CONTEXTUALIZING TABOO WORDS IN EXPRESSING ANGER, FRUSTRATION, AND JOKE IN THE HORRIBLE BOSSES MOVIE

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Abstract

Taboo words are deeply shaped by the context of the situation, including the relationships between speakers and listeners, the topic being discussed, the setting, and the function of the conversation. This study focuses on the use of taboo words in Horrible Bosses movies, aiming to identify the types of taboo words used and to analyze their functions in expressing anger, frustration, and joke. The data for this research were collected using the documentation method, which involved note-taking. A checklist instrument was also used to help identify and collect specific dialogue adjacencies. The data analysis method employed in this study is descriptive qualitative. The research questions were addressed by applying the framework of taboo word types and functions proposed by Jay and the context of the situation proposed by Holmes, both of which fall under sociolinguistics theory. The findings show that taboo words are mainly used to express anger or frustration, especially in scenes involving unfair treatment or emotional outbursts. Some types of taboo words, such as epithets, cursing, profanity, slang, and insults or slurs, are closely tied to emotional release and conflict. Meanwhile, obscenity, vulgarity, and taboo appear in both serious and humorous contexts, depending on the context in which the taboo words are delivered. Additionally, scatology appears only in joking scenes. These patterns suggest that while some taboo word types only serve anger or frustration function, others are more flexible. Overall, the context plays a key role in shaping how and why taboo words are used in the movie.

Keywords: taboo words, anger, frustration, joke, context of situation

Abstrak

Kata-kata tabu sangat dipengaruhi oleh konteks situasi, termasuk hubungan antara penutur dan pendengar, topik yang dibicarakan, latar tempat, serta fungsi dari percakapan tersebut. Penelitian ini berfokus pada penggunaan kata-kata tabu dalam film *Horrible Bosses* dengan tujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis kata tabu yang digunakan serta menganalisis fungsinya dalam mengungkapkan kemarahan, frustrasi, dan lelucon. Data dalam penelitian ini dikumpulkan dengan metode dokumentasi melalui teknik pencatatan. Instrumen berupa daftar periksa juga digunakan untuk membantu mengidentifikasi dan mengumpulkan dialog-dialog tertentu. Metode analisis data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah deskriptif kualitatif. Pertanyaan penelitian dijawab dengan menerapkan kerangka tipe dan fungsi kata tabu yang dikemukakan oleh Jay serta konteks situasi dari Holmes, yang keduanya berada dalam ranah teori sosiolinguistik. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kata-kata tabu sebagian besar digunakan untuk mengekspresikan kemarahan atau frustrasi, terutama pada adegan yang melibatkan perlakuan tidak adil atau ledakan emosi. Beberapa tipe kata tabu seperti *epithets*, *cursing*, *profanity*, *slang*, dan *insults or slurs*, erat kaitannya dengan pelampiasan emosi dan konflik. Sementara itu, *obscenity*, *vulgarity*, dan *taboo* muncul dalam konteks serius maupun humor, tergantung pada situasi ketika kata-kata tersebut diucapkan. Selain itu, tipe *scatology* hanya muncul dalam adegan yang bersifat humor. Pola ini menunjukkan bahwa meskipun beberapa jenis kata tabu hanya berfungsi

untuk mengekspresikan kemarahan atau frustrasi, ada pula yang lebih fleksibel. Secara keseluruhan, konteks memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk cara dan alasan penggunaan kata tabu dalam film ini.

Kata Kunci: kata tabu, kemarahan, frustrasi, lelucon, konteks situasi

1. Introduction

Taboo words are often shaped by the specific context of the conversation or the relationship between those involved, as different situations or social dynamics can influence how and why these words are used. This statement aligns with Jay's (1992) statement that taboo words depend on the context and the speaker's conversational goals, as they can convey various emotions such as anger, frustration, joy, surprise, or even joking. In this way, understanding taboo words is important because it helps people communicate respectfully and avoid accidentally offending others.

Taboo words can have a negative impact in societal contexts, as they often provoke discomfort, anxiety, or shame. However, their use remains common in social interactions, particularly to express strong emotions (Wardaugh, 2006). As Widiastuti and Qomariana (2015: 1602) point out, the function of swearing is essentially the same across languages—namely, to express annoyance or anger toward others—although the specific forms and references may vary. In line with this, Rahmania and Munandar (2021) explain that people often use taboo words to release negative emotions, thereby reducing emotional tension. Supporting this idea, Huang and Nicoladis (2020), in a study on French-English bilinguals, found that taboo words trigger stronger emotional responses than both positive and negative words, as measured through galvanic skin response (GSR). Similarly, Ghomroudi et al. (2024) used electroencephalography (EEG) to examine the neural processing of taboo words and found that they engage distinct cognitive and emotional mechanisms. Their findings suggest that taboo words capture attention more effectively and activate brain regions linked to emotional regulation and cognitive control. Therefore, these previous studies indicate that taboo words are not merely a form of verbal aggression or social deviance but may function to express emotional responses.

Additionally, joke is closely tied to taboo language; as Levinson (2023) states, taboo words in jokes function as a way to strike against symbolic boundaries, challenging what is culturally considered too sacred or sensitive. This statement is supported by several studies showing that taboo words do not always have negative consequences; instead, they can have positive effects, such as being used in jokes or as a tool for strengthening social bonds through humor (see Maraev et al., 2021; Shafto et al., 2024; Sholeha & Simatupang, 2024). However, the impact of taboo words depends on the context of the situation, as what is considered funny or acceptable varies across cultures, social groups, and individual relationships. Because of this, cultural norms, social settings, and interpersonal relationships shape their meaning and acceptability, making context a crucial factor in understanding their role in communication (Sholeha & Simatupang, 2024: 57).

Regarding the context of the use of taboo words, the evolving norms around language and expression in media in this globalization era have highlighted society's shifting tolerance for taboo words. Movies and other popular media increasingly reflect real-world frustrations and humor through language that was once considered offensive. This linguistic shift is particularly evident in workplace-related media, where characters express their struggles through strong language. For example, in real-life workplaces, employees often feel frustrated with their bosses, leading to dissatisfaction that sometimes includes taboo language, whether in private or public. Joking has also become a way for people to cope with frustration, with taboo words often used to make jokes feel more genuine or intense. This dynamic is reflected in Horrible Bosses, an American movie that portrays workplace culture in the USA. The characters frequently use taboo words to vent their anger and frustration with their bosses and to lighten the mood through humor.

Building on this phenomenon, this study aims to explore the functions of taboo words in expressing anger, frustration, and joke while contextualizing their use based on situational factors. The analysis draws on Jay's (1992) framework of taboo word types and functions—focusing specifically on their use in expressing anger/frustration and joking—as well as Holmes' (2013) context of the situation, which includes participant, setting, topic, and function. Previous studies in various languages have analyzed taboo words and their situational contexts, such as the use of taboo words in Malaysian (Hassan et al., 2021), the use of taboo language in Madurese (Faizi et al., 2024), and taboo language in the Banyumasan Javanese dialect (Al Farobi et al., 2022), research in English remains scarce in examining the specific functions of taboo words and their

situational contexts. Therefore, there is a gap for this research to investigate further how taboo words function in expressing anger, frustration, and joking within situational contexts.

Furthermore, several reasons make this research necessary to conduct. First, there is a need to investigate the specific types of taboo words that effectively convey anger, frustration, and joke, as not all taboo words serve the same purpose. Second, while previous research has analyzed taboo words, studies that specifically examine how different types of taboo words function in expressing anger, frustration, and joking remain scarce. Previous studies have generally focused on the broader functions of taboo words. Therefore, this research addresses that gap by analyzing how different types of taboo words serve these specific functions and how their use is shaped by situational context.

2. Research Method

This research used the Horrible Bosses movie as its primary data source. This movie was chosen because it provides rich examples for examining the use of taboo words in a setting where characters frequently express anger or frustration by uttering taboo words toward their oppressive employers. Additionally, since the movie is a comedy, frustration is often vented through joking. These reasons make this movie an ideal data source to analyze how taboo words function in expressing anger or frustration and joking within a specific situational context.

The data for this research were collected through the documentation method with a note-taking technique and a checklist instrument to gather a specific set of dialogue adjacencies. The data collection process was carried out through several stages. First, the movie Horrible Bosses was watched on the Prime Video platform to gain a thorough understanding of the storyline. This initial viewing was supported by the use of the official movie script, which served as a reference for cross-checking dialogues and ensuring accuracy before moving on to the next step. Next, relevant utterances containing taboo words were identified and noted. The note-taking process was conducted systematically using a table consisting of three columns. The first column recorded the name of the character to indicate who produced the utterance. The second column marked the exact minute in the movie when the taboo word appeared. The third column documented the specific taboo word or phrase used.

The data analysis method used in this research was descriptive qualitative. First, the types of taboo words proposed by Jay (1992: 2–9) were used to identify the types found in the utterances. The classification was conducted by analyzing the characteristics and usage of each word. For example, the word "damn" was categorized as an epithet because it served as a brief yet forceful expression of emotion, often used in moments of frustration or hostility. After identifying the type of each taboo word, the next step was to analyze its function and situational context. For instance, the word "damn" could function as an expression of anger or frustration, depending on the context in which it was uttered. If a character exclaimed "damn" after making a costly mistake at work, it indicated frustration. On the other hand, if the same word was directed at someone, such as "damn you," during an argument, it expressed anger. To determine this, the functions and situational context were examined using the functions of taboo words proposed by Jay (1992: 63), supported by the classification of the context of the situation proposed by Holmes (2013: 9). Last, the findings of this research were presented using an informal method, which emphasized qualitative data presentation in textual form. Furthermore, taboo words were highlighted in bold to make them easily identifiable.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Types and Functions Based on the Context of Situation of the Taboo Words Uttered by Characters in the Horrible Bosses Movie

A total of 106 taboo utterances were found in the Horrible Bosses movie, with 81 instances functioning to express anger or frustration and 25 instances serving a joking function. The most frequently occurring type of taboo word is epithets, with 41 instances, followed by obscenity with 25 instances and vulgarity with 20 instances. Moreover, other types of taboo words found include insults and slurs (7 instances), profanity (6 instances), taboo (3 instances), cursing (2 instances), slang (1 instance), and scatology (1 instance). Notably, blasphemy was not present in the data. For a more detailed analysis, the types and functions based on the context of situation of the taboo words are presented below:

3.1.1 Cursing

Cursing is a verbal expression that wishes harm upon someone, often rooted in religious or social beliefs. Examples of curse like "damn you" or "I hope you rot in jail" (Jay, 1992: 2).

Data 1 (00:23:31 - 00:23:34)

Kenny   : "I'll tell you what though. I would **fucking murder** those Lehman Brothers if I could."

Nick   : "I don't blame you."

In this conversation, Kenny expresses intense frustration over his failed career after the collapse of Lehman Brothers. Once an ambitious young man with a promising future, he is unemployed and has not found another job for two years. His anger is directed at the firm, leading him to say, "I would fucking murder those Lehman Brothers if I could." The use of "would" and "if I could" indicates that his statement is a hypothetical or second conditional sentence, meaning it describes an unreal situation, something he is not actually going to do but rather expresses an extreme reaction to his anger. The taboo word "fucking murder" falls under the category of cursing. It functions to vent anger. It reflects a wish for harm toward those he blames for his downfall. The word "fucking" intensifies the emotion, showing the depth of his resentment. Coming from someone whose career was derailed, the curse carries personal weight, expressing anger at the firm and profound disappointment in how his life turned out.

3.1.2 Profanity

Profanity refers to language that does not directly insult religious beliefs but instead demonstrates a disregard for the sacredness of religious terms. Example of profanity is "for the love of Christ" (Jay, 1992: 3).

Data 2 (00:48:47 - 00:48:53)

Harken   : "Take all your work with you and have it on my desk 6 a.m. Monday."

Nick   : "Got it. Thank you, Mr. Harken."

Harken   : "**Jesus Christ**. Don't forget to take your fucking trash can."

In this scene, Nick and his boss, Harken, have a tense interaction that reveals Harken's controlling and manipulative nature. Set in a busy office during the day, Nick, frustrated by being denied a promised promotion, fakes an illness and vomits at his desk to justify skipping work as part of a larger plan against his abusive boss. Harken sees the incident and immediately orders him to leave. Their exchange revolves around Nick's responsibilities and Harken's lack of concern for his well-being, further exposing the toxic work dynamic.

The phrase "Jesus Christ" in this utterance falls under the category of profanity, as defined by Jay (1992). Harken's use of "Jesus Christ" is not a prayer or an invocation of divine authority but an emotional reaction that emphasizes his frustration. Additionally, Harken's use of the phrase "Jesus Christ" in this scene functions as an expression of frustration. Based on the Oxford Dictionary of English (2010) definition, frustration arises when individuals face obstacles that prevent them from achieving their goals. Here, Harken's goal is to maintain order and efficiency in the workplace, but Nick's perceived carelessness disrupts that. Nick's illness and the disruption are beyond his control, but they still interfere with Harken's expectation of order in the workplace.

3.1.3 Taboo

Taboo words are expressions restricted by cultural, social, or moral beliefs, intended to maintain social order and cohesion by prohibiting certain actions or speech. In American culture, these taboos are often linked to topics such as body parts, bodily functions, sexual activity, and violence, where the use of certain words, is socially restricted due to the discomfort and emotional sensitivity surrounding these subjects (Jay, 1992: 4).

Data 3 (00:29:49 - 00:30:03)

Dale   : "You did all this while I was unconscious?"

Julia   : "Ooh. Mm-hm. Yep. That's my favorite."

Dale   : "**Rape**."

Julia   : "What?"

Dale   : "**Rape**. That's a **rape**. This is what **raping** is! You're a raper and you've **raped** me. That's a **rape**! **Rape**!"

The scene takes place in Dr. Julia Harris's dental clinic, where Dale, a dental assistant, is confronted with yet another sexual harassment from his boss. Julia has been persistently harassing him and using blackmail to force him into compliance. At this moment, Dale discovers that Julia has taken compromising photos of him while he was unconscious under anesthesia during his first week on the job. She now uses these photos as leverage, threatening to ruin his relationship with his fiancée, Stacy, if he does not submit to her advances.

The term "rape," along with its variations "raping" and "raped," falls under the category of taboo rather than obscenity, as it refers to a universally condemned act with serious legal and emotional implications. Its use is restricted in public discourse due to its association with trauma and social stigma. According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary, rape is defined as the crime of forcing someone to engage in sex against their will, which reinforces its association with a serious violation of social and legal norms. Moreover, in the workplace setting, using the term "rape" can be especially problematic as it can disrupt the social order of a professional environment by introducing a highly emotional and controversial subject, making others feel uncomfortable or unsafe. This identification aligns with the broader concept of taboo, which involves restrictions on certain words and topics due to their potential to disrupt social harmony or violate social norms (Jay, 1992: 4). Furthermore, Julia's immediate shock reaction, expressed in her "what?", shows her attempt to deflect or downplay Dale's accusation, a typical response to taboo words. People often react this way due to discomfort, denial, or an effort to avoid engaging with taboo subjects. However, Dale's repeated use of the word makes it impossible for Julia to ignore what happened. His choice of language shows his anger and forces her to face the seriousness of her actions.

3.1.4 Obscenity

Obscenity primarily refers to language that is sexually explicit or graphically offensive, particularly related to sexual acts and bodily functions and is considered immoral or indecent in society, often subject to legal restrictions. For example, words like "fuck" and "cunt" are considered obscene in many contexts (Jay, 1992: 5). Taboo, on the other hand, is a broader concept that includes cultural, social, or religious prohibitions against certain behaviors or language, not limited to sexual topics. For instance, the word "rape" may be considered taboo due to its association with trauma and violence. While obscenity and taboo often overlap in Jay's classification, their distinction lies in scope—obscenity focuses on explicit sexual content, while taboo includes a broader range of culturally sensitive subjects.

Data 4 (00:04:33 - 00:04:49)

Kurt   : "You're way too cute to be just a FedEx girl. You got to be a model or actress or something, right? What happens when I open these? Something'll jump out, **bite my penis**?"

FedEx Girl   : "No. Nothing's gonna jump out. I'm just a FedEx girl."

Kurt   : "Shut up."

FedEx Girl   : "Ha ha."

The conversation takes place in the logistics area of a chemical company. Kurt, an account manager, flirts with a FedEx delivery girl. He playfully compliments her looks, joking that she must be a model, not just a delivery worker. Their banter continues when he speculates that something inside the package might bite his penis, to which she casually reassures him otherwise. When he jokingly tells her to "shut up," she laughs, showing the exchange is taken lightheartedly.

The phrase "bite my penis" falls under the category of obscenity, as defined by Jay (1992: 5), who identifies obscene words as those that explicitly reference sexual acts or body parts and are often regarded as highly offensive in public discourse. Although Kurt does not directly describe a specific sexual act in this phrase, the language used implies a sexually suggestive scenario involving his genitalia, which aligns with the criteria for obscenity. In this particular exchange, the function of the taboo word is joking. Kurt does not use "bite my penis" in an aggressive or threatening way but rather as an exaggerated joke to keep the flirtatious conversation going. The FedEx girl's amused reaction suggests that she perceives the remark as playful rather than offensive. This reaction shows that even though obscene language is generally offensive,

it can be used for humor, especially in casual or flirtatious conversations where social boundaries are more relaxed.

3.1.5 Vulgarity

Obscenity and vulgarity are both forms of offensive language but differ in intensity and context. Obscenity refers to language that is sexually explicit or related to bodily functions, often seen as morally offensive. These words, like "fuck" "motherfucker" and "cunt" are considered the most offensive and are rarely allowed in public or media due to their explicit sexual connotations (Jay, 1992). Vulgarity, on the other hand, is a language that is crude or unsophisticated but not necessarily sexually explicit. It reflects everyday speech that lacks refinement, like "snot," or "piss," or expressions like "kiss my ass," and is often judged negatively by societal elites for its coarseness (Jay, 1992: 6).

Data 5 (00:11:19 - 00:11:31)

Nick	: "He did say 10:00, right?"
His Colleague	: "Yeah. Do you know what this is about?"
Nick	: "It just said "staff meeting" on the memo. It's funny how he **gets all over my ass** if I'm a minute late, but then he makes us wait 15."
Harken	: "You were two minutes late, Nick."

This scene occurs in a meeting room where Nick and his colleagues wait for their boss, Harken, who is late for a 10:00 AM meeting. By 10:15, frustration grows as Nick vents about Harken's double standards—he's strict about punctuality with others but makes them wait without explanation. Just as Nick finishes complaining, Harken arrives and hypocritically criticizes Nick for being two minutes late.

Nick's phrase "gets all over my ass" is classified as vulgarity due to its informal and crude nature. Jay (1992: 6) provides examples of vulgar words, including "snot" "piss" "slut" "crap" and expressions like "kiss my ass" or "up yours". Expressions like "kiss my ass" illustrate how vulgar language can include bodily references without their literal meaning being intended. The phrase does not mean that someone should actually kiss another person's buttocks. Instead, it functions as an insult, expressing defiance or dismissal. Similarly, in "gets all over my ass," the word "ass" does not function as a literal reference to the body part but rather as part of a figurative expression meaning to be harshly criticized or reprimanded. In polite speech, especially because the setting is in a formal workplace, alternatives such as "gets all over my case" or "constantly reprimands me" would be more appropriate. However, Nick's choice of words reflects his frustration and informal style of communication in a workplace setting.

In the context of the scene, Nick's use of vulgarity functions as frustration. He vents to his colleague about Harken's hypocrisy rather than address Harken himself. The phrase "gets all over my ass" highlights his annoyance with the unfair double standard applied by his boss. Harken demands strict punctuality from employees yet fails to follow his own rules. Using a vulgar phrase, Nick makes his frustration clear in a casual and unfiltered way, showing how people naturally turn to blunt language when venting their annoyances.

3.1.6 Slang

Cursing and slang are both informal forms of language but serve different functions. Cursing involves expressing anger or wishing harm on others through emotionally charged words or phrases, such as "goddamn" or "eat shit and die" (Jay, 1992: 2). Slang, by contrast, consists of casual and often playful terms used within specific social groups for easier communication. Words like "pimp" or "dweeb" are usually not meant to harm but reflect group identity or social trends (Jay, 1992: 6).

Data 6 (00:48:11 - 00:48:21)

Harken	: "The worst report I have ever read in my life, you nimwit. You're such a **fucking dweeb**. Do you have a parking space? Because I'm gonna take it away from you."

In this scene, Dave Harken insults his employee after criticizing a poorly written report, calling him a "fucking dweeb" and threatening to revoke his parking space. The insult combines the intensifier "fucking" with "dweeb," a slang term for someone socially awkward and lacking confidence. This word choice targets the employee's intelligence and social standing, making the insult more personal and degrading.

The word "dweeb" is a slang term often used among teens and young adults to mock those seen as weak or awkward. It might sound teasing or playful in a casual setting, but in a professional context—

especially from a boss—it becomes a tool for humiliation. Based on the context and definition of slang, the term "dweeb" is commonly used within specific social groups, particularly teenagers or young adults, who are familiar with informal, colloquial language. In the workplace setting, as seen in this scene, "dweeb" would not typically be the language used by professionals. However, it may still be understood by employees or others in the office if they are familiar with informal, colloquial language or have been exposed to slang through personal interactions or popular culture references like TV shows or movies. Furthermore, slang is highly context-dependent, and its meaning can shift based on the setting and the relationship between speakers. The use of slang in this scenario is not just an expression of anger. It is a way to assert dominance, emphasizing his authority while reducing the employee's status. By calling him a "dweeb", Harken reinforces his superiority while ensuring that the employee is positioned as weak and powerless.

3.1.7 Epithets

Epithets are concise, emotionally driven expressions often delivered with intensity, such as loudness or prolonged duration. Epithets are often associated with frustration or anger and reflect spontaneous reactions to situations perceived as annoying or unfair. In some cases, epithets may serve as verbal substitutes for physical aggression or become habitual responses to certain situations, like repeatedly using the same phrase when in pain (Jay, 1992: 7).

Data 7 (00:19:19 - 00:19:33)

Bobby : "I'm sorry. You are one cold, heartless bastard, Buckman."
Kurt : "Hank, this wasn't my idea."
Hank : "**Fuck you**, Kurt."

The dialogue takes place in a tense workplace where Kurt, an account manager, is pressured by the new CEO, Bobby Pellit, to fire either Margie, a pregnant employee, or Hank, who is in a wheelchair—based not on performance but on prejudice. Bobby manipulates the situation by making it seem like the decision was entirely Kurt's. This deceitful act leads to an emotionally charged confrontation in which Hank, feeling betrayed and helpless, responds with the phrase "fuck you, Kurt."

The phrase "fuck you" is an epithet—a direct, emotionally charged insult aimed at a specific target. It reflects Hank's anger and sense of injustice, not meant as casual banter but as a strong reaction to perceived betrayal. Epithets like this are spontaneous and intense, often replacing physical retaliation. The context further reinforces the identification of "fuck you" as an epithet, as it is driven by Hank's anger over what he perceives as an unjust, personal attack on his livelihood. Rather than attempting to argue or negotiate, his words serve as a direct condemnation of Kurt's actions, expressing his outrage in the most immediate and forceful way possible. In this case, "fuck you" functions as an expression of anger, allowing Hank to vent his feelings of betrayal and powerlessness in a moment of high-stress confrontation.

3.1.8 Insults and Slurs

Insults and slurs both aim to harm others directly through words by attributing negative traits to them, either real or imagined. However, their usage differs. Slurs often focus on racial, ethnic, or social stereotypes, expressing prejudice against specific groups, while insults typically target an individual's physical, mental, or psychological traits. For example, insults may include animal imagery or comments on someone's physical appearance, while slurs often use derogatory terms related to race, ethnicity, or social standing. Although both are intended to hurt, slurs rely more heavily on societal biases and stereotypes, whereas insults focus on personal characteristics (Jay, 1992: 8).

Data 8 (01:04:07 - 01:04:13)

Nick : "You realize that we're all going to jail because of that **fucking idiot**?"
Kurt : "Man, I can't go to jail. Look at me. I'll get raped like crazy."

In this scene, Nick and Kurt are in a state of panic after witnessing what they believe to be Dale stabbing Kurt's boss, Harken. Their initial plan was to gather incriminating evidence, not to commit any violent acts. However, after seeing Dale outside appearing to stab Harken, Nick assumes that their friend has completely ruined the plan and put them all at risk of being arrested for attempted murder. Overwhelmed by anger, Nick exclaims, "you realize that we're all going to jail because of that fucking idiot?". His anger is directed at Dale, whom he perceives as responsible for their impending legal trouble.

Nick's use of "fucking idiot" falls under the category of insults because it is a direct verbal attack aimed at Dale. Insults typically focus on an individual's perceived physical, mental, or behavioral shortcomings, often in moments of anger or frustration. In this case, Nick combines "fucking" as an intensifier with "idiot", a term meant to demean Dale's intelligence to create an insult that expresses his anger. Nick's words reflect his immediate emotional response to what he perceives as Dale's reckless behavior, which could have severe consequences for all of them. Therefore, "fucking idiot" is a clear expression of anger, driven by the perceived recklessness of Dale's actions and the mounting anxiety over the potential consequences.

3.1.9 Scatology

Scatology refers to words related to bodily functions, especially waste and excrement. In American culture, people tend to use informal or childish terms rather than scientific ones, while different cultures have varying sensitivities to scatological language. Common examples in English include "poop," "crap," "shit," "fart," and "piss off" (Jay, 1992: 9).

Data 9 (00:25:10 - 00:25:19)

Kenny : "For an extra hundred, I'll let you guys pool **your mayonnaise** right here in my bellybutton. You'll love it. Think about it. Ugh, ugh! Yes! I'll be at my mom's."

Dale : "Okay."

In this scene, Kenny reunites with Nick, Dale, and Kurt at a bar, but things get awkward when he reveals he's been unemployed for two years. Rather than showing shame, he uses crude humor, joking that for an extra hundred dollars, they can pool their mayonnaise in his belly button—complete with exaggerated sound effects. The absurdity is meant to shock and amuse his friends. The phrase "your mayonnaise" is an example of scatological humor, indirectly referencing bodily fluids in a crude way. Scatology involves taboo topics like excrement or bodily functions, often avoided in polite conversation. Kenny uses "mayonnaise" as a euphemism for sperm, highlighting how scatological language can serve a comedic purpose. In this context, Kenny's statement functions as joking due to its absurdity and use of scatological humor to provoke shock and discomfort among his friends. The humor is further reinforced by the shared relationship between the characters, allowing this remark to be interpreted as a playful, albeit uncomfortable, joke rather than an offensive or inappropriate statement. Thus, the statement functions as joking through taboo language to create an unexpected, awkward situation meant to amuse.

3.2. The Discussions Related to the Types and Functions of the Taboo Words in the Horrible Bosses Movie

In Horrible Bosses film, taboo words used to express anger or frustration appear far more frequently than those used for joking. This trend reflects the movie's high-stress, exploitative work environment, which naturally triggers intense emotional reactions. Certain types of taboo words—such as cursing, profanity, slang, epithets, and insults & slurs—are used exclusively to express anger or frustration. In particular, epithets are the most common, functioning as direct and spontaneous verbal attacks that convey strong emotions. Similarly, slang and insults & slurs appear only in emotionally charged scenes, often during conflicts or moments when characters feel provoked. Profanity and cursing also only occur in intense moments like confrontations or threats, showing that these types are tightly linked to anger and frustration, leaving little space for humor.

In contrast, obscenity, vulgarity, and taboo words show functional flexibility, appearing in both anger/frustration and joking contexts. Their usage depends on tone and context—amplifying anger in serious scenes and creating shock-based humor in lighthearted ones. Scatology, however, is used only in joking situations. These findings suggest that while some taboo word types (like epithets, cursing, and slurs) are closely tied to anger/frustration, others (like obscenity and vulgarity) can serve both anger/frustration and joking functions. Overall, the distribution of taboo words and their functions shows how workplace tension drives much of the movie's language, with humor serving as an occasional but secondary function.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, most taboo words in the Horrible Bosses movie are used to express anger or frustration, reflecting the high-stress environments and power imbalances in the film. Taboo word types such as epithets, cursing, profanity, slang, and insults & slurs are consistently used in situations marked by tension or conflict,

and their function is solely to express anger or frustration. Meanwhile, obscenity, vulgarity, and taboo categories appear in both serious and humorous contexts, showing that they can function as anger/frustration and joking. Their use depends on how the characters deliver the utterance and their situation, making these types more flexible. Therefore, it can be concluded that the same type of taboo word can serve different purposes depending on the surrounding situation. Scatology, however, appears exclusively in humorous scenes, indicating that it functions more effectively for joking rather than for expressing anger or frustration. Overall, the functions of taboo words in the movie are strongly shaped by the context of the situation, which is who is speaking, the setting, the topic being discussed, and the function of the utterances. Words directed at bosses or authority figures tend to express anger, while those used among friends often serve as humor or exaggeration. The context of the interaction and the relationship between characters significantly influence the function of taboo language in the film.

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