

Swearing as a Communicative Resource in Film Dialogue: A Pragmatic Analysis of *The Intern* (2015)



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ABSTRACT

Swearing, often stigmatized as impolite, fulfills diverse pragmatic functions in everyday and mediated discourse. Despite increasing scholarly attention, limited research has examined how swearing is employed in cross-generational workplace comedies. This study investigates the lexical types and pragmatic functions of swear words in *The Intern* (2015). Adopting a qualitative descriptive approach, the study analyzed all utterances containing swearing in the film. Data were collected through repeated viewing, transcription, and verification with subtitles to ensure accuracy. The lexical classification followed Hughes' (2006) typology, while functional analysis was guided by Andersson and Trudgill's framework, adapted to the filmic context. Thirty-eight instances of swearing were identified across four lexical categories: religious terms (e.g., "oh my God"), sexual expressions (e.g., "ass," "fucking"), animal references (e.g., "bitch"), and mental-state terms (e.g., "crazy," "maniac"). These fulfilled four pragmatic functions: expletive (spontaneous emotion), abusive (other-directed offence), humorous (affiliative purposes), and auxiliary (intensification). Jules Ostin, the female protagonist, produced the highest frequency, with expletive swearing predominating. The findings demonstrate that swearing in *The Intern* is a versatile pragmatic resource that indexes stance, emotion, and relational alignment, rather than merely signaling impoliteness. The study extends understanding of cinematic discourse and highlights pedagogical implications for raising EFL learners' sociolinguistic awareness of taboo language. Future research could examine genre and cross-cultural variation to illuminate the contextual shaping of swearing practices further.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a functional tool that allows individuals to express their thoughts, emotions, and ideas. Besides sharing information, language also plays a key role in expressing personal identity, cultural background, and social relationships. Through language, people create meaning, engage in social interactions, and build connections with others (Crystal, 1997). One particular aspect of language that has existed since long ago and remains relevant today is swearing, or the use of taboo and offensive words.

Swearing is a form of language that involves the use of taboo or offensive words, often employed to express strong emotions such as anger, frustration, or surprise (Stapleton et al., 2022). According to Mohr (2013), swearing can be divided into two categories there are religious oaths and

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obscene language. Swearing has been a part of human language for a very long time, beginning in ancient Rome, where people already used taboo words related to the body and sexuality. Over the centuries, the role and perception of swearing have changed significantly. For example, in the Middle Ages, religious promises were very important, and breaking them was considered a serious sin with strong consequences. As time passed, especially during the Renaissance, the power of religious institutions decreased. At the same time, words related to the body became more offensive than religious curses. By the 1700s, social rules and censorship made it difficult to use offensive language openly. After World War II, swearing began to include words connected to social and racial issues.

In recent times, the use of swear words has continued to evolve, reflecting changes in social attitudes across generations. Tikile & Ngulube (2025) explained that swear words are now used more frequently and with greater acceptance in everyday conversations and social media interactions. While some groups tend to limit their use of such language to private settings, others express it more freely as a way to convey emotions and build social identity. This trend indicates that swearing nowadays functions not only as a way to express intense emotions but also as a social tool for connection and belonging within various communities.

This evolving use of swear words in everyday language and social media reflects changes in how profanity is portrayed in popular media, including films. To better understand this phenomenon, considering examples from contemporary movies is beneficial, as films often reflect and shape social attitudes toward language use. One such example is *The Intern*, a comedy-drama film that tells the story of a 70-year-old retiree who becomes a senior intern at a modern online fashion company named About the Fit. The film explores interactions between different generations in the workplace, highlighting themes of friendship, adaptation, and mutual support.

In the context of this study, *The Intern* provides a useful case for examining how profanity or swearing functions within a film that combines realistic portrayal with wide audience appeal. Therefore, this research aims to explore the following questions:

1. What types of swear words are used in *The Intern* movie?
2. What are the pragmatic functions of swearing words in *The Intern* movie?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Swear Words

Swear words, also known as profanity or taboo language, are expressions that violate social norms of politeness and are generally seen as offensive or inappropriate in many cultures. These words are commonly used to express strong emotions such as anger, frustration, or surprise (Jay, 2009).

However, the way people perceive and accept these words can be very different depending on cultural and social backgrounds. In some cultures, certain swear words are strictly forbidden and can cause serious offense, while in others, they might be used more casually or even accepted in everyday conversations. Social rules not only decide which words are taboo but also influence when and with whom it is suitable to use them. For example, swearing among close friends might help to build trust and show closeness, but using the same language in formal settings or with strangers could be seen as disrespectful or rude. This shows that swear words are not just about bad language; they also act as signals of cultural values, group identity, and social boundaries (Allan & Burridge, 2006).

Hughes (2006) classified the types of swear words based on the lexical and cultural meanings. These groups include swear words related to sexual matters, excrement, animals, personal background, religious or taboo subjects, mental illness, and racial slurs.

Pragmatic Functions of Swearing

Swear words can be categorized into several types based on their pragmatic functions. According to Andersson and Trudgill, as cited in Sembiring et al. (2019) and Lidyawati & Supri (2023), swear words can be identified as expletive swearing, abusive swearing, humorous swearing, and auxiliary swearing.

- a. *Expletive swearing*. This type of swearing is used when someone expresses their emotions suddenly, without directing the words at anyone else. For example, words like “damn” or “shit” are often uttered when a person feels surprised or upset.
- b. *Abusive swearing*. This refers to the use of offensive language directed at others to show anger. For example, phrases like “fuck you!” or “motherfucker!” are used when a person wants to express strong negative emotions toward someone else.
- c. *Humorous swearing*. Humorous swearing is used to create a relaxed and fun atmosphere, often among people who have close relationships. For example, if someone behaves oddly, a friend might say, “Hey, it looks like shit!” or “Get your ass ready!” without intention to offend.
- d. *Auxiliary swearing*. This type of swearing does not express emotions or target other people. Instead, its functions are used as extra words to make a sentence more powerful. For example, in sentences like “It’s fucking fantastic!” or “That’s fucking awesome!”, the swear words “fucking” is used to show how strongly the speakers feels, not to insult anyone.

A study about swear words in a movie has been conducted by Garaga et al., (2022) investigated the type and functions of taboo and swear words used in the Ted 2 movie. The researcher used a qualitative approach to analyse the movie script, focusing on the dialogues and utterances containing those words. It was discovered that many taboo terms were related to religion. They were classified into strong swear words to express annoyance or intense emotions, and weak terms to show surprise. The study also identified several reasons for using swear words, including to insult or discredit others, to draw attention, to provoke, and to establish social connections, with insulting being the most frequent purpose.

Moreover, a previous study categorized the types, functions, and underlying factors of taboo words in the movie 21 Jump Street, done by Kusumaningsih (2019) revealed that the most frequent appearance of the taboo word is private body parts and sexual activities, compared with religious terms. Utilizing theories from Michael Swan and Timothy Jay, the research analysed the movie script through a qualitative research method. The study found six functions of taboo words, such as insulting others, expressing annoyance, asking surprised questions, showing surprise, emphasizing emotions, and other miscellaneous uses, with insults being the most frequent. The reasons behind the use of taboo language were influenced by the situational context as well as factors like psychological condition, social class, and ethnicity, with psychological factors having the greatest impact.

Another study was held by Pavesi & Formentelli (2023), exploring the pragmatic aspects of swearing in films, with a focus on how swear words are translated in dubbing. Their corpus-based research analysed occurrences of F-words in English-language films and the Italian dubbed versions, examining the interaction between pragmatic functions and translation strategies. The study found that translators tend to keep the emotional intensity and aggressive nature of swear words through strategies such as full translation, mitigation, or omission, aiming to maintain the conflictual and expressive functions of swearing within the film’s narrative (Beers Fägersten, 2012).

The gap in the research lies in the limited exploration of the pragmatic use of swear words by characters in *The Intern*, a film that has not been widely examined. While previous studies have addressed types and social functions of swear words in films like *Ted 2* and *21 Jump Street*, there is still a need to analyze both the types of swear words and their pragmatic functions, specifically in *The Intern*. By focusing on this specific film, the study aims to provide insights into how swearing operates as a communicative tool among characters in English-language films as a representation of people in real life.

METHODS

Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design, which is appropriate for examining language as it naturally occurs in context and for capturing the nuanced meanings of speakers’ choices (Lambert

& Lambert, 2012; Moriarty, 2011). Rather than testing hypotheses or measuring variables numerically, the study intended to provide a detailed account of how swear words are lexically categorized and how they function pragmatically in the film *The Intern* (2015). Within the qualitative paradigm, the research approach can be situated within discourse-pragmatic analysis, which focuses on how speakers' utterances perform actions, convey stance, and negotiate social relationships (Dynel, 2012).

Data Source and Context

The primary data source was the feature film *The Intern* (2015), an American comedy-drama that portrays interactions in a contemporary workplace setting. The film was selected because it combines intergenerational dynamics, informal workplace discourse, and frequent use of colloquial English, including taboo and swear words. This made it a suitable site for investigating how swearing operates as a pragmatic resource in mediated, yet realistic, dialogue. The unit of analysis comprised all utterances containing swear words produced by any character across the film's full running time.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in several stages to ensure completeness and accuracy. First, the researcher watched the film multiple times to gain familiarity with the plot, character relationships, and overall interactional context. During repeated viewing, all potential instances of swearing were noted, including mild, euphemistic, and more explicit forms. Second, the researcher obtained a written transcript of the film from a reputable online script database. The transcript was checked against the original audio-visual material and the official subtitles. This triangulation helped minimize transcription errors and ensured that the wording, speaker attribution, and timing of each instance were correct (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013). Third, all utterances containing swear words were extracted, numbered, and compiled into a data sheet that included: (a) the exact wording of the utterance, (b) the speaker, (c) the time stamp, and (d) a brief description of the situational context. Only verbal instances in the original dialogue were included; written text and background talk that could not be clearly heard were excluded.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of two complementary stages: lexical categorization and pragmatic function analysis. In the first stage, each swear word token was categorized according to Hughes's (2006) typology, which distinguishes religious swearing, sexual terms, animal-based expressions, mental-state or mental-illness terms, and other taboo categories. This deductive coding was applied systematically, while allowing for minor adaptations where film-specific usage required clarification. Frequency counts were then calculated to show the distribution of each lexical category across the 38 identified tokens.

In the second stage, the pragmatic functions of each instance were analyzed drawing on Andersson and Trudgill's framework, as used and operationalized in subsequent studies (e.g., Sembiring et al., 2019; Lidyawati & Supri, 2023). Each token was coded as expletive, abusive, humorous, or auxiliary, based on its interactional role, target, and contextual cues such as prosody, context, and the characters' relationship. Here, the focus was not only on literal meaning but on what the utterance does—for example, whether it vents emotion, insults, builds camaraderie, or intensifies evaluation (Jay, 2009; Beers Fägersten, 2012).

To enhance analytic reliability, the coding was revisited in several rounds. Ambiguous cases were re-watched in the film to re-check intonation, gesture, and the broader scene context. Where needed, previous scholarship on swearing in film dialogue and conversational interaction was consulted to support interpretive decisions (Dynel, 2012; Pavesi & Formentelli, 2023).

Several strategies were employed to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings. Data triangulation was achieved by cross-checking the script, subtitles, and audio-visual material. Methodological transparency was maintained by clearly specifying the categorization criteria and

coding procedures. In addition, the use of established typologies for both lexical categories and pragmatic functions supports the credibility and transferability of the analysis to similar studies on swearing in media discourse.

FINDINGS

Types of Swear Words in The Intern

Based on the movie's dialogue analysis in *The Intern*, there are various types of swear words used by the characters. These harsh words can be classified into several types according to Hughes (2006). The following table presents the categorization and frequency of different types of swear words in *The Intern*.

Table 1. *Types of Swear Words in The Intern*

No	Types of Swearing	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
1	Religion	27	71.06%
2	Sexual terms	7	18.42%
3	Animal references	2	5.26%
4	Mental illness	2	5.26%
	Total	38	100%

Religion

This type of swear word is a term that uses sacred or holy things, such as God, Jesus, or hell. People often find these words offensive because they disrespectfully use holy terms. In everyday speech, people sometimes replace these with softer words like “darn” or “heck” to avoid offending others.

Dialogue 1 (In Jules' office)

Jules : Okay, favorite music?

Ben : Uh, *jeez*. Sam Cooke, one of my all-time favorites. Love Miles Davis, Billie Holiday. (00:54:27,400)

In the first dialogue, the word “jeez” refers to “Jesus”, the name of God in Christianity. This word is considered to be a religious type of swear word based on Hughes' theory; it references things that many people consider holy or forbidden. Ben spontaneously uttered “jeez” after he was asked by Jules about his favorite music. This conversation happened as Jules helped Ben make a *Facebook* account and completed the information required. They stayed in the office through midnight to get the job done that day.

Sexual Terms

Sexual swear words refer to words that describe private parts of the body or sexual acts. These words are usually taboo because they talk about subjects that many find inappropriate to mention openly. For example, words like *asshole*, *dick*, *pussy*, and *fuck* are common sexual words.

Dialogue 2 (In Becky's desk)

Becky : But she doesn't. I mean, I bust my *ass* for her 14 hours a day, and she never notices. Oh, my God. I hate girls who cry at work.

Ben : How about if you, just as an experiment, try letting me help you. A lot of your stress is gonna be lifted once you're out from under this mountain of worry. And maybe you should consider leaving here at a normal hour once in a while. See your friends. Have a little fun.

(01:02:03,840)

In this case, the term “ass” is classified as a sexual term in swear words. Hughes explained that ass belongs to the category of sexual or body-related swear words because it relates to a part of the human anatomy that is considered private in many cultures. From this interaction, it portrayed Becky, who is an employee in Jules’ company, crying bitterly because she’s being overwhelmed with the job duties from Jules. There were numerous papers stacked on her desk. She uttered the word “ass” to illustrate how she worked extremely hard on her job, and Jules never gave her any appreciation.

Animal References

It is the use of the names of animals to insult or describe someone negatively. Hughes (2006) points out that calling someone a *pig*, *bitch*, or *cow* is meant to be rude by comparing the person to animals culturally seen as dirty, aggressive, or unpleasant.

Dialogue 3 (At a pub)

Davis : You are a crazy son of a *bitch*. You know that, right?

Ben : I didn’t, actually. I’m sure my blood pressure was through the roof. But it was worth it. Good times!

(01:14:48,039)

This conversation described the Davis character saying the animal references swear words. He uttered “a bitch” to show his impression of Ben after they managed to get out of Jules’ parents’ house and completed the mission to delete an e-mail of Jules’ cursing message to her mom. The literal meaning of the word “bitch” refers to a female dog. This word is mainly used as an insulting term aimed at women, usually suggesting that they are mean or unpleasant, rather than simply meaning a female dog. So, the swear word “bitch” here meant to be addressed to the mother of Ben.

Mental Illness

This curse refers to mental issues or intelligence, such as the words *crazy*, *idiot*, *dumb*, and *psycho* are often used to insult or show frustration. These words can be hurtful because they reinforce negative stereotypes about mental illness or intellectual ability.

Dialogue 4 (At a bar)

Davis : You are a *crazy* son of a bitch. You know that, right?

Ben : I didn’t, actually. I’m sure my blood pressure was through the roof. But it was worth it. Good times!

(01:14:48,039)

There was a mental illness swear word used by Davis directed at Ben. The word “crazy” is categorized as an insult, as it refers to a state of mental instability and is often used to describe someone perceived as irrational or unpredictable. In the context of this scenario, Davis uttered the word “crazy” not to diagnose Ben but to express strong emotion and emphasize Ben’s unexpected or bold behavior. That was after they completed a mission from Jules to pass the laptop owned by Jules’ mom and remove an inappropriate message from her.

The Pragmatic Function of Swear Words

There are four kinds of pragmatic functions applied in analyzing the movie *The Intern*. Those pragmatic functions are expletive (spontaneous), abusive (offensive), humorous (sense of humour), and auxiliary (highlighting sentence), as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. *The Pragmatic Function of Swear Words in The Intern*

No	Types of Swearing	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Expletive	27	71.06%
2	Abusive	3	7.89%
3	Humorous	3	7.89%
4	Auxiliary	5	13.16%
Total		38	100%

Expletive (to show spontaneous emotion)

Dialogue 5 (in the ATF office)

Jules : *Oh, my God.* Somebody cleaned up that desk. I swear, I was gonna stay late and do this myself.

Cameron : Wasn't me.

Ali : Ben came in at 7:00 this morning and did it.

Jules : Who?

Ali : Ben. Your intern.

(00:27:31,079)

This dialogue occurred when Jules came to the office and directly focused on the desk that used to be overcrowded with stacks of papers and several items. She realized that the “trash” had disappeared, and the table became empty. She uttered the swear word “Oh my God” as an expression of shock and excitement at Ben’s work in throwing away that junk. These swear words were not addressed to other people, but it has a function to express the spontaneous feeling of the speaker, including shock and excitement.

Dialogue 6 (at Paige’s school)

Paige : Bipolar.

Jules : *Oh, my God.* Come here. Oh, I love you, big girl.

(00:45:30,639)

In line with dialogue 5, this conversation happened between Jules and her daughter, Paige. The setting of this scene was in the school yard of her daughter, which meant she was dropping off her child at school. In this case, Paige made fun of her friend by calling her bipolar, and Jules gave a reaction by speaking the term “Oh my God” to show her shock at her daughter’s words. So, the use of Oh my God as a swear word in this context functioned to express the shock of Jules.

Dialogue 7 (At the office cafeteria)

Jules : No, actually, one is, because I am usually better than this. The truth is... Something about you makes me feel calm or more centered or something. And I could use that. Obviously. I hope you’ll accept my apology and come back to work for me. If you want... And I’m not just saying this because I screwed up this morning. But I was thinking that I’d like to bring you up to my area, next to Becky. I know you can handle more work. If you’d like more. I... *Oh, God,* I can’t tell you how much I hate that I jumped the gun and I made you feel...

Ben : I’m coming back. I’m happy to come back.

(01:00:17,519)

In the dialogue, the phrase “Oh God” functions as expletive swearing, which Jules used to suddenly express her intense emotions of frustration and regret without directing the words at anyone specifically. This expletive swearing shows her vulnerability and conveys the depth of her feelings,

making the apology feel heartfelt and genuine. By using this emotional expression, Jules invites the listener to understand and empathize with her state of mind, adding emotional depth to the interaction.

Dialogue 8 (In the meeting room)

Jules : *Oh, my God.* I cannot believe how well that sweater is doing. I'm so happy.

Cameron : Beautiful, Miami! Thank you.

Jules : Oh, look at Chicago! She put the same boots in her cart as the woman from Houston.

(01:03:05,679)

In this dialogue, the swear word, "Oh, my God," is used by Jules as a spontaneous exclamation to express surprise and excitement. It portrayed her genuine reaction to the unexpected success of the sweater. This term highlights her strong positive feelings in the moment. Although the term originally comes from a religious phrase, where it was regarded as sacred, here it is used as a common expression in everyday conversation. It brings a relaxed and honest feeling to the dialogue, reflecting how people often share spontaneous emotions in informal speech without trying to be offensive.

Abusive (to show strong emotion toward others)

Dialogue 9 (At the car)

Doris : Hold your horses, *maniac*! Which way, hon? I'm all turned around here.

Jules : Doris. Doris! Doris!

(00:58:51,880)

This dialogue is a part of a conversation between Doris and Jules. On that morning, Jules was going to her office with her new driver. Doris is an old woman replacing Ben as the personal assistant of Jules. Unfortunately, Doris did not have the capability to drive a car safely. They almost crashed into another vehicle while exiting a roadside parking lot. The term "maniac" as a swear word used by Doris is considered to be abusive. Its function is to show offensive anger directed at a person or group. In this scene, Doris used the harsh word to show her fury at the other driver who had almost bumped into her.

Dialogue 10 (At Jules' parents' house)

Lewis : Here, let me. Found it! "Why is my mother always such a raging *bitch*?" Subject: "She's a terrorist."

Jules : Yes! Delete it!

(01:13:28,239)

In this dialogue, there is a swear word, "bitch" said by Lewis when he finally found and read a message on Jules' mother's laptop. The story of this scene was when Lewis, Ben, and Davis were asked by Jules to help her delete an email mistakenly sent to her mom. It was Jules texting Matt, "Why is my mother always such a raging bitch? She's seriously f-ed up. How did I turn out so normal-ish?". Those sentences show how Jules's anger toward her mom was motivated by her complicated relationship with her parents, specifically with her mom after she was ringed by her. Therefore, the mentioned swear word from Jules, read by Lewis, has a function to show strong, angry emotion toward her mother.

Dialogue 11 (At a funeral)

Miles : Benji, you brought a date to a funeral. Unreal.

Ben : We had plans. Who knew this was gonna happen?

Miles : Well, how do you do? I'm Miles.

Fiona : Hello. Fiona. I'm so sorry for your loss.

Miles : Oh, thank you, dear. Wow!

Patty : Fuck you (lip movement)

(01:20:40,279)

In the context of this conversation, Patty's swearing "fuck you" reflects her strong emotional reaction to Ben bringing Fiona as his date to the funeral. Patty has feelings for Ben, and seeing him with someone else, especially at such a sensitive event like a friend's wife's funeral, provoked her anger and jealousy. Patty's swear word carried a lot of emotion, expressed deep anger and hurt, exposing the complicated feelings between her and Ben.

Humorous (to make a relaxed atmosphere)

Dialogue 12 (In Bens' desk)

Ben : You know, I feel like everybody's uncle around here.

Davis : Yeah, why is that?

Ben : Because I'm gonna save your *ass*, and I'm gonna put you up for a few weeks.

Obviously.

(01:04:36,760)

This conversation shows an interaction between Davis, who confided about his residence to Ben that he will be moving to Philadelphia with his cousin. He conveyed that it would take several hours to get to the office in a sad tone if he did move there. Then, Ben responded to him that he would let Davis stay in his house for some time. The chosen swear word by Ben was "ass"; this word helped him to express humorous and supportive sentences, so it melted the situation between them.

Dialogue 13 (At a pub)

Davis : You are a crazy son of a *bitch*. You know that, right?

Ben : I didn't, actually. I'm sure my blood pressure was through the roof. But it was worth it.

Good times!

(01:14:48,039)

The interaction between Davis and Ben contains a clear example of humorous swearing, which is common among close family members or friends who share a strong bond. Davis called Ben a "crazy son of a bitch" in a playful way, showing their close and caring relationship rather than trying to hurt or insult him. This kind of swearing conveys familiarity and humor to the conversation, creating a sense of strong friendship. The argument is strengthened by Ben's reaction, which includes a humorous comment on his blood pressure, contributing to the friendly tone of the dialogue.

Auxiliary (to point sentences)

Dialogue 14 (In a meeting room)

Ben : Jules, I think there's only one thing we can do.

Jules : What? Tell me. I'm dying.

Ben : Me and the boys take off, we break into your mom's house, and we steal her computer.

Jules : Break into her house and steal the computer? Are you kidding me? That's *freakin'* genius.

(01:10:20,479)

A swear word was found in this dialogue between Ben and Jules. The word "freakin'" is the other term of "fucking" that functions to be an extra word in a sentence. In the context of this dialogue, Jules used it to praise Ben's brilliant idea to advise her on solving the problem she created. This harsh word, employed by Jules, reflected the aim of auxiliary swear words, which are used to highlight her

statement in reply to Ben's opinion rather than to offend. It is making their interaction more expressive and engaging.

Dialogue 15 (Outside of a car)

Ben : Jason! Open the door!

Davis : Open the *fucking* door!

Jason : Whoa! Whoa, okay! Okay!

(01:14:31,600)

This argument emphasized explicitly the use of profanity, “fucking” as an intensifier to express urgency and strong emotion. Davis's choice of language highlights his frustration and impatience in the situation. At that time, they were trapped in a difficult condition and needed to get into the car quickly before being caught by the police because of trespassing. In America, people who enter another person's property could be arrested by cops if the owner did not give permission. This activity is considered criminal and illegal there. That situation is what made Davis throw out the swear word “fucking” to underline the point he was about to deliver to Jason, the driver of the car.

Dialogue 16 (At Maddie's Birthday Party)

Jane : I've just heard she's, you know, kinda tough.

Ben : Tough? Jules? Sure. She's a total *badass*. I guess that's now she became an Internet sensation. Must make you guys proud, huh? One of your own out there every day, crashing the glass ceiling of the tech world. So, bravo, good for her. Right?

Jane : Yeah. No, for sure.

(01:24:07,920)

An auxiliary swear word appears in the conversation between Ben and the other moms of Peige's friends. In this scene, Ben used the word “badass” not to insult anyone but to emphasize his admiration and casual attitude when describing Jules' toughness and success. This kind of swearing acts as a way to add emphasis and emotion without offending others. Ben's choice of words showed that he stood by Jules and wanted to defend her against the quiet criticism from the other moms.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal the presence of 38 instances of verbal swear words in the dialogues of *The Intern*, highlighting the frequent and natural use of swearing in casual, contemporary cinematic dialogue. The use of profanity in this context not only reflects realistic conversational patterns but also mirrors broader social tendencies in language use—where swearing, though still often considered taboo, is pragmatically functional and embedded in everyday speech.

Based on Hughes' (2006) categorization, the swear words in the film fall into four lexical categories: religious terms (e.g., “Oh my God,” “Jeez”), sexual expressions (e.g., “ass,” “fucking”), animal references (e.g., “bitch”), and mental illness-related words (e.g., “crazy,” “maniac”). Each of these types reflects a different cultural or social taboo, and their usage in the film illustrates the characters' emotional states, social relationships, and contextual needs. For instance, religious terms are often used as expletives, spontaneously expressing surprise or shock (as seen in Jules' and Ben's interactions), while animal-related slurs and mental illness terms tend to serve more abusive or emphatic functions depending on tone and target. The pragmatic function analysis—based on Andersson and Trudgill's framework (cited in Sembiring et al., 2019)—further clarifies how profanity serves communicative roles beyond literal offense. Four primary functions were identified: expletive, abusive, humorous, and auxiliary. The most frequent function was the expletive, reflecting characters' spontaneous emotional responses. This supports Jay's (2009) assertion that swearing can function as an emotional release or coping mechanism, especially in high-stress or socially charged situations.

Characters such as Jules and Davis use swearing reflexively in moments of excitement, shock, or frustration—enhancing the realism and relatability of the dialogue.

The abusive function, while less common, was also significant in reflecting interpersonal conflict or frustration. For instance, the use of “maniac” by Doris and “bitch” in the context of Jules’ strained relationship with her mother shows how swear words can encode emotional intensity and social distance. These examples support the claim by Stapleton et al. (2022) that swearing often plays a role in conflict expression and power negotiation. Interestingly, the humorous function of swearing appeared notably in Ben and Davis’ interactions, demonstrating how profanity can foster in-group bonding or soften serious conversations. This aligns with Dynel’s (2012) view that humorous swearing can act as a discourse strategy to build rapport, especially in male-male interactions. Similarly, the auxiliary function, as seen in Jules’ use of “freakin’,” illustrates how swear words can be used to intensify meaning or emphasize a speaker’s stance—without necessarily intending offense (Beers Fägersten, 2012).

Another noteworthy observation is the distribution of swearing among characters. Jules, the female protagonist and CEO, was the most frequent user of profanity, indicating how language use in media no longer strictly adheres to traditional gendered norms where men are portrayed as the primary users of taboo language. Her swearing often reflects the pressures of leadership, emotional strain, and her informal leadership style. This finding supports previous studies (e.g., Baruch & Jenkins, 2007) that suggest swearing is increasingly used by women in professional and media contexts to assert authority, express emotion, and display authenticity (Stapleton, 2003).

Ben and Davis followed as the next most frequent users, both using profanity in ways that align with their generational and relational roles. Ben, though older, uses softer swearing (“jeez,” “ass”) typically in expletive or humorous functions, maintaining his persona as wise yet approachable. Davis, on the other hand, uses more intense swear words, often reflecting youthful impulsiveness and informality. These findings highlight that swearing in film serves as more than dramatic filler; it operates pragmatically to reflect power dynamics, interpersonal intimacy, and emotional nuance. Pragmatic functions of swear words are shaped by context, speaker identity, and social purpose. Swearing thus contributes not only to the realism of dialogue but also to character development and narrative pacing.

In conclusion, the use of swear words in *The Intern* reflects a wide spectrum of pragmatic intentions and lexical categories. Rather than being uniformly offensive, swear words are used flexibly to express emotions, create humor, mark social closeness or distance, and emphasize meaning. These functions confirm that profanity in media discourse serves as a meaningful communicative resource, aligning with broader linguistic and sociocultural functions in real-life conversation.

CONCLUSION

Referring to the results of the data analysis regarding the usage of swear words in this movie, it was discovered that the category of swear words can be divided into several groups, including religious and sexual terms, animal references, and words related to mental illness. The commonly spotted swear words by the author are the utilization of religious swear words that have pragmatic meanings in exposing a sense of surprise, pleasure, and frustration. Besides religious swear words, other categories contribute to the richness and variety of language used in the movie, each of them fulfilling a different communicative purpose. It can be inferred that the characters in *The Intern* use these curse words strategically to share strong emotions such as anger and displeasure, to strengthen their point, and to manage social connections by either creating a good relationship or asserting dominance. This pragmatic use reflects how swear words function as tools for expressing emotions, social negotiation, and sometimes humour, depending on the context and the intention of the speaker.

It is recommended that future research explore the use of swear words across different film genres and cultural backgrounds to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their pragmatic functions and social meanings. Integrating the exploration of swear words into language education can

assist learners in better understanding casual conversations and the social messages or feelings behind these expressions. For filmmakers and translators, understanding the different ways swear words are used can help make dialogues feel more real and respectful of cultural differences. Furthermore, investigating how audiences interpret and react to swear words in media can offer valuable insights into how language shapes social attitudes and affects interpersonal relationships.

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