreme polarization of gender roles (Busso & Vignozzi, 2017). As Lakoff (1975) suggested, the women we see on television, “whether we like it or not, form role models for young girls” (p. 83), and many more have emphasised the social, political and cultural significance of film and television, and its influence on our conception of gender (Rey, 2001; Bednarek, 2010; Beers Fägersten & Sveen,

2016). While film dialogue is not the same as unscripted language, it does represent the language that the scriptwriters assume real women and men produce (Rey, 2001, p. 138), and investigating how female characters are treated in the media can be viewed as a mirror of societal changes.

Although scripted dialogue represents sort of a “communicative ideal”, in which all participants have an equal opportunity to speak (Beers Fägersten, 2016, p. 3), among the research conducted about the treatment of gender in film and TV, many noticed how often female characters are silenced or punished for talking (Silverman, 1988; Lawrence, 1990; Kozloff, 2000). Kozloff (2000) goes as far to say that the reason dialogue had been undervalued in film research is because of its association with femininity, since “films that are ‘talky’ come with the connotations ‘trivial’ [...] and ultimately, ‘female’” (p. 13). Because the crucial factors for scripting the language is “whether the genre is primarily addressed to male or female viewers” as well as “how each genre treats its male and female characters” (Kozloff, 2000, p. 137), the language can be seen as a reflection the industry’s unserious attitude to ‘women’s film’.

The evolution of female character itself in film is evident. In the early film era, including the golden age of Hollywood, female characters were often depicted in stereotypical roles, such as damsel in distress or virtuous heroines. While some films feature strong female leads, their dialogue was often scripted in a way that emphasized their femininity and conformity to societal expectations (Silverman, 1988). Television content also showed “a clear preference for middle-class accents and was a monument of safe middle-class respectability” (McEnery, 2006, p. 104), and while working class life and bad language were being represented on TV by the mid-1960s, the censorship was stricter with female characters conforming to the traditional ideas. The first woman to utter the word *fuck* in a mainstream film was Marianne Faithful, as late as in 1968’s *I’ll Never Forget What’s’name* (McEnery, 2006).

Although the late twentieth century films show women in wide range of roles and personalities, attention is still brought to the sexist archetypes and storylines regarding the language of female characters. A corpus study by Busso and Vignozzi (2017) showed women in films tend to talk about “shopping, cleaning, personal care, and family”, while men discuss “money, sports, work, and male friendship” (p. 73). Beers Fägersten and Sveen (2016) analysed four main female characters in the TV show *Sex and the City* and found one of them is actually ‘linguistically male’, because of her diverging linguistic features traditionally associated with men, and point out that the sexual terms such as “the slut” or “the prude” in film are only used to refer to female archetypes (p. 90). While the statistics show that film is still a very male-

dominated industry (Lauzen, 2023), a significant change took place behind the camera as well. For example, French (2021) discusses the phenomenon of ‘female gaze’ in cinema, giving women the opportunity to portray their experience more realistically. This recent development of both gender representation in film and the increasingly liberal use of profanity by women raises the question whether the frequency and range in use of swearwords have also increased in popular films in the past couple of decades.

2.3.3 Romantic comedy

For this research, the language of female characters will be analysed for their use of profanity in romantic comedies. As Henderson (1986) wrote, definition of romantic comedy is difficult because “all Hollywood films (except some war films) have romance and all have comedy” (p. 12). William Shakespeare is sometimes credited as an introducer of the original romantic comedy tropes (White, 2020), and to this day, many modern films use Shakespeare’s plays as inspiration (e.g. *10 Things I Hate About You*, *She’s the Man*, *Anyone but You*). The genre has seen an apparent evolution from the 1930 screwball comedy, 1950s sex comedy, to the ‘neo-traditional’ comedy of the present time (Jeffers McDonald, 2021). The decision to base this study on romantic comedies after the 1980s in particular in this thesis comes from a number of reasons which will be summarized in the following paragraphs.

First of all, although film dialogue provides the data of informal spoken language in action, essential for studying politeness, there is scarcely any research done on contemporary romantic comedy, especially in terms of its language. That is despite some of the screenwriters of the most famous romantic comedies being primarily writers. For example, Syme wrote about Nora Ephron, the author of *When Harry Met Sally* or *Sleepless in Seattle*, that “[her] films are highly literary – many of them are about reading and writing – and they suggest that language is at the heart of romance” (Syme, 2022). The limited discussion of rom-com language mentions general ‘talkativeness’ and enunciation, in that lines of dialogue are delivered fast (Henderson 1986, p. 20), or the importance of speech acts: just like the revelation of secret in crime, the declaration of love in romantic comedy serves as the resolution of the story (Henderson, 1986; Kozloff, 2000).

Secondly, as the genre is primarily targeted at women (San Filippo, 2021), its fluctuating success arguably reflects what the film industry assumes women want and seek from the media. Already in 1986, Henderson commented on the political and social changes which have transformed the romantic comedy since the classical period. He mentioned “doubling of divorce rate”, “rise of the single parent”, “political and social impact of feminist movement and gay

rights movements” and “rise of working women”, but also noticed “how little these changes have made their way into films of any kind” (p. 19). The romantic comedy’s connection to current societal state creates discussion about the rise, fall, but also rebirth of the genre seemingly every few years. Although it has been pronounced ‘dead’ already in the 1970s (Henderson, 1986), romantic comedy had never experienced a bigger success in terms of revenues as between the 1990s and the early 2010s according to Box Office Mojo.³

In recent discourse, it is agreed that since this ‘peak’ in the late 2000s, romantic comedy has become redundant and predictable, with the audience tired of the typical notion of the heroine’s life being incomplete without a relationship, or the relegation of non-white and non-heterosexual characters to supporting roles (Jeffers McDonald, 2021, p. 8). Some of other reasons behind fall of rom-com suggested are that the film industry is focusing on big action blockbusters, and people might prefer TV series, which offer to view relationship as a process, providing a “resource for explorations that go beyond the ‘happily ever after’” (San Filippo, 2021, p. 31). While the 2020s are currently seeing the worst box-office profits in rom-com history, streaming services such as Netflix or Hulu are being credited for a recent rebirth of the genre (Jeffers McDonald, 2021), relying especially on the introduction of wider range of themes, rebranding the contemporary rom-com with diversity, sense of realism and even the possibility to question romance (San Filippo, 2021). As the title of an article by TV critic Jen Chaney for Vulture magazine suggests, “romantic comedy is not dead, just not the same as you remember” (Chaney, 2017).

Finally, the analysis uses films released since the 1980s, in which both men and women are allowed to use swear words without the former censorship, and have the option of expressing love and sexual themes without the innuendos. Looking at the frequency and patterns in female characters’ breaching of politeness in the recent romantic comedies could provide a new look at how the genre and the general trends in women’s language in popular media developed since the previous broader results (e.g. Jay, 1992 mentioned in Chapter 2.3.1).

³ <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/genre/sg2111762689/>. Accessed 19 July 2024.

3. Methodology

The aim of this thesis is to find out whether the frequency and strength of profanity in the language of female film characters have changed in the last 40 years. To conduct the analysis, I will build a corpus consisting of 25 transcripts of romantic comedies released between the years 1984 and 2024. The frequency of female-uttered vulgarisms will be compared in terms of individual decades as well as their potential differences from male speakers. Furthermore, the qualitative aspects of the results such as the strength and linguistic quality of the expressions will be analysed for any changes throughout the years. According to this thesis' hypothesis, use of profanity by female characters in romantic comedies is increasing in frequency and strength, supporting the claims that women's language moves away from the restraints inflicted on them by the societal standards. In this chapter the data collection, methodology and work process will be described.

3.1 Data for the present study

Although there are existing corpora of film screenplays available (such as the TV and Movie corpora from Englishcorpora.org), they lack in the number and diversity of the romantic comedy genre and only incorporate films released before 2018. To make sure the data collection contains examples representative of all chosen time frames including recent years, I decided to use available scripts in order to create a corpus with a selection of romantic comedies relevant for this research. The criteria for selecting films for this study were following:

1. The film is labelled as both "romance" and "comedy", on [imdb.com](https://www.imdb.com)⁴, an online database containing information about films, their ratings and categorization based on keywords. While the chosen films mostly fit into the neo-traditional romantic comedy definition with similar synopses, the selection also reflects the development of the genre by incorporating less traditional themes, especially in the recent ones, and some of the films have elements of drama or fantasy.
2. The film is of American production and all the female main characters are American, to ensure the language for the research will be homogeneous and minimally influenced by other factors besides gender, such as regional differences in vocabulary, the character's first language or accent. American film was chosen for the aforementioned tradition of rom-com in Hollywood and its influence.

⁴ <https://www.imdb.com>. Accessed 22 May 2024.

3. The main characters are adults. This criterion was chosen to restrict the choice from films which take place in high school, as they have their own typical plots and tropes different from the rest of romantic comedies.
4. Year of release. To ensure a sufficient representativeness of the study, I included films from a range of decades from the 1980s up to 2024, and the same number of films from each respective decade.

All the 25 films chosen for the analysis are shown in Table 4 below, which includes their title, year of release, PG/profanity rating and the number of tokens in their transcriptions. All of them are feature films and their length ranges from 90 to 123 minutes. I decided to include films with varying PG ratings to reflect the developing tendencies of profanity inclusion in popular romantic comedy over time. Among the selected films, ratings vary between TV-PG, TV-MA, PG-13 or R in the USA (As explained in Chapter 2.3.1). In addition, their profanity ratings on [imdb.com](https://www.imdb.com) are relatively consistent, ranging from mild and moderate to severe in one case. The films are listed from the oldest, released in the year 1984, to the most recent one, released in 2024. The total number of tokens in the films ranges from 6798 to 17072, and the number of tokens uttered by only female characters ranges from 853 to 8728.

	Title	Year of release	PG rating	Profanity rating	Number of tokens	
					Total	Women
1	Splash	1984	PG	Mild	7404	853
2	Overboard	1987	TV-PG	Moderate	11441	3983
3	Mannequin	1987	TV-PG	Mild	7643	2194
4	Moonstruck	1987	PG	Mild	7985	3978
5	When Harry Met Sally	1989	R	Moderate	11028	4847
6	Pretty Woman	1990	R	Moderate	10988	4689
7	Sleepless in Seattle	1993	TV-PG	Mild	7245	3394
8	While You Were Sleeping	1995	PG	Mild	9951	4909
9	My Best Friend's Wedding	1997	PG-13	Mild	6798	4158
10	You've Got Mail	1998	TV-PG	Mild	11363	5434
11	Sweet Home Alabama	2002	PG-13	Mild	9989	5419
12	How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days	2003	PG-13	Mild	12361	5796
13	Just Like Heaven	2005	PG-13	Mild	10630	5561
14	27 Dresses	2008	PG-13	Mild	12 785	8155
15	The Proposal	2009	PG-13	Mild	11097	6561
16	Crazy Stupid Love	2011	PG-13	Moderate	11729	4156
17	Silver Linings Playbook	2012	R	Severe	17072	3988
18	About Time	2013	R	Moderate	10870	3420
19	The Other Woman	2014	PG-13	Moderate	11190	8728
20	Set it up	2018	TV-MA	Moderate	11999	6329
21	Holidate	2020	TV-MA	Moderate	10031	6094
22	The Happiest Season	2020	PG-13	None/Mild	10324	7788
23	The Hating Game	2021	R	Moderate	11346	6375
24	Anyone but You	2023	R	Moderate	9 566	4958
25	The Idea of You	2024	R	Mild	8807	5046

Table 5. Data for the present study.

3.2 Corpus building and annotation

The corpus was made from film transcriptions available online for research purposes (e.g. Springfield! Springfield!⁵). It is important to note the films' transcriptions often differ from the original screenplays, and the data used for the analysis are the final scripts released in the films. I made some edits to the transcripts manually to fit the plain text format for EXMARaLDA corpus tools (Schmidt & Wörner, 2014), Partitur Editor and EXAKT. The format necessary for the import is "SPEAKER: Utterance", with each utterance on a separate line. The texts were then imported to Partitur Editor, which allows annotation of the speakers' attributes, including gender. After annotating the transcripts, I used EXAKT to generate corpora for films from each decade and search for the queries.

⁵ <https://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk>. Accessed 2 April 2024.

Table 6 shows an overview of the corpora and their sizes.

Corpus	Number of tokens	
	All speakers	Female characters
1980s	45 501	15855
1990s	46 345	22584
2000s	56 862	31492
2010s	62 860	26621
2020s	50 074	30261
Total	261 642	126813

Table 6. Overview of the corpora and their sizes.

The whole corpus contains 261 642 tokens, 126 813 out of which is uttered by female characters. There are 15 855 tokens by female characters in the films released in the 1980s, 22 584 in the 1990s, 31 492 in the 2000s, 26 621 in the 2010s, and 30 261 in the 2020s.

3.3 Corpus analysis

To decide which words to search for in the corpus, I consulted a list of 788 English swearwords and their variations provided by Wang (2014), and selected 9 words: *hell*, *damn*, *shit*, *fuck*, *bitch*, *screw*, *ass*, *slut* and *whore*. I did not include words from the list which did not appear in the corpus, such as *fag* or *nigga*. Due to the limited scope of the thesis, I also decided to omit offensive or taboo words which appeared less frequently in the corpus and weren't uttered by female characters more than 10 times, namely *jerk*, *dick*, *crap*, *cock*, *moron*, *cunt*, *idiot*, *pussy*, *piss* and *bastard*. Moreover, I will be using a typology of vulgarisms by McEnery (2006, p. 25-30), which was presented in Chapter 2.1.3, for the qualitative part of the analysis. The list of the selected words, their variations and strength is shown in Table 7. In some cases, different variations of one expression are categorized with different strength, which will be taken into consideration in the qualitative analysis of the corpus findings. Otherwise, I will consider variations of the expression to have the same strength as the original word.

Word	Variations included	Strength
Hell	hellish, halva	Very mild
Damn	damned, goddamn, goddamned	Very mild
Shit	shitting, shitty, shits, batshit, bullshit	Mild
Fuck	fucking, fucked, fucks, fuckboy, fucker	Strong
	motherfucker	Very strong
Bitch	bitches, bitchy, bitching	Mild
	son-of-a-bitch, sons-of-bitches	Very mild
Ass	arse	Mild
	asshole, assholes, arsehole	Moderate
Screw	screws, screwed, screwing	Mild
Whore	whores	Moderate
Slut	sluts, slutty	Mild

Table 7. Expressions of profanity chosen for the analysis, their variations and strength.

I searched for vulgarisms in utterances of all speakers but focus the study on the development of female characters' use of profanity, while also analysing the changes in comparison to male characters in some cases. To define vulgar language, I used the classification by McEnery (2006), which mostly includes their literal use depending on the context. I will include all cases as classified by McEnery (see Table 2), such as personal insults (1), literal use with taboo referent (2) or adverbial boosters (3). There were expressions in the corpus which do not fit into any of the categories, but were included in the analysis because of the use of a taboo referent, for example use of a taboo word as a compliment (4).

(1) Leave me alone, you **bitch!** (*My Best Friend's Wedding*)

(2) I want to **fuck** this pizza. (*Set it Up*)

(3) He's **fucking** great. (*Anyone but you*)

(4) And now I'm seeing this badass **bitch**. She's a journalist! (*Set it Up*)

I did not include vulgarisms which were only mouthed, inaudible, replaced by euphemisms, or cases of non-offensive literal use (5) and multiple repeatings of the word for comedic effect, such as in games (6) and singing songs (7).

(5) I swear, if his head wasn't **screwed** on, we'd use it as a bowling ball. (*Anyone but You*)

(6) A little game of **Bullshit**. Want to join us? (*How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*)

(7) To the walls, to the walls. To the sweat drip down my balls. Now all you **bitches** crawl. All skeet, skeet, mother... (*The Proposal*)

Finally, to identify whether the change between time periods was statistically significant, I used the corpus calculator Calc⁶, which allows comparison of word frequencies across corpora. Moreover, I conducted a log-linear regression analysis using the software Jamovi (Jamovi, 2022), which allows to test whether certain variables, such as gender, have a statistically significant impact on the frequencies.

3.4 Limitations

This study not without its limitations, which will be addressed in these paragraphs. Firstly, due to the scope of this diploma thesis, the analysis only contains 25 films, and the results would be more reliable if more films from each decade were included. Although the films were chosen based on the listed criteria, the specific selection could pose other limiting

⁶ <https://www.korpus.cz/calculator/>. Accessed 2 April 2024.

factors, such as the varying number of tokens in each film. Moreover, due to the changing standard in inclusion of profanity in popular films, the variation of PG rating in each decade is not consistent. Finally, it needs to be said that while I intentionally chose mainstream American romantic comedies, this genre usually lacks in diversity of characters. Most of the main characters in these films are white and middle-class, and only one contains a non-heterosexual central couple, making it difficult to generalize its representation of women. As was mentioned earlier, while studying film language gives an idea of how the characters are perceived by authors and it influences how people speak, the data is taken from scripted language, which cannot substitute or make universal conclusions about how people speak in real life. The changes in women's swearing cannot be expected to be dramatic, since as Jay (1992) pointed out in his study of vulgarisms in films, "there is only so many swear words that can be uttered in a 90-minute popular film" (p. 226).

There are many additional aspects about female film characters' language and profanity in particular, which would benefit from further analysis. Firstly, the findings could be replicated with a wider scope of films and vulgarisms, and the use of euphemisms or avoidance of profanity could be taken into consideration. Results concerning American romantic comedies could be compared to their British counterparts, but also to films across other countries and languages. Apart from gender, the use of profanity could also be analysed in the terms of the characters' age, ethnicity or sexual orientation, as well as these variables' role in speaker-addressee direction. Moreover, it would be interesting to analyse the specific archetypes of female characters typical for romantic comedies, such as the main lead, their best friend, parent, boss, or the antagonist, and how their use of profanity differs. Finally, as was suggested by Jay (1992), a meta-analysis of the same linguistic features across films of different genres would provide a comprehensive verdict on the topic.

4. Results

4.1 General quantitative results

A total 777 of the selected expressions of profanity were found in the corpus, which is 2.97 vulgarisms per 1000 words. 314 (2.48 per 1000 words) of those were uttered by female characters, which means 40.4% of total vulgarisms in the films were uttered by women. The findings separated into relevant decades are shown in Table 8 along with the relative frequency of vulgarisms per 1000 words in each decade, and the percentage of vulgarisms uttered by female characters out of the total number.

Decade	Number of vulgarisms				% uttered by women
	Women		All speakers		
	Absolute frequency	Per 1000 words	Absolute frequency	Per 1000 words	
1980s	14	0.88	80	1.75	17.7
1990s	24	1.06	61	1.31	39.7
2000s	54	1.71	132	2.32	40.9
2010s	109	4.09	285	4.53	38.2
2020s	113	3.73	219	4.37	51.8
Total	314	2.48	777	2.97	40.4

Table 8. Frequency of vulgarisms in each corpus.

The results show that there was a gradual increase in the number of vulgarisms uttered by women in American romantic comedies throughout the past 5 decades. There were 80 vulgarisms (1.75 per 1000 words) found in romantic comedies released in the 1980s, but only 14 (0.88 per 1000 words) were uttered by women, which is 17.7% from the total occurrences, the lowest ratio in the whole corpus.

The lowest number of vulgarisms by all speakers, 61 (1.31 per 1000 words) were found in films from the 1990s. While the total amount of profane expressions lowered in this decade, the number of vulgarisms uttered by women increased to 24 (1.06 per 1000 words), although not significantly according to the chi-square test ($X^2 = 0.3046$, $p = 0.581$). The ratio of vulgarisms in the films which were uttered by women also increased to 39.7%.

In the 2000s, the number of vulgarisms uttered both by female and male speakers doubled, and 54 (1.71 per 1000 words) out of the 132 words were uttered by women, which means the relative frequency for female characters increased again, in this case significantly ($X^2 = 3.882$, $p = 0.049$), and women uttered 40.9% of the total number of vulgarisms.

The highest number of vulgarisms in total and by both genders were found in films from the 2010s, with 109 (4.09 per 1000 words) out of the total 285 (4.53 per 1000 words) uttered by female characters, which means that 2000s to 2010s saw the most statistically significant

frequency increase between two consecutive decades ($X^2 = 29.2102$, $p < 0.001$). However, the ratio of vulgarisms uttered by women from the total occurrences lowered to 38.2%.

In the most recent films, released after the year 2020, number of found vulgarisms uttered by women increased again to 113, but their relative frequency, 3.73 per 1000 words, is lower than in the previous decade, although this decrease is not statistically significant ($X^2 = 0.473$, $p = 0.492$). The total number of vulgarisms also lowered to 219 (4.37 per 1000 words). According to the results, 2020s is the only decade where women outswear men, uttering 51.8% out of the total finds. 2020s is also the only decade in which female uttered more tokens than male characters in total. This suggest there has been a change in how female film characters are perceived in terms of strength of their language in comparison to male ones and how this perception is changing over time.

The visualisation of development of female characters' use of profanity in the films (per 1000 words) throughout the five decades is shown in Figure 1.

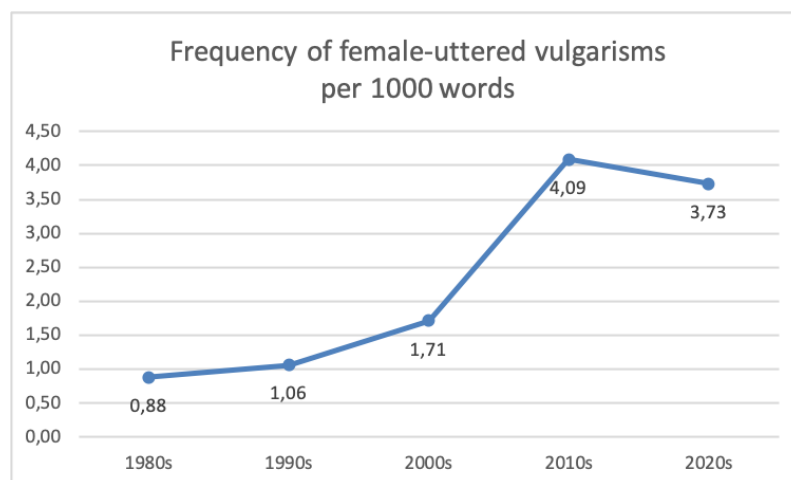


Figure 1. Frequency of female-uttered vulgarisms in every decade.

The overall increase observed from 14 (0.88 per 1000 words) to 113 (3.73 per 1000 words) expression of profanity from the 1980s to 2020s was statistically significant as indicated by the chi-square test ($X^2 = 30.7958$, $p < 0.001$). A log-linear regression confirms that there is a significant decade effect on the vulgarisms' frequency (Estimate: 2.088, $p < 0.001$). The results provide evidence for the hypothesis that female characters swear significantly more in recent romantic comedies.

While the overall number of vulgarisms increased from 80 (1.75 per 1000 words) to 219 (2.97 per 1000 words), which is also statistically significant ($X^2 = 52.2846$, $p < 0.001$), the results suggest that the changes in frequency differed for male characters. The comparison of female and male characters' development in profanity use is shown in Table 9 and Figure 2.

	Frequency of vulgarisms per 1000 words based on gender				
	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s
Women	0.88	1.06	1.71	4.09	3.73
Men	2.23	1.56	3.07	4.86	5.35

Table 9. Frequency of vulgarisms per 1000 words based on speaker's gender.

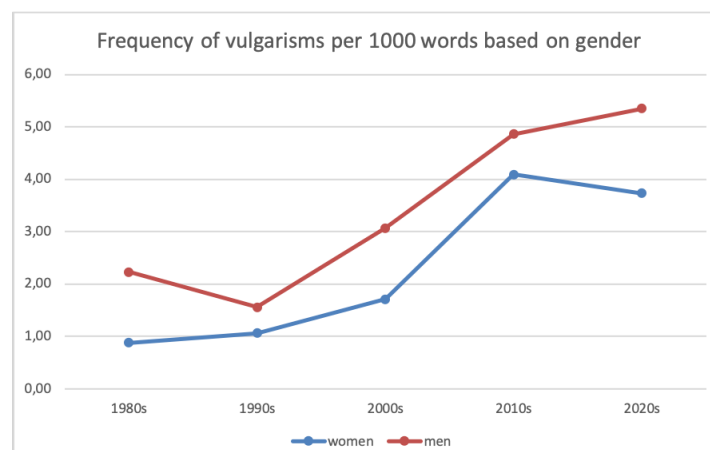


Figure 2. Frequency of vulgarisms per 1000 words based on speaker's gender.

While women's use of profanity increased gradually until the 2010s and then lowered in the last decade, men saw a non-significant decrease from 2.23 vulgarisms per 1000 words in the 1980s ($X^2 = 3.0677$, $p = 0.08$) to 1.56 per 1000 words in 1990s, and a slight, also non-significant increase from 4.86 in the 2010s to 5.35 in the 2020s ($X^2 = 0.06229$, $p = 0.43$). The percentage of total number of vulgarisms in the films uttered by female characters also increased from the earliest to the latest decade, which is visualized in Figure 3.

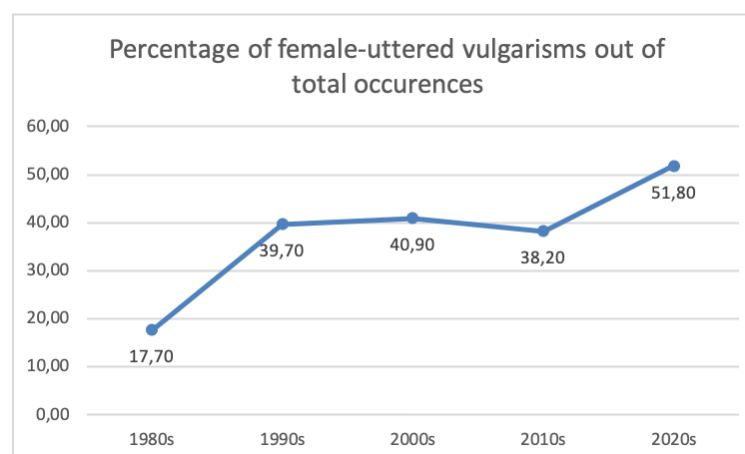


Figure 3. Percentage of female-uttered vulgarisms out of total occurrences.

According to a log-linear regression, male characters are more likely to use vulgarisms than female characters, as indicated by the positive and significant coefficient (Estimate: 1.551, $p < 0.001$), but this difference is decreasing towards the recent films, and is the smallest in the 2020s (Estimate: -1.615, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that while the increase in the use of vulgarisms is significant for both genders, it is more pronounced for female characters. It also needs to be

pointed out that the ratio of tokens uttered by women in the films from these decades increased significantly, which means men speak less in the recent films, but make up for it with swearing more often.

Table 10 presents the detailed findings of profanity in each film uttered by female speakers and by all speakers with relative value to the number of tokens in each film.

	Film	PG rating	Number of vulgarisms			
			Women		All speakers	
			Absolute frequency	Per 1000 words	Absolute frequency	Per 1000 words
1	Splash	PG	0	0	13	1.76
2	Overboard	TV-PG	4	1	32	2.79
3	Mannequin	TV-PG	3	1.37	19	2.49
4	Moonstruck	PG	4	1	8	1
5	When Harry Met Sally	R	3	0.62	8	0.72
6	Pretty Woman	R	11	2.35	25	2.28
7	Sleepless in Seattle	TV-PG	0	0	3	0.41
8	While You Were Sleeping	PG	1	0.2	8	0.8
9	My Best Friend's Wedding	PG-13	9	2.16	14	2.06
10	You've Got Mail	TV-PG	3	0.55	11	0.97
11	Sweet Home Alabama	PG-13	13	2.4	39	3.9
12	How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days	PG-13	7	1.21	30	2.43
13	Just Like Heaven	PG-13	8	1.44	20	1.88
14	27 Dresses	PG-13	18	2.21	24	1.88
15	The Proposal	PG-13	8	1.22	19	1.71
16	Crazy Stupid Love	PG-13	18	4.33	38	3.24
17	Silver Linings Playbook	R	33	8.27	120	7.03
18	About Time	R	6	1.75	20	1.84
19	The Other Woman	PG-13	41	4.7	66	5.9
20	Set it up	TV-MA	11	1.74	41	3.42
21	Holidate	TV-MA	41	6.73	69	6.88
22	The Happiest Season	PG-13	5	0.64	9	0.88
23	The Hating Game	R	26	4.08	36	3.17
24	Anyone but You	R	37	7.46	90	9.4
25	The Idea of You	R	4	0.79	15	1.7
Total			314	2.48	777	2.97

Table 10. Number of vulgarisms in each film uttered by women and in total.

The detailed overview suggests there is a gradual increase in the number of vulgarisms in romantic comedies in female characters' utterances. The films with the highest relative frequency of vulgarisms uttered by women are *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012) with 8.27 vulgarisms per 1000 words, followed by *Anyone but You* (2023) with 7.46 vulgarisms per 1000 words and *Holidate* (2020) with 6.73 vulgarisms per 1000 words. There are two films which have no occurrences of swear words by women, *Splash* (1984) and *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993). In the majority of the films, female characters swear less than male ones. Out of the 25 films,

there are 6 in which women utter relatively higher number of vulgarisms than men, and 4 of these were released in the latter half of the five decades.

To see whether the range of expressions used in the films changed, Table 11 shows the types of vulgarisms uttered by female characters in every decade.

Decade	Types of vulgarisms
1980s	7
1990s	8
2000s	9
2010s	9
2020s	8

Table 11. Types of female-uttered vulgarisms in every decade.

Since the results only contain the 9 most frequent vulgarisms in the whole corpus, there is effectively no difference in the range of vulgarisms between films from different decade. The number varies from 7 in films from the 1980s to all 9 of the most frequent expressions found in 2000s and 2010s.

4.2 Quantitative results for individual vulgarisms

The absolute number of occurrences of individual expressions (Abs) used by female characters in each decade and their relative frequency per 10 000 words (Rel) can be seen in Table 12.

	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s	Total						
Tokens by women	15 855	22 584	31 492	26621	30 261	126 813						
Word	Frequency of female-uttered expressions in each decade per 10 000 words											
	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel
Shit	1	0.63	7	3.1	10	3.18	38	14.27	22	7.27	78	6.15
Fuck	2	1.26	3	1.32	1	0.32	22	8.26	52	17.18	80	6.31
Hell	5	3.15	5	2.21	12	3.81	3	1.13	8	2.64	33	2.6
Ass	0	0	4	1.77	15	4.76	19	7.14	8	2.64	46	3.63
Damn	2	1.26	1	0.44	4	1.27	4	1.5	5	1.65	16	1.26
Bitch	1	0.63	1	0.44	5	1.59	2	0.75	11	3.64	20	1.58
Screw	1	0.63	1	0.44	1	0.32	7	2.63	0	0	10	0.79
Slut	2	1.26	2	0.89	4	1.27	7	2.63	4	1.32	19	1.5
Whore	0	0	0	0	2	0.64	7	2.63	3	0.99	12	0.95
Total	14	8.83	24	10.6	54	17.15	109	40.94	113	37.34	314	24.76

Table 12. Frequency of individual vulgarisms uttered by female characters in each decade.

Because of the significant increase in films released after 2020, *fuck* was the most frequently used vulgarism for female characters overall with 80 occurrences (6.15 per 10 000 words) in the corpus, however, it was only the most frequent once in the most recent decade, with 17.18 occurrences per 10 000 words. The second most frequently found expression was *shit* with 78

occurrences (6.15 per 10 000 words) overall, which made it the most popular vulgarism of the 1990s and 2010s. *Ass* appeared 46 times (3.63 per 10 000 words) in total, and was the most popular vulgarism of the 2000s. The most frequent vulgarism of the 1980s was *hell*, which appeared 3.63 times per 10 000 words in total. *Bitch* appeared 1.58 times per 10 000 words in total, *slut* 1.5 times per 10 000 words, *damn* 1.26 times per 10 000 words, *whore* 0.95 times per 10 000 words and *screw* 0.79 times per 10 000 words. Most of the expressions saw an increase in frequency from the earliest to the latest decade, most significantly *fuck* (statistically significant with $X^2 = 9.2001$, $p = 0.002$) and *shit* (statistically significant with $X^2 = 22.5518$, $p < 0.001$), followed by *ass* and *bitch*. There was no significant decrease in the use of any swear word in women's speech.

To find out whether the preference of specific expressions differs based on the character's gender, Table 13 shows total occurrences of each word by both female and male characters and all speakers along with their relative frequencies per 10 000 words and their percentage out of total occurrences across the corpora.

Word	Frequency of individual vulgarisms in all films								
	Women			Men			Total		
	Abs	Rel	%	Abs	Rel	%	Abs	Rel	%
Shit	78	6.15	24.8	133	9.86	28.7	211	8.06	27.2
Fuck	80	6.31	25.5	108	8.01	23.3	188	7.19	24.2
Hell	33	2.6	10.5	85	6.3	18.4	118	4.51	15.2
Ass	46	3.63	14.6	45	3.34	9.7	91	3.48	11.7
Damn	16	1.26	5.1	45	3.34	9.7	61	2.33	7.9
Bitch	20	1.58	6.4	22	1.63	4.8	42	1.61	5.4
Screw	10	0.79	3.2	18	1.34	3.9	28	1.07	3.6
Slut	19	1.5	6.1	4	0.3	0.9	23	0.88	3
Whore	12	0.95	3.8	3	0.22	0.6	15	0.57	1.9
Total	314	24.76	100	463	34.34	100	777	29.7	100

Table 13. Number of individual vulgarisms uttered by all speakers.

The table shows that the order of the most frequently used vulgarisms differs for male and female characters. The most popular swear word for men and by all speakers in total was *shit*, which made up 27% of all vulgarisms in the corpus, followed by *fuck*, *hell*, *ass* and *damn*. The largest difference between the genders' word choice is in *damn*, *shit* and *hell*, which are all used more frequently by men. The only words uttered more frequently by female characters are *slut* and *whore*. These results suggest some of the expressions of profanity in film are more likely to be uttered by female characters.

Tables 15-18 along with Figures 4-7 show the development of the four most frequent vulgarisms throughout all decades. The results compare expressions uttered by both female and male characters to see whether there is a difference in the pattern based on the speaker's gender.

The results for the most frequent vulgarism used by female characters, *fuck*, is shown in Table 14.

Corpus	Frequency of <i>fuck</i>					
	Women		Men		All speakers	
	Absolute frequency	Per 10 000 words	Absolute frequency	Per 10 000 words	Absolute frequency	Per 10 000 words
1980s	2	1.26	2	0.67	4	0.88
1990s	3	1.32	1	0.42	4	0.86
2000s	1	0.32	0	0	1	0.18
2010s	22	8.26	61	16.83	83	13.2
2020s	52	17.18	44	22.21	96	19.17
Total	80	6.31	108	8.01	188	7.19

Table 14. Frequency of *fuck* in every decade uttered by all speakers.

The use of *fuck* significantly increased from the oldest to the most recent films for both men ($X^2 = 59.2615$, $p < 0.001$) and women ($X^2 = 9.2001$, $p = 0.002$). While it was used rarely in the 1980s, 1990s, and only once in the 2000s, where it was used more often by women, *fuck* became one of the most popular vulgarisms in the two recent decades, in which it was uttered more frequently by men.

Shit was the second most frequent vulgarism used by female characters, and the most frequent one for men and all speakers in total, and the overview of its frequency in every decade can be seen in Table 16.

Corpus	Frequency of <i>shit</i>					
	Women		Men		All speakers	
	Absolute frequency	Per 10 000 words	Absolute frequency	Per 10 000 words	Absolute frequency	Per 10 000 words
1980s	1	0.63	20	6.75	21	4.62
1990s	7	3.10	9	3.79	16	3.45
2000s	10	3.18	18	7.09	28	4.92
2010s	38	14.27	56	15.45	94	14.95
2020s	22	7.27	30	15.14	52	10.38
Total	78	6.15	133	9.86	211	8.06

Table 15. Frequency of *shit* in every decade uttered by all speakers.

The frequency of *shit* increased for both genders, and it was used more frequently by men in every decade. Again, this vulgarism gained more popularity in the 2010s, but unlike *fuck*, its frequency decreased in the 2020s. The increase of *shit* from the oldest to the latest decade was

also statistically significant for both men ($X^2 = 8.2882$, $p = 0.004$), and women ($X^2 = 22.5518$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 16 shows the frequency of *ass*, the third most frequent vulgarism uttered by female characters per 10 000 words, and the fourth more frequent by all speakers.

Corpus	Frequency of <i>ass</i>					
	Women		Men		All speakers	
	Absolute frequency	Per 10 000 words	Absolute frequency	Per 10 000 words	Absolute frequency	Per 10 000 words
1980s	0	0	6	2.02	6	1.32
1990s	4	1.77	4	1.68	8	1.73
2000s	15	4.76	9	3.55	24	4.22
2010s	19	7.14	17	4.69	36	5.73
2020s	8	2.64	9	4.54	17	3.39
Total	46	3.63	45	3.38	91	3.48

Table 16. Frequency of *ass* in every decade uttered by all speakers.

The frequency of *ass* increased for both genders from the earliest to the latest decade. This increase was only statistically significant for female speakers ($X^2 = 4.1923$, $p = 0.041$), while it was insignificant for men ($X^2 = 2.4847$, $p = 0.115$). The results show that *ass* was used most frequently in the 2010s, but decreased again in the 2020s. It was used more frequently by men in the 1980s and 2020s, but women used it more frequently in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s.

Table 17 shows the frequency of *hell*, which was the fourth most frequent vulgarism for women, and third most frequent for men and all speakers.

Corpus	Frequency of <i>hell</i>					
	Women		Men		All speakers	
	Absolute frequency	Per 10 000 words	Absolute frequency	Per 10 000 words	Absolute frequency	Per 10 000 words
1980s	5	3.15	15	5.06	20	4.4
1990s	5	2.21	8	3.37	13	2.81
2000s	12	3.81	33	13	45	7.91
2010s	3	1.13	18	4.97	21	3.34
2020s	8	2.64	11	5.55	19	3.79
Total	33	2.6	85	6.3	118	4.51

Table 17. Frequency of *hell* in every decade uttered by all speakers.

There was no statistically significant change in the frequency of *hell* from the earliest to the most recent films, while it slightly increased for men ($X^2 = 0.0548$, $p = 0.81$) and decreased for women ($X^2 = 0.095$, $p = 0.757$). However, the use of *hell* noticeably peaked in the 2000s for both male and female characters. In all decades, men used this vulgarism more often than women.

The comparison of changes across the decades in the four most frequently used vulgarisms by female and male characters per 10 000 words can be seen in Figures 4-7.

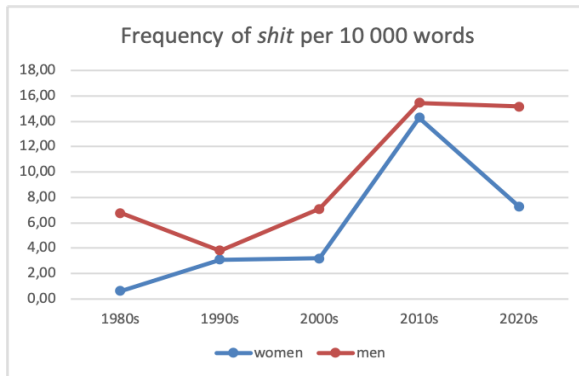


Figure 4. Frequency of *shit* per 10 000 words.

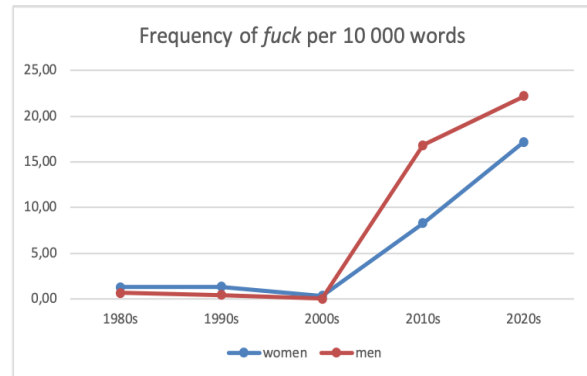


Figure 5. Frequency of *fuck* per 10 000 words.

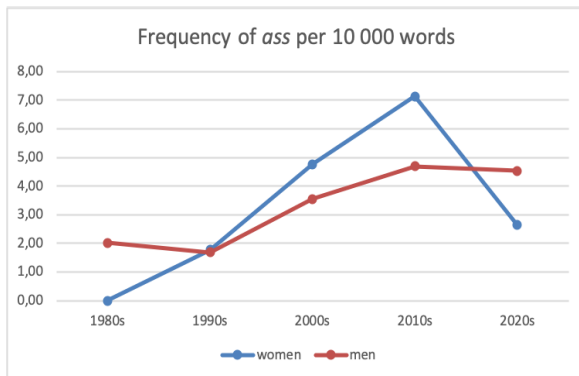


Figure 6. Frequency of *ass* per 10 000 words.

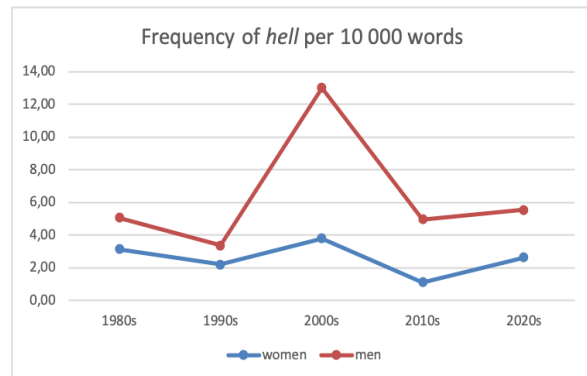


Figure 7. Frequency of *hell* per 10 000 words.

The figures show that the development in the frequency differs based on the specific expression. While the use of *fuck* increased gradually for both female and male characters, *shit* and *ass* saw an increase since 2010s and 2000s respectively, followed by a decrease in the 2020s, which was more significant for women in both cases. The frequency of *hell* peaked in the 2000s, more dramatically for men, and stayed relatively similar in the rest of the decades. The differences between the patterns in use of the *shit*, *fuck*, *ass* and *hell* can also be related to their varying value of strength or offensiveness, which is further explored in the qualitative part of this analysis.

4.3 Qualitative analysis

According to the previously shown results, while 2000s was the decade with the least uses of the word *fuck*, it was also the one with most uses of *hell* both by women and in total. This suggests the strength or offensiveness value of the expressions plays a role in their frequency, which will be explored in the following chapter. Considering the dynamic character of swear words, it also need to be said that the difference between their strength could be blurry at times,

and the actual impact on the addressee may differ based on context. For example, while the terms *slut* and *whore* could be seen as semantically similar, *slut* was more often connected to non-offensive usage, such as in the phrase *slutty dress*, or even used as a compliment, which suggest it is less offensive than *whore*. The pragmatic functions of the vulgarisms in the corpus will be further discussed in Chapter 4.3.2. The typologies used for the qualitative analysis are the ones made by McEnery (2006), which were described in Chapter 2.3.1.

4.3.1 Strength

As was presented in Table 7, some of the expressions have multiple variations classified with varying strength, which is taken into consideration in this part of the thesis. The expressions in the examples below, *hell* (1), *damn* (2), and *son-of-a-bitch* (3) were categorized as very mild vulgarisms. In these cases, the expressions are not seen as very offensive or controversial to use, while still expressing a strong emotion, and are not considered suitable for a ‘polite’ conversation. They were mostly used as expletives or as an intensification of the utterance, not referring to a specific person or a thing.

(1) What the **hell** does that have to do with anything? (*When Harry Met Sally*)

(2) Answer this, **damn** it! I’m in a meltdown! (*My Best Friend’s Wedding*)

(3) Ow! Son of a **bitch**! Who shoots someone in the back? (*Hating Game*)

The largest number of the selected expressions were categorized as mild, namely *shit* (4), *bitch* (5), *ass* (6), *screw* (7) and *slut* (8). Although some of them were also used as expletives, the referent is more commonly defined in these cases in comparison to the very mild terms.

(4) You’re choosing to be a piece of **shit**. (*Set It Up*)

(5) You go after him, you little **bitch**. (*Sweet Home Alabama*)

(6) It’s gonna suck **ass**. I can’t wait to read it. (*Set It Up*)

(7) He must have literally **screwed** your brains out! (*The Other Woman*)

(8) Maybe I was a **slut**. A lonely, home-wrecking **slut**. (*Just Like Heaven*)

Asshole, a variation of *ass*, and *whore*, were categorized as moderate vulgarisms, perhaps because of the aggressive nature of the terms, which are usually used as insults referring to a specific person, like in Examples 9 and 10, and they are considered more offensive to the addressee than the mild expressions. Examples 8 and 10 also show that the women in the films tend to use these particular terms in a self-deprecating way, even more so than as an insult of another person.

(9) You're an **asshole**. (27 Dresses)

(10) You're his soulmate. I'm a **whore**. You must hate me so much. (*The Other Woman*)

The word *fuck* was employed in a variety of functions in the corpus, for example, it is used as a cursing expletive and intensification an expression within one segment in Example 11. While the parental guidelines distinguish sexually implicit and explicit use of profanity in films, *fuck* is generally considered more offensive than the previous expressions, and it is categorized as a strong vulgarity.

(11) **Fuck** you! You shut the **fuck** up! (*Silver Linings Playbook*)

The category of very strong vulgarisms also only contained one term, *motherfucker*, shown in Example 12, where it was used as a general expletive to convey the character's stress and anger in the situation. It is however more likely than *fuck* to refer to a specific person rather than as a general expletive, which is perhaps why it is rated higher on the scale of offensiveness.

(12) Mother**fuck**er! Why? Why? (27 Dresses)

Table 18 shows the absolute number of vulgarisms uttered by female characters and their relative frequency per 10 000 words in each decade based on their relative strength and the percentage of each category out of the total 314 female-uttered vulgarisms.

Decade	Frequency of vulgarisms by female characters based on strength									
	Very mild		Mild		Moderate		Strong		Very strong	
	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel
1980s	7	4.41	5	3.15	0	0	2	1.26	0	0
1990s	6	2.66	14	6.2	1	0.44	3	1.33	0	0
2000s	16	5.08	33	10.48	4	1.27	0	0	1	0.32
2010s	7	2.63	58	21.79	22	8.26	22	8.26	0	0
2020s	17	5.62	35	11.57	9	2.97	52	17.18	0	0
Total	53	4.18	145	11.43	36	2.84	79	6.23	1	0.08
%	16.9		46.2		11.5		25.2		0.3	

Table 18. Number of female-uttered vulgarisms in each decade based on their strength.

The results show that overall, the 46.2% of vulgarisms uttered by female characters were mild with 145 occurrences (11.43 per 10 000 words), followed by strong which appeared 79 times (6.23 per 10 000 words), and make up 25.2% of all expressions. There were 53 very mild vulgarisms (11.43 per 10 000 words) and 36 moderate vulgarisms (6.23 per 10 000 words) in total. The only expression categorized as very strong (*motherfucker*) was uttered one time by a female character in the whole corpus. Apart from the very strong ones, vulgarisms of all categories had seen an increase from the earliest to the last decade. Strong vulgarisms saw the

most dramatic increase, statistically significant as indicated by the chi-square test ($X^2 = 22.5518$, $p < 0.001$). The increase was also measure as statistically significant for mild ($X^2 = 6.496$, $p = 0.004$), and moderate vulgarisms ($X^2 = 4.7164$, $p = 0.03$), but was not statistically significant for very mild ones ($X^2 = 4.1923$, $p = 0.041$). Despite of these significant interactions between some of the decades and strength categories, the log-linear regression test does not indicate there is any consistently significant role of strength on the frequencies across different decades, as most of the effect have a p-value of < 0.05 . The development in use of every strength category uttered by female characters per 10 000 words over time is visualized in Figure 8.

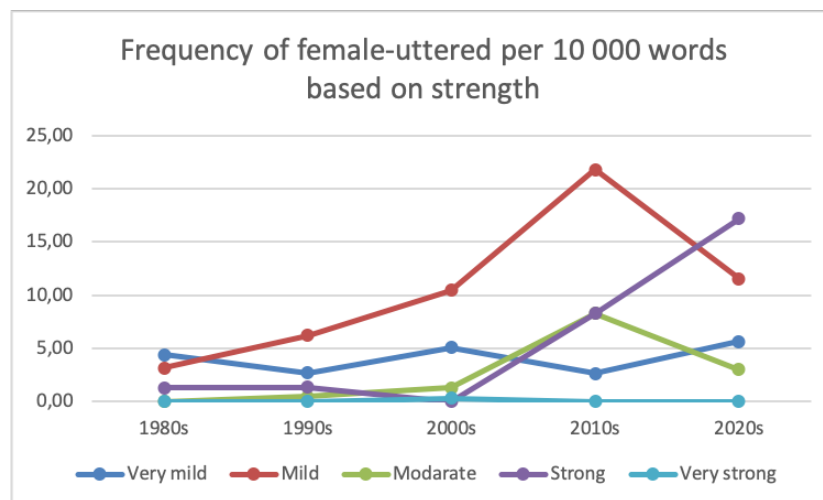


Figure 8. Frequency of female-uttered vulgarisms based on strength.

Women preferred very mild vulgarisms in films released in the 1980s, and mild vulgarisms in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. 2010s present a change in the previous pattern. While mild vulgarisms are still the most frequent, there is a slight decrease in very mild ones and a statistically significant increase in mild, moderate and strong expressions. In films released after the year 2020, strong vulgarisms are most popular. This provides evidence for the hypothesis that female characters use stronger expletives in recent romantic comedies.

Table 19 presents the detailed frequencies of vulgarisms of all categories of strength in every decade uttered by female characters in absolute number of uses and their relative frequency per 10 000 words.

Word	Frequency of vulgarisms per 10 000 words based on their strength											
	1980s		1990s		2000s		2010s		2020s		Total	
	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel
Very mild												
Hell	5	3.15	5	2.21	12	3.81	3	1.13	8	2.64	33	2.6
Damn	2	1.26	1	0.44	4	1.27	4	1.5	5	1.65	16	1.26
Son-of-a-bitch	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1.32	4	0.32
Mild												
Shit	1	0.63	7	3.1	10	3.18	38	14.27	22	7.27	78	6.15
Bitch	1	0.63	1	0.44	5	1.59	2	0.75	7	2.31	16	1.26
Ass	0	0	3	1.33	12	4.13	4	1.5	2	0.66	22	1.73
Screw	1	0.63	1	0.44	1	0.32	7	2.63	0	0	10	0.79
Slut	2	1.26	2	0.89	4	1.27	7	2.63	4	1.32	19	1.5
Moderate												
Asshole	0	0	1	0.63	2	1.26	15	5.63	6	3.78	24	1.89
Whore	0	0	0	0	2	0.64	7	2.63	3	0.99	12	0.95
Strong												
Fuck	2	1.26	3	1.33	0	0	22	8.26	52	17.18	79	6.23
Very strong												
Motherfucker	0	0	0	0	1	0.32	0	0	0	0	1	0.08

Table 19. Frequency of individual expressions uttered by female characters based on their strength.

Out of the 3 vulgarisms classified as very mild, the most frequent was *hell* with 2.6 occurrences per 10 000 words. There were 5 mild vulgarisms uttered by women, and the most frequent one was *shit*, which appeared 6.15 times per 10 000 words. The most frequent moderate vulgarism was *asshole* (variation of *ass*) with 1.89 occurrences per 10 000 words. The only strong vulgarism in the corpus was *fuck*, which was uttered 6.23 times per 10 000 words, and the only very strong vulgarism, *motherfucker* (variation of *fuck*), appeared 0.08 times per 10 000 words.

Again, I decided to compare these findings with the same expressions used by male characters to see if there is a difference between the genders' preference of specific vulgarisms based on their strength. Table 20 shows total occurrences of words in each category based on the characters' gender.

Strength	Frequency of total vulgarisms by all speakers based on strength					
	Women		Men		All speakers	
	Absolute frequency	Per 10 000 words	Absolute frequency	Per 10 000 words	Absolute frequency	Per 10 000 words
Very mild	53	4.18	138	10.24	191	7.3
Mild	145	11.43	194	14.39	339	12.96
Moderate	36	2.84	23	1.71	59	2.25
Strong	79	6.23	107	7.94	186	7.11
Very strong	1	0.08	1	0.07	2	0.08
Total	314	24.76	463	34.34	777	29.7

Table 20. Total occurrences of vulgarisms based on their strength and speaker's gender.

The results show that the relative strength of vulgarisms in romantic comedies is different for female and male characters. In male characters' speech, as well as by all speakers in total, the mild vulgarisms were also the most frequent with 14.39 occurrences per 10 000 words, followed by very mild vulgarisms (10.24 per 10 000 words) and strong (7.94 per 10 000 words). Men uttered more of very mild, mild and strong vulgarisms per 10 000 words than women. Women used higher number of moderate vulgarisms. The very strong expression occurred once in total by each gender, which suggests that romantic comedies do not often opt for the inclusion of very strong language into the scripts, regardless of the speaker's gender.

4.3.2 Pragmatic function

Apart from their relative strength, McEnery (2006) also categorized vulgarisms based on linguistic quality of the expression (See Table 2). I identified these categories in the corpus and categorized them to see if their use by female characters changed over time. To categorize the 314 vulgarisms uttered by women, I simplified McEnery's list of categories by combining some of them, as I am interested in their pragmatic function rather than a detailed replication of his study, which included analysing their syntactic positions. The categories "religious oath" and "reclaimed usage" used by McEnery had no occurrences in the corpus.

The findings suggest that there is a variety in the productivity of different vulgarisms, for example, *fuck* and its variations were used in multiple the pragmatic functions, which will be shown in the examples below. In Example 1, *fuck* is used as a taboo referent in a literal sense, an instance which is considered bad language by McEnery (2006), but would be excluded by Ljung (2011) since it is not intended to offend the addressee.

(1) He just came by to **fuck** me. (*My Best Friend's Wedding*)

In the category of Negative modification, I included McEnery's (2006) "premodifying intensifying negative adjective", which marks the subject or the object in the utterance as negative. In Example 2, *shit* is used as an adjective *shitty*, and in Example 3, *fucking* is used as both intensifier and modifier to express the character's negative attitude to the subject. I also included McEnery's (2006) "predicative negative adjective" in this category, which has the same function with a predicative position of the adjective, but there were no occurrences of this case in the corpus.

(2) I'm gonna write the **shittiest** article ever written. (*Set It Up*)

(3) **Fucking** holidays. (*Holidate*)

Unlike in Example 3, the use of *fucking* as an intensifier can also be marked positively, such as in Example 4, which falls under McEnery's category of "adverbial booster". I combined this class with "emphatic adverb/adjective" (5), in which the adverb or adjective emphasizes the whole phrase.

(4) He's **fucking** great. (*Anyone but You*)

(5) I can't **fucking** believe that [...] (*Holidate*)

The use of *fuck* as a "cursing expletive" (6a) was categorized as Insult for this analysis, combined with McEnery's categories of "destinational usage" (7a) and "personal insult referring to defined entity" (8a), as they are all a form of aggression or insult, targeting a specific person or a thing. Instead of *fuck*, there were instances of mild or even very mild terms used in similar context, while keeping the same pragmatic function and meaning, such as *damn* as a cursing expletive (6b), *go to hell* as destinational usage (7b), or *ass* as a personal insult (8b), which suggests the choice of the expression's strength does not just depend on the situational context but also the film production's decision on how to portray the speaker through their language.

(6a) **Fuck** you! (*When Harry Met Sally*)

(6b) **Damn** him. (*Mannequin*)

(7a) Oh, **fuck** off, Randy. (*Silver Linings Playbook*)

(7b) So the big, bad Fox Books can just go to **hell**. (*You've Got Mail*)

(8a) Can you say the same about yourself, **fucker**? (*Silver Linings Playbook*)

(8b) Have it your way, you stubborn **ass**! (*Sweet Home Alabama*)

Example 9 shows the use of *fuck* as a "general expletive", in which the term is not syntactically dependent on the rest of the speech and can be uttered as an expression of surprise, anger, or another strong emotion. Milder words such as *shit* (10) or *damn* (11) were also frequently used as general expletives.

(9) **Fuck!** We're gonna get eaten by sharks! (*Anyone but You*)

(10) Oh, my God. I have 37 messages. **Shit**. I need a computer. (*The Proposal*)

(11) Get the ball back! **Damn!** Next game. (*How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*)

For this part of the analysis, I also combined all figurative uses of the expressions. McEnery (2006) distinguished “idiomatic or ‘set’ phrases” such as the use of *fuck* in Example 12, “imagery based on a literal meaning” (13) and “figurative extension of literal meaning” (14).

(12) I don’t give a **fuck**. (*Silver Linings Playbook*)

(13) Because you scared the **shit** out of me. (*Anyone but you*)

(14) Andie is kicking Ben’s **ass** in Bullshit! (*How to lose a guy in 10 days*)

The last category defined by McEnery (2006) found in the corpus is “‘pronominal’ form with undefined referent”, in which the vulgarity replaces another noun, usually to express a negative attitude to the referent. In this corpus, the pronominal function was exclusive to *shit*, such as in Example 15.

(15) Have you packed your **shit**? (*The Other Woman*)

Something that McEnery (2006) did not consider in his categorisation is the use of taboo words as a compliment or as something positive or playful, such as the word *bitch* used as a term of endearment in Example 16, or *slut* a friendly tease in Example 17. Although this wasn’t a common occurrence in the corpus, I made a new category for this function to differentiate it from use of the same words as an insult, because it shows the semantic shift in the use of certain terms.

(16) I love the shit out of her and I just wanna marry the **bitch**, [...] (*Anyone but You*)

(17) Call me later, you **slut**. (*How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*)

As I discussed in Chapter 2.1.3, even more categories could be added to make McEnery’s (2006) classification more precise. There were many examples in the corpus of the *wh*-constructions, which Ljung (2011) suggested could be put in a separate category. However, even those were used in varying functions. For example, the whole phrase *what the fuck* in Example 19 is used as a general expletive (18), but *fuck* in *where the fuck* in Example 19 serves as an intensification of the phrase, and was categorized as such.

(18) Oh, Jesus. What the **fuck**? (*Silver Linings Playbook*)

(19) Get out of where? Where the **fuck** you want to go? (*Pretty Woman*)

Table 21 presents an overview of the types of expressions found in the corpus and their categorization for this analysis, along with examples from the films.

Function	McEnergy's category	Example
Literal use	Literal use	He just came by to fuck me. (<i>My Best Friend's Wedding</i>)
Negative modification	Predicative negative adjective	-
	Premodifying intensifying negative adjective	Fucking holidays. (<i>Holidate</i>)
Intensification	Adverbial booster	He's fuckin g great. (<i>Anyone but you</i>)
	Emphatic adverb / adjective	I can't fuckin g believe that [...] (<i>Holidate</i>)
Insult	Cursing expletive	Fuck you! (<i>When Harry Met Sally</i>)
	Destinational usage	Oh, fuck off, Randy. (<i>Silver Linings Playbook</i>)
	Personal insult	Leave me alone, you bitch ! (<i>My Best Friend's Wedding</i>)
General expletive	General expletive	Fuck! We're gonna get eaten by sharks! (<i>Anyone but You</i>)
Figurative use	Idiomatic 'set' phrase	I don't give a fuck . (<i>Silver Linings Playbook</i>)
	Imagery based on literal meaning	Because you scared the shit out of me. (<i>Anyone but you</i>)
	Figurative extension of literal meaning	Andie is kicking Ben's ass in Bullshit! (<i>How to lose a guy in 10 days</i>)
Pronominal	Pronominal form	Have you packed your shit ? (<i>The Other Woman</i>)
Compliment	-	I love the shit out of her and I just wanna marry the bitch , [...] (<i>Anyone but You</i>)

Table 21. Overview of the pragmatic functions of vulgarisms used by female characters in the corpus.

Table 22 shows numbers of vulgarisms uttered by female characters based on their function in every decade in absolute and relative frequency per 10 000 words, along with the percentage of each category out of the total 314 expressions.

Category	Frequency of each linguistic category uttered by female characters												%
	1980s		1990s		2000s		2010s		2020s		Total		
	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	Abs	Rel	
Literal use	6	3.78	4	1.77	15	4.76	18	6.76	16	5.29	59	4.65	18.8
Negative mod.	1	0.63	0	0	4	1.27	14	5.26	7	2.31	26	2.05	8.3
Intensification	3	1.89	6	2.66	7	2.22	10	3.76	18	6.28	44	5.95	3.47
Insult	3	1.89	6	2.66	9	2.86	24	9.02	21	6.94	63	4.89	19.7
Gen. expletive	0	0	4	1.77	9	2.86	16	6.01	28	9.25	57	4.34	18.2
Figurative use	1	0.63	2	0.89	7	2.22	13	3.46	19	6.28	42	3.15	13.4
Pronominal	0	0	2	0.89	2	0.64	14	5.26	3	0.99	21	1.66	6.7
Compliment	0	0	0	0	1	0.32	0	0	1	0.33	2	0.16	0.6

Table 22. Frequency of female-uttered vulgarisms based on pragmatic function.

The most frequent category used by women in overall was Insult, which was 19.7% of all occurrences, followed by Literal use (18.8%) and General expletive (18.2%). Again, all

categories saw an increase from the earliest to the latest decade, but this change was only statistically significant in the case of Figurative use ($X^2 = 7.6559$, $p = 0.006$), Insults ($X^2 = 5.0956$, $p = 0.024$), and most dramatically General expletives ($X^2 = 14.6793$, $p < 0.001$), which did not appear at all in the 1980s and became the most frequent category in the 2020s. Literal use of taboo words, which is generally not intended as aggression, was the most popular category of the 1980s and 2000s, which proved to be milder in the strength of vulgarisms as well. Between the two decades with the highest numbers of vulgarisms, 2010s and 2020s, the former has more occurrences of insults, negative modifications, literal and pronominal use. 2020s have more occurrences of general expletives, idiomatic phrases and use of vulgarisms for emphasis, which corresponds to 2010s being the decade with the most aggressive use of profanity. The newly created category, praise, had two female-uttered occurrences in the corpus with no noticeable change in the pattern over the years.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to find out whether the use of profanity in language changes in the speech of female characters in romantic comedies since the 1980s to the present time. In particular, the analysis focused on the change of frequency and strength of the nine most commonly used vulgarisms, as well as comparing their use with male characters in the same films. As was discussed in Chapter 2, there is a common belief that women use less vulgarisms and opt for expletives which are milder in comparison to men (McEnery, 2006; Hughes, 2006; Coates, 2015). However, empirical data prove that while women's use of profanity might vary in functions and is perceived more negatively than men's, the frequency in their swearing does not significantly differ (DeKlerk, 1992). Because of the shift from formality and higher tolerance of controversial topics in American culture, including increasing realism and development in how female characters are treated in media and film in particular (Kozloff, 2000), the assumption for this thesis was that the frequency and strength of vulgarisms in the female characters' speech would increase.

It was found that the frequency of profane expressions in female film characters' speech had significantly increased from the earliest to the latest decade. The increase was gradual up until the 2010s, followed by a non-significant decrease in the most recent films. The relative strength of women's expressions also increased, with milder vulgarisms being more popular in the earlier decades, and stronger vulgarisms, such as *fuck* and *asshole*, increasing significantly in the latter half of the films. While the 1980s and 1990s contained the least total vulgarisms, 2000s had even less occurrences of the strong ones, but saw a noticeable peak in the mild vulgarism *hell*, suggesting there was a shift in the female characters' speech, but also a choice to keep the popular rom-coms subtle in the use of profanity. The most significant increase in frequency happened between the 2000s and 2010s, which could be explained by the transformation in the genre towards more realistic themes and depictions of romance, as well as the women's language. The slight decrease in the number of vulgarisms by all speakers in the last decade could then be seen as a result of the 'netflixization' of modern rom-coms discussed in Chapter 2.3.3, which relies on the nostalgia and simplicity of the earlier decades, while keeping the realistic themes and focus on the female experience.

Overall, these results correspond to the previously referenced research suggesting women's use of profanity is moving towards increasing freedom (e.g. DeKlerk, 1992, Thelwall, 2008). The findings are also consistent with Jay's (1992) analysis of use of profanity based on gender in films between the years 1939 and 1989, which found a significant increase in frequency for

all speakers. The use of vulgarisms for all speakers in this study had also increased, and the effect of gender on the frequency got smaller over time. According to Jay's results, men swore significantly more than women over all time periods with the ratio 4:1. While in the films released in the last 40 years, men still swear more than women in every decade, it needs to be pointed out that there was also an increase in the number of tokens uttered by women in the recent films, and the ratio of the female-uttered vulgarisms out of the total occurrences increased in comparison to Jay's study of earlier films, as 40.4% of all vulgarisms in the corpus were uttered by women. In terms of the pragmatic functions of the expressions, the female characters in films released after the 2010s use cursing expletives and insults more frequently than in the earlier decades, which shows the level of assertiveness in women's language could now be perceived as higher than described in McEnery's study (2006), at least in the popular media. Out of the selected expressions, only two were used more frequently in the speech of female characters, *whore* and *slut*, which suggests the word choice for women in the films is different than for men, perhaps because of the association of these vulgarisms with a female addressee. It was also noticed that these particular terms were often used to refer to the speaker herself, which would also be interesting to explore further, as the direction in the use of specific expressions based on the speaker's and addressee's genders could play a role in their frequency.

Finally, although analysis of the films as such is not within the scope of this thesis, I would like to comment on the 'typicality' of romantic comedy and its relation to the use of profanity. As I mentioned in the Limitations, the films chosen for the analysis contained predominantly white, middle-class and heterosexual characters, which is the typical case for the genre. However, romantic comedy had continuously evolved since the 1980s towards more diverse representation of characters as well as more realistic themes, and the gradual increase in the frequency of vulgarisms uttered by women in the analysis reflected this change. Interestingly, some of the films which diverged the most from the neo-traditional rom-com tropes, such as *The Idea of You* with an older female character's romance with a younger man, or *The Happiest Season* with a gay central couple, were actually the two mildest films in the corpus released after the year 2000, which could be seen as a compensation of the non-standard theme. However, what did apparently play a role in the increase of vulgarisms was the elements of other genres. *Silver Linings Playbook* could be seen as an outlier in the corpus, with the most total tokens (17 072, although only 3988 uttered by female characters), 120 total vulgarisms and the highest relative frequency of vulgarisms in women's speech (8.27 per 1000 words). While this film is labelled as a romantic comedy, the element of drama and inclusion of serious

themes, such as mental illness, set it apart from the light-hearted romantic comedies from the same time period focused more narrowly on the romance aspect.

6. Summary and conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyse the use of profanity in the language of female characters in the transcriptions of 25 romantic comedies released between the years 1984 and 2024. In particular, it focused on whether the frequency and strength of vulgarisms in their speech increased over time. The theoretical part of the study dealt with swearing in English, including its varying functions and classification. Furthermore, the research behind language and gender was described with the focus on women and swearing, and features of film language were explained with the focus on the role of censorship and gender on film and the genre of romantic comedy in particular. In the analytical part of this thesis, the data and methodology for this study were described, and finally, the results were presented. As was mentioned at the beginning of this study, it has been reported that the frequency of profanity in women's speech does not differ significantly from male usage, and the stereotype of higher politeness of female speech seems to be decreasing in the media. As the film language reflects contemporary language standards as gender expectations, the hypothesis for this thesis was that women would swear more in the recent releases and choose stronger expletives.

The frequency did increase significantly from the earliest to the latest decade, as did the strength of the vulgarisms. The increase was gradual since the 1980s to the 2010s, with a non-significant decrease in the relative frequency in films released after 2020, and the most significant increase in the profanity's frequency happened between the 2000s and the 2010s. The most frequent vulgarisms in female characters' speech were *fuck* and *shit*, which saw the most significant increase over time, but the development in frequency of individual expressions varied. For example, *hell* did not significantly increase from the earliest to the latest decade, but saw a noticeable peak in the films released in the 2000s. Although men swore more than women in every decade, the difference between the genders' frequency got smaller over time, and the ratio of total vulgarisms in the films uttered by women increased from 17.7% in the 1980s to 51.8% in the 2020s. The qualitative part of the analysis showed that vulgarisms with higher strength were more popular in the most recent films, and had seen the most significant increase, especially after the year 2000. The most frequent pragmatic function in which female characters used the selected expressions were insults, literal use and general expletives, and the most significant increase was found in the case of general expletives, insults and figurative use.

Thus, the results indicate the perception of women in recent romantic comedies in terms of their language is moving towards a more realistic one, allowing them to use language that is less restrained, including the use of profanity. The increase in the frequency in the use of

vulgarisms by all speakers suggests that the tolerance of an informal language continues to grow in the entertainment media, and it differs less based on the speaker's gender. In a broader sense, the belief that women speak more politely in comparison to men is potentially changing and it is reflected in their portrayal in recent films. Overall, the increase of frequency and strength of female characters' language support the hope expressed by Kozloff (2000), that the models of language are becoming less constricting to a person's gender.

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Resumé

1. Úvod

Cílem této práce je zjistit, zda se frekvence užití vulgarismů a jejich síla u ženských filmových postav změnila od 80. let do současnosti. Studie konkrétně zkoumala počet devíti nejčastěji používaných vulgarismů. Ačkoliv empirická data potvrzují, že se množství sprostých slov v mluvě dnešních žen a mužů tolik neliší, a tento rozdíl se časem snižuje, ve společnosti přetrvává domněnka, že ženy mluví méně sprostě a používají mírnější vulgarismy než muži. Tato práce si klade za cíl ověřit, jestli se tato představa promítá v mluvě filmových postav, která je často vnímána jako lingvistický standard a projevuje se v jazyce jejich diváků, a jestli se situace v změnila v nedávno vydaných filmech. Změna ve frekvenci a síle vulgarismů je měřena pomocí korpusové analýzy 25 romantických komedií vycházejících postupně v posledních 40 letech.

2. Teoretická část

Teoretická část práce se zabývá třemi hlavními tématy, a to vlivu genderu na jazyk, vulgárním jazykem a jazykem ve filmu. Kapitola 2.1 se zabývá vulgárním jazykem v angličtině. Podkapitola 2.2.1 vysvětluje zdvořilostní strategie a jejich roli v lingvistice a vulgárním jazyce, podkapitola 2.1.2 definuje vulgární jazyk a jeho funkci, relevantní proměnné, které ovlivňují jeho užívání, a existující výzkum. Podkapitola 2.1.3 představuje možnosti klasifikace vulgarismů podle jejich lingvistického druhu a relativní síly.

Další kapitola teoretické části se zabývá rolí genderu v jazyce. Oproti původním teoriím o rozdílech mezi mluvou mužů a žen považují současné lingvistické studie gender jen za jednu z mnoha proměnných, která jazyk ovlivňuje (Eckert a McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Podkapitola 2.2.1 shrnuje dosavadní výzkum na toto téma a podkapitola 2.2.2 uvádí prvky jazyka tradičně přisuzované ženám, například podle Lakoff (1975), mezi které patří vyšší zdvořilost nebo hedging, a porovnává tyto teorie s reálným výzkumem. Podkapitola 2.2.3 se pak zaměřuje konkrétně na užití vulgárního jazyka ženami. Ačkoliv se podle moderních studií frekvence vulgárního jazyka u žen zvyšuje, ve společnosti se stále setkává s menší tolerancí, a domněnky o vyšší zdvořilosti v ženském jazyce přetrvávají, a výzkumy (např. Stapleton, 2003) poukazují na to, že užití vulgarismů u žen má proto často rozdílné funkce oproti mluvě mužů.

Poslední teoretická kapitola, 2.3, je věnovaná jazyku ve filmu a důvody, proč ho zkoumat. Jazyk ve filmu je plánovaný a oproti spontánnímu projevu v něm chybí přirozené pauzy, přeřeky nebo přerušení. I přes jeho nepřirozený charakter poskytuje filmový jazyk data

mluveného neformálního projevu, ve kterém se pragmatika jazyka postav projevuje nejvíce. Jeho zkoumání pak může znázornit, jak chtěli autoři scénářů vykreslit jazyk a charakter dané postavy, a jak se jazyk různých typů postav, včetně užití vulgárního jazyka, vyvíjí s ohledem na postupné změny ve společnosti a vnímání genderu v médiích. Přesto je jazyk ve filmu v lingvistice často opomíjen, a jeho detailní studie se objevily až poměrně nedávno (např. Kozloff, 2000; Bednarek, 2010; Beers Fägersten, 2016). Podkapitola 2.3.1 se zabývá vulgárním jazykem a jeho cenzurou ve filmu a televizi, a vysvětluje systém hodnocení filmů podle stupně nevhodného jazyka a motivů. Podkapitola 2.3.2 popisuje vliv genderu ve filmovém průmyslu, zacházení s ženskou postavou ve filmu a jeho vývoj. Přestože dávají moderní filmy a televizní pořady ženám více prostoru a různorodosti v typech postav, nedávané studie tvrdí, že genderové stereotypy se objevují i v současnosti (Busso a Vignozzi, 2017). Poslední podkapitola, 2.3.3, představuje důvody k výběru romantických komedií pro tuto analýzu a shrnuje vývoj tohoto žánru a jeho charakteristiku. Romantické komedie jsou tradičně asociovány s ženským publikem, a proměnlivost v jejich popularitě a tématech může ukázat, jak se obsah filmů a užití jazyka jejich postav mění podle současných konvencí.

3. Metodologie

Ve třetí kapitole byla představena data a určena hypotéza a výzkumné otázky. Práce si klade za cíl zjistit, jestli se užívání vulgárního jazyka ženských filmových změnílo za posledních 40 let. Jelikož filmový jazyk odráží konvence současného jazyka a vnímání genderu, předpokládá se, že budou ženy používat více vulgarismů v později vydaných filmech, a jejich síla bude vyšší. Analýza byla provedena na základě transkripce 25 filmů, které jsou uvedené v tabulce 5. Jedná se o americké romantické komedie vydané mezi roky 1984 a 2024, rozdělené ve stejném počtu do korpusů podle dekády. Další kritéria pro výběr konkrétních filmů byly dospělé hlavní postavy, a používání americké angličtiny hlavní ženskou postavou.

Transkripce filmů byly upraveny do potřebného formátu, anotovány na základě genderu jednotlivých mluvčích a rozděleny do korpusů podle dekády, k čemuž byly použity aplikace softwaru EXMARaLDA (Schmidt a Wörner, 2014). Poté byly v korpusech vyhledány vybrané vulgarismy, které se ve filmech vyskytovaly nejčastěji: *hell*, *damn*, *ass*, *shit*, *fuck*, *bitch*, *whore*, *slut*, a *screw* (a jejich variace) a zaznamenáno jejich množství. Kvalitativní analýza byla provedena na základě typologie podle jejich síly a lingvistického druhu vytvořená McEnerym (2006), která byla představena v kapitole 2.1.3. Významnost změn ve frekvencích vulgarismů byla změřena na základě statistických testů chi-square a lineární regrese. Dále byly v této

kapitole uvedeny limitace této studie, které se týkají převážně univerzality výsledků a vysokého rozsahu v počtu tokenů a systému hodnocení mezi vybranými filmy.

4. Výsledky

Výzkum ukázal, že se frekvence vulgarismů v jazyce ženských filmových postav výrazně zvýšila. Nárůst byl postupný od 80. let, s lehkým poklesem ve filmech po roce 2020. Nejvýznamnější nárůst v množství vulgarismů proběhlo mezi obdobími 2000-2010 a 2010-2020. Narostl i počet celkových vulgarismů ve filmech bez ohledu na pohlaví mluvčích, a rozdíl ve frekvencích mezi ženskými a mužskými postavami se snížil. Vzhledem ke zvýšení počtu slov ženských postav je frekvence stále vyšší u mužů ve všech dekadách, ale podíl vulgarismů vyřčených ženami z celkového počtu se mezi nejstaršími a nejnovějšími filmy zvýšil. Vzorec užívání vulgarismů se lišil i podle individuálních slov. Celkově nejčastější vulgarismy v mluvě ženských postav byly *fuck* a *shit*, které také zaznamenaly největší nárůst v pozdějších filmech. Jediná slova, která byla častěji používána ženami než muži, byla *slut* a *whore*. Dále byla provedena kvalitativní analýza. Užití vulgarismů ženskými postavami ve filmech bylo uvedeno na příkladech v kontextu, a vybrané termíny byly rozděleny do kategorií podle jejich síly a pragmatické funkce. Ačkoliv se zvýšil i počet mírnějších vulgarismů, jako *hell* nebo *damn*, výsledky ukázaly, že mírné termíny byly populárnější ve starších filmech, zatímco silné vulgarismy jako *fuck* a *asshole* zaznamenaly výrazný nárůst po roce 2000, což poukazuje na to, že relativní síla vulgarismů v mluvě žen se také zvýšila. Nejčastější pragmatické funkce vulgarismů v mluvě ženských postav byly urážky, užití v doslovném smyslu, a obecná expletiva. Jejich množství se rovněž lišilo v jednotlivých dekadách, a největší nárůst byl zaznamenán u obecných expletiv, frází v přeneseném významu slov a urážek.

5. Diskuze

V páté kapitole jsou shrnuty výsledky práce a porovnány s jinými studii. Zvýšení frekvence a síly vulgarismů v mluvě ženských filmových postav odpovídají jak ustupující formalitě a realistickému aspektu moderních romantických komedií, tak i změně v zacházení s ženami v populárních médiích a spojování určitého vyjadřování s pohlavím mluvčího. Výsledky odpovídají výzkumům, které naznačují snižování přílišné zdvořilosti v mluvě žen a ustupující stereotypy ohledně užívání vulgarismů v médiích. Navazují také na výzkum Jay (1992), v jehož studii se frekvence vulgarismů ve filmech zvýšila už mezi 30. a 80. lety. Podíl vulgarismů vyřčených ženami se ale oproti tomuto výzkumu zvýšil, což nasvědčuje tomu, že zvýšení frekvence vulgarismů u ženských filmových postav stále probíhá, a gender

v současných filmech hraje menší roli v jejich množství. Další proměnné, které mohly ovlivnit frekvenci vulgarismů v jednotlivých filmech, jsou prvky dalších žánrů, které se v romantických komediích objevují, jako drama, nebo jejich samotná témata a jejich vážnost. Uvedené příklady z korpusu ukázaly, že vulgarismy byly ženskými postavami použité v různých pragmatických funkcích, a zvýšení frekvence určitých funkcí, jako urážek nebo obecných expletiv, mohlo být rovněž ovlivněno vývojem žánru a jeho témat.

6. Závěr

Šestá kapitola uzavírá práci. Výsledky potvrzují hypotézu, že se frekvence vulgarismů a jejich relativní síla v mluvě ženských filmových postav za posledních 40 let významně zvýšila. Nejvýznamnější změna v užívání vulgarismů se objevila ve filmech po roce 2010, a to hlavně u silnějších termínů, jako *fuck* a *shit*, což naznačuje, že se zvyšuje i síla individuálních slov v projevu ženských postav. Kromě toho se významně zvýšil i počet vulgarismů u všech postav bez ohledu na jejich pohlaví, což vypovídá ustupující formalitě ve filmovém jazyce. Ačkoliv muži používají více vulgárních slov ve všech dekadách, jejich podíl vyřčených ženami se od 80. let do současnosti zvýšil. Výsledky celkově odpovídají zvýšení realismu v projevu žen v médiích, které se promítají i do jazyku a tématům žánru romantické komedie.