

Research Article

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**Taboo Words Spoken by The Main Characters of Louis Leterrier's
The Brothers Grimsby Movie**

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Abstract

This study concerns the classification of the taboo words uttered by the main characters of *The Brothers Grimsby* movie, Nobby Butcher and Sebastian Graves. The taboo words are classified in accordance with Battistella's groupings of taboo words. Non-participant observation method and note-taking technique were applied to collect the data. The result shows that there are a total of 36 taboo words spoken by Nobby and Sebastian, which consist of 13 vulgarity (36,1%), 11 obscenity (30,5%), 9 profanity (25%), and 3 epithet (8,3%). From the 36 taboo words discovered, 26 are uttered by Nobby, while the rest of which are said by Sebastian. The finding implies that an individual with less education and from a lower-class society tends to speak taboo words more frequently than that growing up with education within an upper-class circle.

Keywords: Taboo words; Battistella; movie; *The Brothers Grimsby*

1. Introduction

The Brothers Grimsby is an action-comedy movie produced by Louis Leterrier in 2016. The movie tells a story of a football hooligan named Nobby Butcher, who reunites with his brother after they were separated and adopted by two different families as children. The brother, Sebastian Graves, currently works as an MI6 top agent, while Nobby only works at a small factory in his hometown. The story starts with a scene when Nobby finds a hint which leads to Sebastian's location while Sebastian is in the middle of a secret mission. Unaware of that situation, Nobby rushes to Sebastian and accidentally blows Sebastian's mission. In the end, Sebastian realizes that he needs his clumsy brother's help to correct the mess that they create.

In this movie, the director has made Nobby a person who often slips various taboo words when communicating with other movie characters. His brother, Sebastian, also uses taboo words although he does not say them as frequent as Nobby does. Interestingly, there is no opposition from other characters when Nobby and Sebastian speak taboo words toward them; this may be because most of the characters in the movie are from a lower-class society, and they may not find the uttering of taboo words offensive, while in real life, the use of taboo words potentially hurt others.

Interestingly, thus far, there has not been any linguistic research on the movie, let alone that which investigates the uses of taboo words. Research on taboo and swear words in movies that has been carried out is that of Lestari, Magria, and Asridayani [1], Anggita [2], Sugiarti [3], Auliani [4], Sari [5],

Rahmayani and Fitrawati [6], Kusumaningsih [7], and Nikmah [8]. These eight studies are similar in that they aim to classify the types of taboo words and analyze the reasons the speakers say the words. All these researchers use Battistella's classification of taboo words [9], consisting of epithets, profanity, obscenity, and vulgarity, to group the taboo words they discover in the movies. None of them, however, concerns Leterrier's *The Brothers Grimsby* movie. This is why I am interested in conducting research on the uses of taboo words in *The Brothers Grimsby* with the aims of finding the types of taboo words uttered by the main characters of the movie and the reasons they speak the words.

1.1. Taboo Words

The term 'taboo words' or 'taboo languages' is defined as 'words and phrases which are considered improper in certain situation or condition'. Taboo words are prohibited and limited on both institutional and individual levels because some harm will occur following the usage of the words. It can be harmful for the speaker of taboo word itself and it can be harmful to others who hear it. In addition, the use of taboo words can make its user viewed negatively by the hearers. Therefore, taboo words are not used as freely as any other words while communicating with other people.

Although taboo words cannot be uttered while communicating with others, there are some words which become not taboo if they are used at certain times or certain contexts. For example, the word 'penis' is considered taboo because it is a private organ of human body. Thus, saying it inappropriately may offend the hearers. Yet, when the word is said in a proper place, time, or situation, it may not be considered indecent, inappropriate, or rude. Taboo words can also be spoken using deliberate circumlocutions, such as by applying euphemism.

Battistella [9] classifies taboo words into four categories, which are **epithet**, **vulgarity**, **profanity**, and **obscenity**. Each of which is clarified as follows:

1.1. Epithet

Battistella [9] explains that epithets are various kinds of name-calling and slurs. This type of taboo is used when dealing with sexuality, race, or gender. Epithets can also be used in relation to physical appearance or disabilities. The examples of epithet are *bitch*, *bastard*, *nigger*, *faggot*, etc.

1.2. Vulgarity

Vulgarity is a type of taboo word which uses words or expressions that contain excretory systems in a rude way. In addition, words that contain private parts of human body can also be categorized as vulgarity. In society, this type of taboo word can be called as the language of street people since it does not serve another a particular function beyond a normal communication. Hence, vulgarity is not always obscene or prurient, it only portrays the rawness of street language. The examples of vulgarity are *dick*, *cunt*, *ass*, *cock*, etc.

1.3. Profanity

According to Battistella [9], profanity is the use of religion-related term that is used outside the religious context. The purpose of the speaker using profanity is not to disfigure God or anything related to religion. The word *God* itself is considered taboo since it is a greatly holy being in every religion. This type of taboo words often uses the religious term of Christianity such as *goddamn*, *Jesus Christ*, *holy shit*, etc. These are categorized as profanity because it involves the rude use of something which is sacred.

1.4. Obscenity

Battistella [9] explains that obscenity has a similar definition as vulgarity, which is words that contain sexual differentiating anatomy and excretory or sexual function in a coarse manner. He states that the difference between vulgarity and obscenity lies on the level of prurience. Obscenity is considered rougher than vulgarity because obscenity contains sexual activity or bodily system that can create disgusting feelings and disrespecting morality. The two words belong to this type of taboo word are *fuck* and *shit*.

2. Methods

In conducting this study, I used descriptive-qualitative method. It is descriptive-qualitative because this study presents the result by describing and elaborating the phenomenon in its own environment without applying any statistical procedures. According to Raco [10], this type of method has an advantage in presenting its study. It can provide a deeper understanding to the reader because it presents the result by analyzing the data comprehensively. This study classifies the type of taboo words uttered by the main characters of *The Brothers Grimsby* movie.

To collect the data, non-participant observation method was used. Non-participant observation is a method where I, as the writer, served as an observer to collect the subjects of the study in their actual environment before analyzing the data. I was not involved in the action of the subject of the study, instead, I only observed the utterances spoken by two main characters of *The Brothers Grimsby* movie by watching the movie and reading the movie script. In addition, note taking technique was also used to collect and classify the data, and to transcribe the context of the dialogue.

3. Result

After obtaining the data by watching *The Brothers Grimsby* movie, reading the movie script, making notes to classify data, and transcribing the dialogue context showing the use of taboo word uttered by the main characters, Nobby Butcher and Sebastian Graves, I found four types of taboo words produced by each and all of them. The finding is exposed in Table 1 and the discussion of the finding is provided in the next chapter.

Table 1. Taboo Words in *The Brothers Grimsby* Movie

Characters	Epithet	Vulgarity	Profanity	Obscenity	Σ
Nobby	3	13	2	8	26
Sebastian	0	0	7	3	10
Σ Nobby and Sebastian	3	13	9	11	36

Table 1 above shows the quantity of taboo words and swear words uttered by the main characters of *The Brothers Grimsby* movie, Nobby and Sebastian. The taboo words are enumerated as 3 epithet, 13 vulgarity, 9 profanity, and 11 obscenity. The table also suggests that Nobby is the one who utters taboo words the most. This is happening because Nobby lives in a slum area since his childhood where taboo words are uttered freely, while Sebastian grows in a rich and well-mannered family.

4. Discussion

4.1. Epithet

Datum 1

Nobby : It's alright to be sad. But, it's not alright to stand there and whinge like a low mopey *Bastard*. Who are we?

Sebastian : We're the Butcher boys of Grimsby!

The dialogue above occurs in the past after Nobby and Sebastian's parents passed away. They lived in an orphanage since then because they did not have anybody else to take care of them. The flashback scene starts with a view where Sebastian cried in their room as he missed their parents. He was also

worried if the orphanage would separate them one day. As the elder brother, Nobby tried to be strong and convinced Sebastian that nobody could split them apart, including the orphanage.

The word *bastard* uttered by Nobby can be classified as epithet as it is a slur which relates to sexuality. *Bastard*, in Cambridge University (n.d.) [11] dictionary, is defined as someone who is very unpleasant or someone who is born outside a marriage. In some cultures, illegitimate child is often considered as a disgrace as it shows that their parents have a sexual intercourse outside of a marriage. Nobby said that due to his high solidarity is with his younger brother, Sebastian, and he did not want his brother to mourn all day.

Datum 2

Sebastian : Nobby, they're beating up Zeke Stanton.

Nobby : Nazi *Bastard!*

Sebastian and Nobby were watching a football game between the Grimsby against the away team. When they were watching the game and singing some chants to support the Grimsby Team, Sebastian saw that their friend, Zeke Stanton, was beaten by two of the supporters of the away team. He immediately told his brother of what he saw. Nobby felt angry when he knew that. He shouted "Nazi *Bastard*" toward those two bullies, and then he and Sebastian breached the pitch and headed toward the opposite stand to save Zeke Stanton. Therefore, the word *bastard* in that phrase is classified as epithet, for it is a slur referring to sexuality.

4.2. *Vulgarity*

Datum 3

Nobby : Isn't life strange? I mean, yesterday I'm having a normal day down the pub with me mates with a firework up me, *ass*. And here we are now, with me brother doing some running and swimming, different types of cardio.

Nobby and Sebastian manage to get out from their drown car after being chased by the police. They hide inside an abandoned warehouse to avoid the police officers who are still looking for them. They have a little chat there while Sebastian treats his injury. After Sebastian finishes to treat it, Sebastian bids farewell to Nobby as he wants to hide somewhere safe. But, Nobby has an idea to bring his brother to hide in their hometown, Grimsby, because Sebastian has left Grimsby for twenty years. Sebastian accepts that idea as he does not find a good place to hide yet. When they are walking towards Grimsby, Nobby tells Sebastian how different these past two days for him. The previous day, he was in a pub in Grimsby to watch a football match with his friends, while today, his day is filled with a lot of adrenaline with his long-lost brother. Nobby can freely utters the word *ass* when communicating with Sebastian as they both are very intimate. The word *ass* in that utterance can be classified as vulgarity because Nobby uses it to refer to his bottom.

Datum 4

Sharon : Boys!

Nobby : Oh, *bollocks*.

The dialogue occurs when Nobby and Sebastian are chasing Sharon Osbourne, who is trying to escape from the world cup stadium. She wants to escape since they have uncovered her plan. Sharon plans to release the virus in the stadium because she wants to reduce the population on Earth. By

releasing the virus, she hopes that the virus will kill a lot of hooligans who are dominated by poor people. When Nobby and Sebastian almost catch Sharon in a tunnel, she immediately calls her army to surround them. Nobby, who feels panicked instantly mutters "oh, *bollocks*" as the situation reverses for them.

According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.) [12], *bollocks* can be interpreted as testicles or nonsense. Therefore, the word *bollocks* uttered by Nobby is categorized as vulgarity since *bollocks* is a term to refer to a man's sexual organs.

4.3. Profanity

Datum 5

Jodie : Ledford activated someone called Chil-something. That's all I know.
Sebastian : Chilcott? Oh, *Jesus*, he's a psychopath. That's a kill order.

The conversation happens in an abandoned warehouse where Sebastian hides with Nobby from the police. Sebastian is calling his colleague in MI6, Jodie, to ask for help. Sebastian explains that he is not a traitor and needs her help to clear this mess and clean his name. Jodie, who is initially reluctant to help Sebastian, is finally willing to help him. She tells Sebastian that their boss, Ledford, has activated an agent named Chilcott to hunt him. Sebastian is surprised and says "oh, *Jesus*" because Chilcott is the usual agent assigned by MI6 to eliminate their target. Sebastian says the word *Jesus* because he is close with Jodie. The phone call ends when their boss, Ledford, starts glancing suspiciously at Jodie when she is on the phone. The word *Jesus* used by Sebastian in that utterance is categorized as profanity because *Jesus* is a sacred name in Christianity.

Datum 6

Nobby : What the *hell* are you doing?
Lina : I'm getting myself ready.

This occurrence occurs when Nobby is collecting the information about the villain of this movie in a hotel located in South Africa. He collects it by seducing Lina Smit, the villain's wife. At first, Nobby feels confident that he will complete the mission. However, there is a big misunderstanding in the end. Nobby mistakenly seduce the wrong woman and leaves the real Lina Smit in his room's bathroom.

In that dialogue, Nobby uses the word *hell* in the phrase "what the *hell* are you doing". The word *hell* in that phrase is categorized as profanity because *hell* is a place deeply related to religion and saying it freely is considered taboo. It is a place to condemn every person who did bad things in their previous life

4.4. Obscenity

Datum 7

Nobby : Leg it!
Old Lady : You little bastards. Give me back me ball!
Nobby : *Fuck off!*

This dialogue happened in the past when Nobby and Sebastian were children. At that time, they saw a ball in an old woman's backyard and decided to steal it. Sebastian entered the backyard silently through an unlocked door and kicked the ball to Nobby who waited outside. The old woman suddenly

got out of her house because of the noise. She shouted to Nobby and Sebastian to return her ball. Nobby replied by shouting “*fuck off!*” to the old lady as he and Sebastian ran away from that place.

The phrase *fuck off* uttered by Nobby in that scene is categorized as obscenity because it is a term relates to sexuality. Fuck off means to leave or go away (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.) [13]. It is used as a harsh way of telling someone to go away.

Datum 8

Nobby : Who are we?

Sebastian : We’re the Butcher boys of Grimsby

Nobby : I didn’t hear you. Say it again.

Sebastian : We’re the *fucking* Butcher boys of Grimsby. They’ll never split us up. Forever!

After the death of their parents, Nobby and Sebastian lived in an orphanage as a child. One day, Sebastian cried because he missed his life when Nobby and Sebastian’s parents were still alive. He also worried that his only family left, Nobby, would be taken away as well from his life. Nobby, who did not want Sebastian drowned in sorrow, tried to calm Sebastian.

The word *fucking* uttered by Sebastian in that dialogue is classified as an obscenity because it is a word that means sexual intercourse. The word *fucking* is a very rough word that is strongly prohibited to use in public as well. Nobby said it to Sebastian as they are very close to each other.

5. Conclusion

The Brothers Grimsby is an action-comedy movie directed by Louis Leterrier in 2016 that tells a story about an adventure of a pair of brothers, Nobby Butcher and Sebastian Graves. The main characters of this movie frequently utter taboo words when they communicate with others since it is a comedy movie that tells a story of lower-class people. There are a total of 36 taboo words in this movie. Vulgarity appears most with 13 words (36,1%) because the main characters often say words related to human’s sexual organ or sexual function. Obscenity appears next with 11 words (30,5%) followed by profanity with 9 words (25%). Epithet appears the least which is only uttered 3 times (8,3%) throughout the movie.

Furthermore, from the 36 taboo words in this movie, 26 of them are uttered by Nobby Butcher while Sebastian Graves speaks the rest. It suggests that someone from lower-class tends to use the taboo words more often rather than someone from the upper class. Nobby, who has lived in a slum of Grimsby since childhood, utters taboo words more freely when communicating with other people. Nobby does not know that taboo words may be harmful to other people. He even says it when he speaks to his children and his family. On the other hand, Sebastian who was adopted by a decent and rich family as a child, rarely speaks the rude taboo words when he is communicating with other people. Most of the taboo words uttered by Sebastian in this movie are profanity which is less rude than the other type of taboo words.

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