Profanity and Women

A Linguistic Analysis of Language and Gender - Based on HBO's *True Blood*

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Abstract

Like many other social issues concerning gender, language also comes with gendered stereotypes and limitations which results in difference and inequality in speech, based on gender. According to folk-linguistic beliefs and a variety of linguists, women are believed to speak in a specific way in which using swear words is not considered ideal. In this context, folk-linguistic beliefs are general speculations concerning language which is grounded on personal opinions and misconceptions. One common misconception remains that women swear less as foul language is considered as an emotion of anger, associated with masculinity rather than femininity. This research was carried out quantitatively and qualitatively using discourse analysis. Male and female characters from the series *True Blood* on HBO were examined by analyzing the difference in frequency of swear words uttered by both genders. This study aims to determine if men swear more than women in the series and whether the theory of dominance can provide an explanation for the linguistic behavior of the male and female characters of the series. The quantitative data collected from the series was later discussed alongside some of the theories, in particular, the theory of dominance. The results suggest that the female character Tara in the series swears the most and the results fall in disagreement with folk-linguistic beliefs and Lakoffs (1973) claims stating that women use fewer expletives than men. Also, the linguistic behavior of the characters in the series does not confirm the theory of dominance no specific linguistic attributes concerning gender are spotted as there is no evidence of men appearing different in terms of power, dominance, or defiance in terms of language in the series.

1 Introduction

Interest in gender and language as an individual field was formed during the second wave of the Western Women's Movement around the late 1969's. Women were oppressed in different ways in which the role of language and linguistic oppression was equally evident. In turn, the Western Women's Movement paid much interest to this issue as sexist language was a huge problem then, which led to the examination of gender representation in, for instance, children's books and media (Sunderland, 2012). The interest in the linguistic differences between women and men is increasing rapidly and questions like 'Do women and men talk differently?' are becoming more intense. These questions are usually targeted and answered in news channels and media in general, which sustains folk-linguistic beliefs and strengthens gender-typical linguistic stereotypes. Folk-linguistic beliefs are common misconceptions regarding language based on personal opinions and norms. These beliefs are not scientific, rather thoughts and assumptions based on speculations, prejudice, and casual conversations. To demonstrate, folk-linguistic beliefs are perceptions such as women swearing less and men swearing more, or associating women with gossiping and men with reason. Also, by asking the question 'Do women and men talk differently?', it is being put out there that there are obvious differences that are supposed to be natural, and that in turn encourages stereotypes (Coates, 2015).

Using expletives and taboo words are considered as masculine attributes and do not fit into the frame of the language of women, according to norms and stereotypes. This is since swearing is seen as an aggressive, commanding, and violent way of expressing oneself. Thus, (Lakoff 1975) explains that, if women use expletives and taboo words, they are scrutinized and may be perceived as exceeding the expectations and norms of culture and society, violating femininity. Swear words essentially form a masculine personality, and so women taking over male attributes are condemned and considered improper and disorderly as they are supposed to represent a kind and pretty speech with uncertainty along with appearing polite and maintaining social relations. They are essentially denied power as they are perceived as unsuited to handling it due to their linguistic behavior (Lakoff 1975).

Robin Lakoff's book, *Language and Women's place* in 1975 opened doors to researchers and studies to examine the differences between the language of men and women which was not thought of before. Lakoff made it possible for researchers to pursue different perspectives and identify new theories to be able to study language and gender from other distinct angles and dimensions. Diverse approaches then started to become available in which particularly the theories of deficit, dominance, and difference will be discussed and applied in this research by analyzing the series *True Blood* on HBO.

2 Aim and Research Questions

In this study, I intend to find out how language is framed based on gender, and to what degree the speech of men and women differ from each other in the series. The integral part of this essay is the series *True Blood* and its characters, which will be studied and examined using both, quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis will help determine the frequency of the swear words uttered, and the qualitative analysis will help discuss the episodes of the series with the help of some theories, in particular, the theory of dominance. The focus is on whether preconceptions and folk-linguistic beliefs regarding gendered speech are valid and applicable to the characters of the series.

The questions this paper aims to answer are:

1. Do men swear more than women in the series *True Blood*, and to what degree?
2. Does the linguistic behavior of the male and female characters in the series True Blood concur with some theories, in particular, the theory of dominance?

3 Theoretical Background

3.1 Language and Gender – The Deficit Theory

Over the years, the language of men and women has been portrayed to be different from each other which has led to stereotypical beliefs and assumptions. Folk-linguistic evidence has for a long time differentiated language based on gender and presented the language of men and women to be distinctive. Evidence-based on this belief relies on a prescriptive perspective which discusses how the language of women should be rather than applying a descriptive point of view discussing how it truly is (Baxter, 2011). Language and gender or 'feminist linguistics' is a considerably new field in the study of sociolinguists which was essentially developed after Robin Lakoff's article "Language and woman's place" published in 1973. This was an article that took everyone by storm and essentially launched the study of language and gender. Lakoff (1973) argues in her article that women have a distinctive way of speaking which largely differs from men's, and what characterizes women's way of speaking is that it represents and produces a subordinate position in society. Two aspects that contribute to the subordinate position of women and their powerlessness are first, reflected in the way women are anticipated to speak and secondly, how women are spoken of. A certain type of speech style is considered to be appropriate where, for example, a strong expression of thought and feeling is not accepted. Instead, representation of

uncertainty is favored which leaves women in an inferior position linguistically compared to men This theory in essence claims that women's language is known by certain types of linguistic features such as hedges, adjectives that are considered empty, weak, uncertain, and powerless which indicates overall deficiency (Coates, 2015).

Lakoff (1973) introduces the deficit theory which explains how girls are taught to use a distinctive language that is only meant for women. The language for women "was more tentative, hesitant, indirect, and therefore a more powerless version of men's, trapping them in a perpetual double-bind" (Baxter 2011, p.333). She further discusses in her article that women encounter linguistic discrimination in two specific ways which include: "in the way they are taught to use language, and in the way general language use treats them." (p.46). If a girl speaks roughly, she is mocked and criticized and reprimanded for talking in a way boys normally would. By doing this to a girl and 'correcting' her, society keeps girls in place and makes sure that they speak how they are supposed to according to society. This way, girls are taught language in a specific way from an early stage which puts them in a subordinate position throughout. If not corrected, girls will be accused of not being able to speak well and appropriately as a woman should and will be looked down upon. If a woman refuses to talk in a lady-like way, she is criticized and seen as unfeminine, but if she does talk in a lady-like way, she will still be looked down upon and appear clueless. She will not be able to participate in serious conversations and powerfully express herself. This has resulted in women not having access to power in society as women are not allowed to express themselves strongly, which also affects their identity negatively (Lakoff, 1973).

3.2 The Dominance Theory

Since the very beginning, men have been correlated with power and essentially been handed power in comparison to women. Women are denied access to power due to them seeming incapable of maintaining it "… as demonstrated by their linguistic behavior…" (Lakoff 1975, p. 48). According to the theory of dominance (Lakoff, 1973) women are thought of as oppressed bodies where men essentially dominate women linguistically. The agenda of early feminist linguistics was primarily constructed by the dominance approach where Lakoff's (1973) thesis argued that women framed their inferiority linguistically led to the dominance theory which had two parallel divisions: "language as social interaction, which considered how gender inequalities were constructed through routine interactions between men and women, and language as a system focusing on 'sexism' within the language." (Baxter, 2011 p.333). Language as social interaction involved research and examination of daily conversations with a focus on gender. Therefore, interactional studies were carried out to examine conversations of men and women where elements like frequency of talk, silent pauses, questions,

interruptions, and back-channeling were examined (Baxter, 2011 p.333). A well-known study conducted by Fishman (1978) showcased that women do not talk as much as men in conversations and men talk for the most part. Instead, women try to interact more and appear supportive by listening and maintain social relations by encouraging their speakers. Moreover, a study conducted by Defrancisco (1991) showcased that men mostly reply with silence if they are in conversation with women, which results in women not having much to talk about.

Language as a system, on the other hand, involves ways in which language has been constructed over the years which has resulted in men and women following norms of language as a system that cannot be changed. Spender (1980) explains that language has essentially evolved over centuries only to benefit men and adhering to their needs and interests. Spender, in short, argues that language is man-made and discusses masculine terms and their usage which also concerns how grammars and dictionaries defined the usage of masculine terms such as he, man, and mankind as untrue generics to signify males and females. This later strengthened a view of the world which revolved around men, an andro-centric view (Baxter, 2011, p. 334). Patriarchy and the insistence of male power and dominance in society is essentially the cause of the subordination of women linguistically, which is what the dominance theory primarily looks at.

Furthermore, women and their linguistically subordinate position are also examined by (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003) who discuss Janet Holmes (1995) as she proposes that compared to men, women appear politer linguistically, which is also a part of folk-linguistics. Holmes found out in her research that in comparison to men, women complimented each other more and apologized to each other more as well. Homes associated women with polite facework where they essentially tend to focus more on the affective function of talk. The affective function of talk includes the overt expression of emotion, along with the maintenance of social relations. Men, on the other hand, are mostly associated with the referential or instrumental function which includes passing on information regarding more serious things compared to emotional conditions. Likewise, the referential and instrumental functions also relate to men trying to convey facts or achieve something. This results in men being paired with reason and women with emotion, which again leaves women with a subordinate position linguistically and in society in general where they lack power as well as recognition.

3.3 Theory of Difference

The theory of difference, originally promoted by Tannen (1990), suggests “that based on presumed differences in their use of language, men and women constitute two different subcultures, each with

their communicative styles, one neither inferior nor subordinate to the other" (Beers Fägersten and Sveen, 2016, p. 103). Tannen (1990) further argues that the language of men is more tilted towards status, resolving problems, communicating information, commanding, confronting, and not depending on anyone when speaking. Women, on the other hand, as discussed above, are keener on maintaining their politeness and social relations. They show support while speaking, aim to accomplice intimacy, and try to solve any disputes. The differences in the language of men and women depict two different natures and two distinctive cultures which are taught and learned from a young age which set the base for them regarding how to act in their adult life. Young boys are practically taught to compete and remain in the center while speaking with reason and with an intention, whereas girls are taught to showcase cooperation and appear emotional. These differences are learned and maintained from a young age as boys and girls are pushed towards stereotypes, both socially and linguistically, which shape them later as adults. Tannen (1990) explains these cultural differences by dividing them into two categories: report-talk vs. rapport-talk. This represents a clear sense of power in mixed-sex conversations which Crawford (1995) explains by comparing the reasons as to why men and women speak and how they utilize linguistic attributes. Men essentially utilize their talk in an attempt to dominate, whereas women are dominated by their talk (p. 7). Although, as Cameron (1985) describes it, it remains unclear whether women lack control of language because they do not have the power in society, or because they need to master a language to gain social power and a higher status in society.

3.4 Swear Words and Gender

Lakoff (1975) argues that swear words are an aspect of language which does not fit in the frame for language for women. As discussed above, if women do not adhere to the stereotypes of the language of women, they are scolded and reprimanded, along with appearing unfeminine. Therefore, swearing is seen as unacceptable coming from women as it does not suit their nature of language for they cannot appear rough or aggressive like men due to swearing being extensively acknowledged as an expression of extreme emotion that tilts towards anger and frustration. Additionally, a lot of men and women still express uneasiness and displeasure when swearwords are uttered from a woman's mouth. In the US, there are actual laws that prevent the usage of taboo words or swear words in front of women and children. “a Michigan man was indicted and convicted under such a stature in the of 1999.” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p.182). Swear words are not allowed or expected in the presence of women as women are not expected to use such language, which again accentuates their subordinate position in society.

Profanity is often considered a symbol of masculinity and power and is used to break norms and stand out. De Klerk (1997) discusses expletives that are being used increasingly in Western cultures to achieve acceptance and feel included. Also, breaking norms and disrespecting others by using expletives is a way to gain authority. Therefore, while women tend to avoid expletives, men usually tend to use foul language to adhere to the norms of the society as verbal aggression portrays men as strong and powerful which makes them follow the stereotypes of masculinity. Expletives are seen as an attribute of being a man and therefore, "males have a certain obligation to try them out, and conform to the expectations of society by using them." (p.148).

Similarly, Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (2003) discuss anger as an emotion and how it is mostly expected to be showcased by men. Being abusive, insulting, and shouting at other people is most commonly expected by men and are all attributes of anger. This essentially promotes power and puts people showcasing anger, in an influential position where they can get other people to obey them. Anger and profanity produce fear where one feels intimidated, however, that is not the case every time. Women's anger is commonly appeared to be brushed off and classified as frustration or an emotional outburst. Women's anger does not appear threatening where they are not taken seriously while people end to say things like: "You're so cute when you're mad." (p.182). Women uttering swear words and speaking a foul language, in general, is a threat to men which hits their dominance and their powerful status in modern Western society. Allowing women to do something which only men can do, or allowing them to act in the same aggressive and intimidating way as men, will undermine the authority of men and challenge their dominance while snatching their power of appearing dominant as then it will be 'shared' with women as well (Eckert and McConnel-Ginet 2003, p. 182) Furthermore, swearing, particularly for women, will commonly lead to unwanted consequences, as men still have a wide scope of getting away with it being more acceptable for them to use foul language. Therefore, it is typical for women not wanting to use swear words due to the fear of facing harsh consequences.

Furthermore, various studies conducted on swearing and gender suggest that women use expletives as well, and them adhering to folk-linguistic beliefs is not always the case. Gender and profanity is essentially a more complex and context-based matter than what it has been portrayed as. In a study conducted by De Klerk (1992), it was found out that despite the general belief that women do not use taboo words or expletives, women use expletives and are familiar with taboo words just like men. Taboo words, slang, and profanity are equally obvious and known amongst women, as it is amongst men. This finding is based on data collected in South Africa which supports Risch's (1987) research conducted in the United States that provided evidence against folk-linguistic beliefs stating women are merely

concerned about politeness and use a standard speech style discussed above. Risch (1987) primarily found out that women use derogatory language with expletives, slang, and taboo words, and are doing so in an increasing manner.

Limbrick (1991) carried out a study concerning expletives amongst single and mixed-gender conversations. This study suggested that men did swear somewhat more than women in single-gender conversations, but the difference was hardly noticeable. However, women did appear to swear more than men when in mixed-gender conversations while also using harsher swearwords than men. These results challenge the stereotypical image and framework of women's language which suggests otherwise. However, as mentioned above, gender and profanity is a more complex and context-based matter than what it has been portrayed as, which is visible in Limbrick's research which studies mixed as well as single-gender conversations which suggested different results. To sum it up, these studies generally disagree with the claims made by Lakoff (1973) focusing on how women are merely dominated by the talk of men and refrain from using expletives or taboo words. However, these studies, or essentially any study conducted about this particular topic as mentioned above, is a complex and situational aspect that has different results depending on the circumstances and various other factors like who the opposite person in the conversation is, where is it being held, the social status of the people participating, etc. Moreover, because situations have changed since the initial research on language and gender and the studies discussed above, results cannot be based solely on these.

3.5 Television and Language

Since the series *True Blood* is a focal part of this research, it makes television an integral aspect of this paper. The reason for this is because television portrays characters and situations in a way that pleases the audiences and tries to make them relatable to them. Television promotes stereotypes which in turn results in them becoming stronger which audiences often adapt to in real life. This leads to television shows constructing the language of characters in a way that adheres to the stereotypes of various types, gender being one of them. Characters in TV shows reflect a stereotypical image as to how a man or a woman is expected to speak in various situations, which is then portrayed in television for the audiences to connect to, that can mislead the audiences into believing it as the ultimate reality. Therefore, the content in television does not represent a fundamental reality, but what is presented is in various ways adapted by people in real life as television figures are also seen as idols and role models. Referring to how masculine or feminine a character behaves or to what extent a character aligns to the framework of masculinity or femininity can be represented through linguistic features. Therefore, gender is essentially a performance that dictates if a person is a man or a woman based on behavior. The way gender is

portrayed through language in television depends primarily on "real people around the character, including the viewers, actors, or writers, who have conscious or subconscious ideas of what is traditionally considered typically masculine or feminine traits in talk. (Beers Fägersten and Sveen, 2016, p. 87). This is essentially based on research, personal encounters, media, etc., which then represents a hegemonic discourse regarding differences in gender and speech. In addition, folk-linguistic beliefs maneuver the writers of TV series and their way of constructing characters and their dialogues. This is, as discussed above, is done for the audiences to identify themselves and people around them with characters from fictional shows, which maintain the stereotypes of language and gender (Beers Fägersten and Sveen, 2016).

3.6 *True Blood* on HBO

True Blood premiered on the cable network HBO in 2008 and is based on a series of novels written by Charlaine Harris called *The Southern Vampire Mysteries*. The series went on air for six years completing its last season in 2014. The show is set in Louisiana, two years after the discovery of artificial blood which is labeled as True Blood. The main characters in this series are either vampires or humans that get transformed into vampires eventually, who are in a constant fight against enemies counter to vampires along with various other vampire enemies. This series has a balanced appearance of the characters in terms of gender where male and female characters are given equal screen space and dialogues whilst remaining fair in the distribution of male and female actors.

4 Material and Methodology

The main source of material for this paper was derived from the series *True Blood*. True Blood is an American horror-fantasy series that premiered in 2008 on the television network HBO, comprising of seven seasons and 80 episodes in total. This particular TV show was selected due to it consisting of a leading female character that swears to a great degree and in a truly powerful way as well. This female character is portrayed in a quite prominent way concerning foul language and linguistic dominance. Also, another reason why this series was selected was that, while watching *True Blood* without any research purpose, the swearing does not appear unbalanced in terms of gender and the linguistics behavior of the male and female characters looks balanced at first sight. Whilst watching it solely for entertainment purposes, this show does not demonstrate any type of inequality concerning linguistic features between men and women as the swearing and foul language, in general, was distributed fairly, which makes it adequate for this particular research promising reliable results. This paper focuses on the first season of the show which consists of 12 episodes, from which the first six were selected to collect

data. The data derived comprises swearwords used by the main characters from the show. These characters have been chosen depending on their contribution to the episodes in terms of their usage of swearwords.

Characters analyzed:

Female	**Male**
Tara	Lafayette
Sookie	Sam
Dawn	Jason
Denise	

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

This study was conducted both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analysis was conducted to find out whether men swear more than women in the series *True Blood*, and to what degree. A table was made to collect the data where divisions based on the characters and different swearwords were created along with the frequency of these words. The table contained 13 columns vertically for the number of swear words and 7 columns horizontally for the characters selected. The swear words were picked up after watching the episodes multiple times to gather all the swear words, and for a higher level of reliability. Through the six episodes analyzed, thirteen swear words were spotted in total.

Swear words selected:

1. Fuck/ing/er/ed 2. Shit 3. Dumb/Ass/hole 4. Shut up 5. Pussy 6. Dick 7. Bitch 8. Cunt 9. God(damn) it 10. Hell 11. Stupid 12. Motherfucker 13. Idiot

Most of the words are strong enough to be classified as swear words although some words might not appear strong enough, in particular, the words *stupid* and *idiot*. Stupid and idiot are chosen for this research as these are words that undermine somebody's intelligence and are spoken with a powerful and mean tone whenever uttered by the characters. Therefore, the impact of the words stupid and idiot appears the same as any other swear word as they are used for the same purpose, to undermine a person by cursing them with the same aggression as the other words. In a study conducted by Agrini Dewi (2017), swear words were classified into their type based on Hughes' (1991) theories and so the words

stupid and idiot were classified as imbecilic terms. The words stupid and idiot are synonymous with the word imbecile and are words that "…are linked to disability or low level of intelligence." (p. 17).

Each episode was watched around two to three times for accuracy and reliability and each swearword selected was noted down, along with its frequency. After watching the episodes and counting the swearwords multiple times, the table was filled in with the results stating how many times each character uttered the swear word.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

For the qualitative analysis, discourse analysis was applied for three reasons. Firstly, it was implemented in an attempt to find out whether male characters swear more than the female characters in the show and secondly, to find out whether the linguistic behavior of the male and female characters in the series True Blood concur with some theories, in particular, the theory of dominance. Lastly, discourse analysis was applied to find out whether the language in the TV shows confirms the theory or refutes it. This will be done by analyzing conversation extracts from the episodes analyzed from where the linguistic behavior of the characters will be examined.

"Discourse analysis is a research method that provides systematic evidence about social processes through the detailed examination of speech, writing and other signs." (Stanton and Reyes, 2014, p.3). Discourse analysis is an adequate tool when analyzing how language is designed based on gender, norms, stereotypes, and consequences. While analyzing discourse with gender the focus lays on the linguistic resources people adapt to present themselves according to the norms and stereotypes of respective gender, conforming to these constraints by speaking in a specific way that is considered to be appropriate for society. Moreover, researching gender and discourse through discourse analysis is a complex process that requires focus on cultural influences that side with gendered differences which also includes gendered language (Kendall and Tannen, 2015). With discourse analysis, the aim is to find out whether the language spoken by the male and female characters in the series confirms the theory of dominance and to what extent are the linguistic features predetermined for men and women in the show. Therefore, for this essay, specific examples of dialogues and conversations were selected from the six episodes of *True Blood,* which were then discussed and analyzed with some theories, mainly being the dominance theory.

5 Results

Table 1. Swear Words by Characters in The Series *True Blood*

Table 1 illustrates the swear words used in episodes 1–6 in the first season of the series True Blood, by the main characters Tara, Lafayette, Sookie, Dawn, Sam, Jason, and Denise.

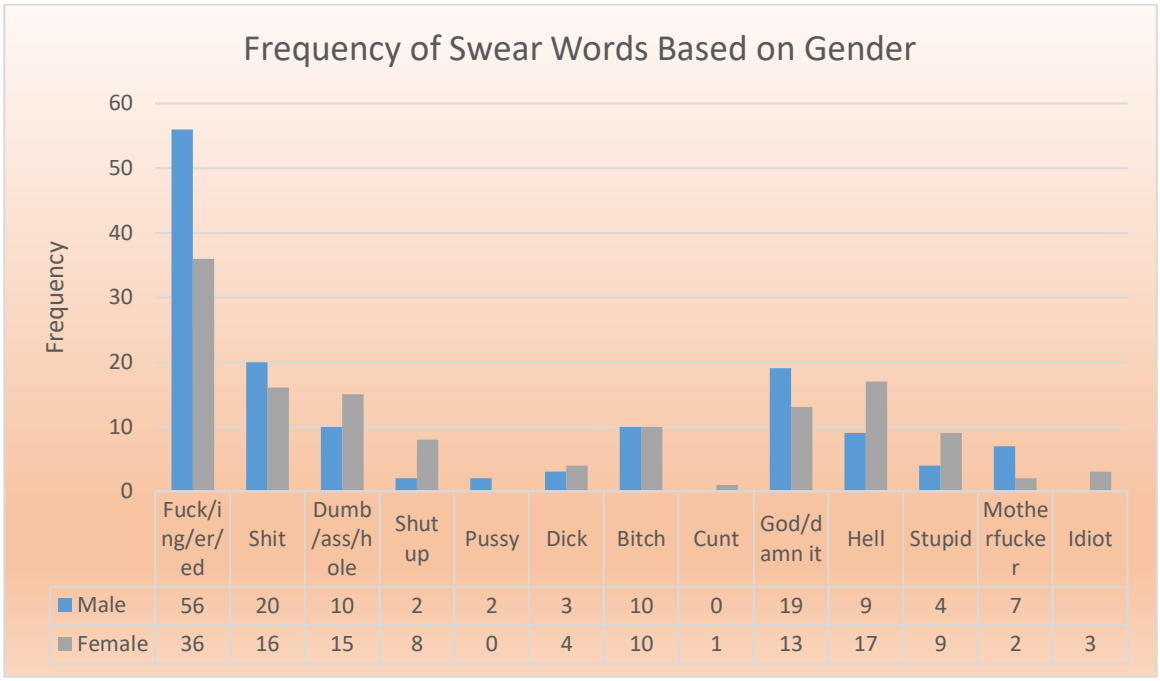
Swear words	Tara	Denise	Sookie	Dawn	Sam	Jason	Lafayette
Fuck/ing/er/ed	21	7	1	7	2	40	9
Shit	13	1	1	1	2	7	11
Dumb/Ass/hole	9	1	2	3	1	2	7
Shut up	2		6		1		1
Pussy							2
Dick	1			3		3	
Bitch	6	1	3			5	5
Cunt		1					
God(damn) it	8	2	3		5	6	8
Hell	11	2	3	1	1	6	2
Stupid	7	1	1		2	1	1
Motherfucker	1			1		3	4
Idiot	2			1			
Total	81	16	20	17	14	73	50

Table 1 above shows a total of thirteen swear words which were uttered a total of 190 times by the chosen characters, throughout the six first episodes of season one. The total amount of swear words used by Tara were 81. She uses *fuck* in all its forms 21 times, *shit* 13 times, *dumb* (individually and in the form of *ass/hole*) nine times, *shut up* two times, *dick* one time, *bitch* six times, *god (damn) it* eight times, *hell* 11 times, *stupid* seven times, *motherfucker* one time and *idiot* was used two times. Jason is the second-highest person who uses swear words in the episodes analyzed with a total of 73 words. He uses *fuck* in all its forms 40 times which is the highest amongst all the characters for this particular expletive. He uses *shit* seven times, *dumb*/ass/hole two times, *dick* three times, *bitch* five times, *god (damn) it* six times, *hell* six times, *stupid* one time, and *motherfucker* three times. Lafayette falls in third place with a total of 50 swear words. Then falls Sookie in fourth place with a total of 20 swear words, following with Dawn with a total of 17 swear words. Thereafter comes Denise who uses a total of 16 swears words, and lastly Sam uses 14 swear words in total.

Based on Table 1, results indicate that the female character Tara swears the most compared to both male and female characters and refuted the claims made by Lakoff arguing women's linguistic weakness and inferiority. Even though the difference is not that exceptional, something which is worthy of notice is that women did not refrain from using a certain type of expletive. Instead, the female character, Tara, used a wider variety of words rather than sticking to only one type, in comparison to Jason. For instance, Jason uttered the expletive 'fuck' 40 times, whereas Tara used 'fuck' almost only half the time, but used various other expletives and repeated them more compared to Jason. In comparison to Jason, some were repeated numerous times whereas, some were repeated only once or twice.

Figure 1. Frequency of Swear Words - Male and Female

Figure 1 illustrates the amount of swear words used by the characters based on gender. Here, the expletives for male and female characters are counted collectively as the table is collapsed with all the male characters in one unit, and all the female characters in one unit.



	Fuck/ing/er/ed	Shit	Dumb/ass/hole	Shut up	Pussy	Dick	Bitch	Cunt	God/damn it	Hell	Stupid	Motherfucker	Idiot
Male	56	20	10	2	2	3	10	0	19	9	4	7	
Female	36	16	15	8	0	4	10	1	13	17	9	2	3

The results in figure 1 suggest that the female characters collectively do not swear more than the male characters in *True Blood*. This is depicted in the results as, collectively, all male characters swore 142 times compared to the female character who swore 134 times. However, this does not confirm the claims made by Lakoff arguing that women are linguistically weaker and refrain from using expletives as the difference in the expletives used by males and females in the series is not a lot. The female characters used swear words 134 times, almost as often as the male ones with a difference of eight words. Therefore, the results are not in line with the arguments claimed by Lakoff.

Furthermore, another aspect of this data worthy of drawing attention to is the character of Denise and why she was selected despite her not being a main character in the series. Denise was included in this study as the 16 swear words uttered by her were from merely two episodes, from which almost all the expletives were mainly from one episode. Denise is merely a recurring character who appeared twice in the six episodes analyzed. Denise swears 16 times in two episodes compared to Sam with 14 swear words in the course of six episodes as a leading character, which is a powerful usage of expletives.

6 Discussion

6.1 Differences in Frequency of Swearing between Men and Women in *True Blood* – Quantitative Analysis

This study set out to address two questions. The first question was analyzed quantitatively and concerned whether men swear more than women in the series *True Blood*, and if so, to what degree. As a result, prior claims made by Lakoff (1973) along with folk-linguistic beliefs claiming women refrain from using expletives and taboo-like language due to it not being feminine and acceptable, are not in line with these results as they swear almost as often as men with a mere difference of eight words. The difference is not extraordinary as the female characters were seen using swear words in an equal manner in specific conversations which seemed balanced in terms of the usage of expletives in general. and there were no indications of them refraining from using foul language based on their gender.

Additionally, the results do not confirm the claims made by researchers in the field of language and gender, who consider profanity acting as a symbol of masculinity and power (De Klerk, 1997). The results fall partly in disagreement with this claim as profanity is used to demonstrate power and scare the opposition, yet masculinity does not act as a contributing factor. This can be seen in conversation example 1 and is strongly demonstrated throughout the series where female characters use a strong and equal language to men with aggressiveness, taboo words, and expletives. They demonstrate strong emotions of anger, frustration, and disagreement even when in front of powerful men. Also, as figure 1 indicates, female characters in the series use all kinds of expletives and taboo words just like the male characters. In fact, *cunt* and *idiot* are two expletives/taboo words used only by the female characters and not by the male characters in the episodes analyzed.

6.2 The Theories of Deficit, Dominance, and Difference – Qualitative Analysis

In turn, the second question dealt with whether the linguistic behavior of the male and female characters in the series *True Blood* concur with some theories, in particular, the theory of dominance. This has been carried out through a qualitative analysis to complement the quantitative analysis, where discourse analysis as a method was implemented. The discourse was analyzed in which specific conversations and dialogues of the characters selected were examined in terms of expletives and overall language with gender. This was carried out by looking at and analyzing Lakoffs claims and some of the theories

discussed above, the theory of dominance in particular, along with other studies conducted on language and gender, as they try to map out how men and women should talk with studies simultaneously indicating otherwise.

It was found out that, based on the six episodes of *True Blood,* women in the series do not adhere to a certain type of linguistic behavior and their participation in dialogues and conversations is equivalent to men's. The language in the TV shows in many ways does no align with folk-linguistic beliefs and some of the theories examined. For instance, Lakoffs (1973) theory of deficit, concerns how girls are taught from a young age to speak in a way that will be adequate for them as adults, as women. Thereupon, the type of linguistic behavior women essentially ought to adapt to and represent is a powerless version of men's as it was more uncertain, hesitant, and ambiguous in many senses. Moreover, the theory of deficit also revolves around girls being scolded and corrected if they speak in a way seen as inappropriate for a female speaker. They are trained from a young age how to speak to follow the societal norms and stereotypes for them not to be criticized later on in their lives.

In *True Blood,* women do not show a lesser demeanor than men and do not lack linguistically, as the theory of deficit argues. In fact, women appear stronger in various scenes as they manage to grab the center of the stage with their explicit language and taboo words, which are represented in an equal manner throughout the series. The female character Tara is an adequate example of this as she is an extremely abusive character with an exceptionally independent and blunt personality. Tara purely has a sarcastic and pessimistic nature which is mainly due to her growing up in an abusive environment with an alcoholic mother. Thus, one reason for her not developing a 'lady-like' or 'correct' nature is possibly due to her mother not being there for her and rectifying Tara according to societal stereotypes. Nevertheless, the writer, producer, and director of *True Blood* explained how Tara was one of the smartest characters in the series, which is represented in the way she conducts herself despite her insecurities and trust issues because of her childhood with her mother. Because of her mother being an alcoholic and not being there for her child, Tara develops a personality mostly based on her childhood experiences, which is not in line with, for instance, the theory of dominance.

Lakoff (1973) also discusses that if women do not adhere to the norms and regulations regarding women and language, they will be looked down upon and criticized. However, if they do adhere to these norms and regulations in society, they will still be considered clueless and weak linguistically. Tara as a character does not appear weak as she uses language mostly common for men. However, she is still not criticized for that, rather she makes people listen and appears dominant as well as bold. Again, looking

at the results in terms of swear words, even if the difference between Tara and the male Character Jason were minimal, she has been one of the consequent abusers in the show and talks in a manner that highly contradicts Lakoff's theory of deficit. One example concerning Tara's behavior and boldness in speech is when she gets into a fight with one of her customers at her workplace. In that specific scene, Tara behaves extremely disrespectfully and in a very cruel manner which gets her fired after she behaved in the same way with her employer.

Conversation example 2

Tara: Does our website have a phone number?

Customer: Well, I suppose it does, but…

Tara: So… it never occurred to you, before you drove an hour, to pick up the phone and call us, to see if we stocked whatever the **hell** it is that you're looking for?

Customer: Well, I think that if a business chooses to classify itself as…

Tara: Why didn't you just find it online and have it delivered to your house?! Or were you just looking for an excuse to wear the ugly-**ass** clothes?!

Customer: I would like to speak to your manager!

Tara: Fine.

Tara: Wailon!

Tara: Trust me, you are not gettin' me fired! I am quittin'! you were just the **fuckin'** catalyst! …and for that, I ought to thank you!

Customer: You are a very rude young woman!

Tara: Oh, this ain't rude. This is uppity. (*True Blood*, Episode 1, Strange Love, HBO).

In this particular conversation, Tara manages to behave rudely and uses expletives towards her customer and manager, both of them being men. Besides expletives, her interaction is aggressive and loud with her shouting in the middle of the store. She was triggered by her customer who behaved slightly rudely, which got the aggressive side out of her. Although, the thought of respecting a customer or a man or even her manager who is in a dominant position, did not occur in her mind and did not stop her from reacting in a way that felt natural to her.

Following is an extract from the first episode which depicts how Denise uses language and expresses herself linguistically with heavy profanity and aggressiveness. It demonstrates how Denise is a powerful character in her words even when she does not use offensive language.

Conversation example 3

Denise Rattray: This ain't your business, you **stupid cunt**!"

Sookie: Now, see, that just proves how low-rent you really are.

Denise Rattray: You have no idea who you're messing with? You don't wanna be on my bad side!

Sookie: I'm not sure you even have any other side, you no-account, backwoods trash!

Sookie: (with a knife in her hand when Denise tries to take the bags of blood) Do not even think about taking that blood!

Denise Rattray: I will kill you for this.

Sookie: Get out!

Sookie: Now!

Denise Rattray: Come on, Mack!

Denise Rattray: This ain't over!

Denise Rattray: Come on! Get up Mack! Why can't you take that fuckin' thing off? I ain't got time for a **fuckin'** cripple! Because I'm getting out of here one way or the other." (*True Blood*, Episode 1, Strange Love, HBO).

This conversation depicts how the female characters in this series do not confirm the theories and what they claim, mainly the theory of dominance. In this extract, Denise is the only one swearing, but even when she does not, her sentences contain powerful meanings and threats which sometimes sound worse than literal expletives. One such example is when she threatens Sookie and says that she will kill her. This is a strong way of expressing anger and power along with using expletives repeatedly in such a short dialogue. Moreover, Denise uses the swear word 'cunt' which is only uttered by her and used once in the six episodes analyzed. She has a powerful personality and as mentioned above, it is reflected in her dialogues even when she is not using foul language as it is visible in the way she talks to her companion as well. She is in constant anger and she does not show mercy on her friend, Mack. It is not only visible in her speech, but her actions dictate the same behavior when she for instance grabs Mack and pulls him. Nonetheless, Sookie, who is another female character is no less than Denise. Even if no expletives are used by her in the short conversation, she does not refrain from acting and speaking in a challenging way. She gives it back to Denise by threatening her back, which also makes her win in the end.

Therefore, the linguistic behavior of the female characters in *True Blood* does not support Lakoff's theory of dominance. The dominance approach is based on how women form their inferiority in speech

which presented men with the opportunity to dominate women when in conversation with them. Lakoff (1973) discussed the dominance approach from different dimensions where one of which concerned social interaction. Here, gender inequalities were framed linguistically amidst daily interactions.

Also, as the dominance approach argues that women do no talk as much as men when in interactional situations and that women listen actively and try to maintain social relationships by appearing supporting, mostly falls in disagreement with the female characters of this series. Looking at the continuation of Tara's interaction with her customer and manager, she does not frame her language or way of behaving depending on social relations. Instead, she uses expletives and behaves extremely inappropriately which damages her social relations, which she is was well aware of but did not consider altering her behavior or asking for forgiveness. She behaves unapologetically along with smacking her manager's ass when he is called in by her customer.

> Conversation example 4
> Tara: That's for pattin' my **ass** too much! I'm goin' get my baby daddy, who just got out of prison, to come and kick your teef in!
> Wailon: Jesus, Tara. Please don't do any…
> Tara: Oh, my God! I'm not serious, you pathetic racist! I don't have a baby! **Damn**! I know y'all have to be **stupid**, but do you have to be that **stupid**?! **Fuck** this job! (*True Blood,* Episode 1, Strange Love, HBO).

In this conversation extract, what has been claimed by researchers regarding males and how their use of profanity is an obligation towards society to appear masculine and powerful according to Klerk (1997) and Lakoff, is not maintained by Tara. She gives it back to her manager for patting her glutes before and talking in an extremely angry manner with him. Rather, her manager who is considered to be in a dominant position being a man and her boss at the same time, replies to her calmly and in fear. He uses 'please' and pleads for her to stop, instead of using his position as a boss and for example sacking her before she quits herself after calling him racist and pathetic along with stronger expletives. Moreover, according to the theory of dominance, women are thought of as oppressed beings in conversations and are constantly under the dominance of men and their speech. According to the theory, women are supposed to maintain relationships without angering the opposite person in daily conversations. Emotions and silence are what women are associated with, whereas men are essentially allowed to depict anger and profanity linguistically. Following is an example when the female character Dawn gets upset and angry when Jason is not able to get an erection because of some reason she does not buy,

while they were about to have sex. At that moment, Dawn shows her anger and throws Jason out of her house.

> Dialogue Example
> Dawn: That's right, you get the **fuck** out my house! Limp **dick motherfucker**! Why don't you go try and **fuck** your grandmother with that limp **dick**! (*True Blood*, Episode 3, Mine, HBO).

Again, the theory of dominance as it considers the emotion of anger and abusive nature mainly being manifested by men does not correspond to the characters analyzed in *True Blood* as they seem to reverse this thought in this extract. In this example, one would believe Jason being a man, is in the dominant position, and being a man can manifest strong anger and abusive nature. But that as it may, Dawn proves that argument wrong and acts in a way a man is anticipated to. Jason leaves the house in anger but also in fear of Dawn because of her explicit anger along with her attempting to shoot towards him while throwing him out.

The arguments above concerning the theory of dominance, in turn, support the theory of difference further developed by Tannen (1990) which claims that the language of men and women differs from each other. This is particularly because the language of men is considered to tilt more towards status, problem-solving skills, conveying information, commanding confrontation, and independence (Tannen, 1990). In this series, the female characters do not refrain from speaking in a way described as the "men's way" and this shows that there are no linguistic differences between the male and female characters in the show as the aspects mentioned above explaining the differences in linguistic attributes between men and women are not found in the series. Rather, the female characters appear using taboo words as much as men which are also represented as cruel coming from women. This does not mean that men are in a subordinate position in this series, rather it indicates that women are in an equally superior and dominant position as men, again confirming the dominance theory as well. For instance, Dawn uses the taboo word *dick* (in the dialogue example above), being the only female character uttering this specific term in the episodes analyzed. This specific dialogue example further concurs with the theory of dominance as it showcases Dawn's commanding behavior towards Jason which further indicates that attributes that are supposed to differ from the speech of men and women cannot be spotted here as for instance, Jason does not show any type of commanding behavior or independence in this situation as Tannen (1990) suggests. Instead, what can be spotted here is the opposite of what Tannen (1990) argues when she claims that women strive to maintain their politeness and social relations while showing support and try to solve any disputes. Dawn does not fear not being able to maintain a relation or politeness with Jason.

As a matter of fact, she does not even give it a thought while also not showing any support or willingness to solve the dispute.

Not to mention, various studies have also examined the use of taboo words and foul language where results contradict Tannen's (1990) arguments as well as the folk-linguistic beliefs. Expletives are being used more commonly by women as well, which reflects *True Blood* in various dimensions, a few of them discussed above. De Klerk (1992) suggests that women use expletives and are familiar with taboo words in the same manner as men. It is obvious for women to use foul language which is being done in a fast-growing manner. This is evident in the episodes analyzed of *True Blood* as it demonstrates dialogues and conversations that do not follow the folk-linguistic beliefs claiming the linguistic inferiority of women and women and men adhering to specific stereotypes. Television shows represent a sense of "reality" that audiences relate to and can picture themselves in the world demonstrated on TV. Therefore, Tara signifying the one with the most swear words along with all the female characters using strong language filled with taboo words, authority, and aggression showcases a world where expletives used by both men and women feel natural and real, even outside television.

Briefly, this research was carried out by looking at previous findings concerning language and gender, which actively demonstrate how men and women are represented in society and how they are expected to speak, based on gender and folk-linguistic beliefs. The study was carried out quantitatively as well as qualitatively where the characters in the series *True Blood* were analyzed based on the frequency of swear words uttered by the male and female characters. This was conducted along with looking at their linguistic behavior specifically based on Lakoff's theory of dominance to find out whether the linguistic behavior of the characters confirms the theory or not.
Thus, to conclude this discussion, the female character Tara swears the most in the six episodes of *True Blood*. However, the rest of the female characters do not swear more than any of the male characters, as when analyzed collectively, the female characters swore 134 times compared to the male characters who swore 143 times in total. Nevertheless, the difference is not enough to say that prior claims made by Lakoff (1973) along with folk-linguistic beliefs claiming women refrain from using expletives and taboo-like language due to it not being feminine and acceptable are in line with these results. This is because the female characters wear almost as often as the male characters. Also, the findings do not comply with Lakoff's (1973) theory of dominance as the linguistic behavior of the characters in the series does not confirm the theory in terms of the claims concerning a specific type of linguistic behavior depending on gender.

6.3 Didactic Point of View

Why gender and language as a topic while studying language should be taught depends on various reasons. Firstly, it is highly crucial to introduce differences in language use by both genders in a language teaching classroom, for the students to learn these differences and be able to spot them. This will enable them to improve their speaking skills and identify speaking styles depending on gender. It is practically essential for students to identify how different ways of speaking are altered depending on gender. This way, students learn to avoid certain conversational practices that might make them sound arrogant and be able to alter their linguistic behavior. This will also give them a chance to recognize certain stereotypical conversational practices which will enable their control over their speech and not them always adhering to norms and stereotypes. This applies in classroom settings as well where linguistic differences between male and female students are experienced regularly. Julé (2004) mentions the passive and silent struggles of female students concerning participation and putting their opinions across in the classroom due to power relations in the classrooms, where power is often depicted in speech. Therefore, weakness is often represented in silence which is often witnessed in girls in a classroom setting. A shy and quiet nature is commonly found in girls which are depicted when they resist raising their hand and taking part in discussions to the same degree as boys. Although, this is not the case with all girls or in every classroom, although it is not uncommon either. Also, research such as De Klerk (1997) and Lakoff (1973) shows that male students are often associated with an aggressive nature and offensive discourse, in particular towards their female teachers and female classmates. Moreover, various other studies also suggest that showcasing power and authority through speech is to be associated with maleness and means of representing masculinity.

Furthermore, Short and Carrington's (1989) research with its primary focus on the nursery and pre-school stage indicates that children, from a relatively young age, develop linguistic attributes depending on their gender. This study is in agreement with Lakoff's claims stating that children are taught to speak in a certain way from a young age to conform to stereotypical norms regarding language. Therefore, additional power is most of the time associated with males, and less power is associated with females, even in the classroom. Girls lack self-esteem and boys adhere to the gender stereotypes and appear powerful in their language, which makes this topic an essential element to teach and discuss in a classroom setting today. By addressing this topic in a teaching setting today will raise awareness concerning gender norms in language and make it visible for the students as well as the teachers. This will benefit them in improving their speech and contribution in conversations by, for instance, realizing the subordination of another person and altering their speech accordingly.

More than that, as a teacher it is fundamental to address this topic even within collegial contexts where teachers have the opportunity to educate themselves when it comes to gender-based language. This is integral for teachers, firstly, for them to teach this further to students, and secondly for teachers not to adapt to stereotypical behaviors which can undermine particular students in their classrooms. As girls are associated with silence and linguistic weakness, it becomes easy and apparent for teachers to ignore female students as they are often overpowered by male students who tend to dominate the talk in the classroom. Also, with this being said, this does not apply to a student of a specific age as it is something which is experienced from young school kids to adult students.

7 Conclusion

The study set out to address two questions about language and gender. The first question concerned whether men swear more than women in the series *True Blood*, and to what degree, whereas the second question concerned if the linguistic behavior of the male and female characters in the series concur with some theories, in particular, the theory of dominance. The results suggest that the female character Tara in the series swears the highest, and the results fall in disagreement with folk-linguistic beliefs and Lakoffs (1973) claims stating that women use fewer expletives than men. However, the difference between her and the male character Jason is not extraordinary as he swears merely eight times lesser than Tara. Looking at the results of male and female characters combined, together with four women and three men, the total swear words uttered by women were 134 compared to that of men which were 142. Nevertheless, even though the male characters collectively swear more than the female characters, the difference is insignificant as the women in the series swear as often as men. Therefore, the results fall in disagreement with Lakoffs (1973) claim stating that women use fewer expletives than men. However, a specific type of language for men and women where one gender appears more powerful than the other, cannot be spotted in *True Blood*. As a result, the theories of deficit, dominance, and difference cannot explain the difference between men and women in *True Blood* as there is no evidence of men appearing different in terms of power, dominance or, defiance concerning language in the series. Thus, the linguistic behavior of the male and female characters in the series does not confirm the theory of dominance this theory, along with the other theories, does not provide an explanation for the linguistic features of speech in male and female characters in this series. Rather, there are events where female characters are depicted as stronger and more dominant than men, maintain a balance linguistically, which strikingly counters the claims argued by Lakoff (1973).

All things considered, it should be brought to mind that the data collected and analyzed is from a show which is scripted. The language in the series does not reflect real-life events as it represents people who want to watch for entertainment purposes. This is not reality, nor is it a reality series and so it does not reflect norms in real life. Yet, the fact that women and men swear in equal margins in the series, along with women contradicting linguistic stereotypes cannot be completely brushed off.

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