An Analysis of Dysphemism Uttered by the Main Characters in Bottoms (2023) Film

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ABSTRAK

Komunikasi adalah fondasi interaksi manusia melalui bahasa, dan sosiolinguistik mempelajari bagaimana bahasa bekerja dalam masyarakat, termasuk bagaimana penutur menggunakan disfemisme untuk mengekspresikan identitas sosial, emosi, atau niat melalui pilihan bahasa yang kasar atau ofensif dalam konteks spesifik. Penelitian ini menguji ekspresi disfemisme yang diucapkan oleh PJ dan Josie sebagai karakter utama dalam film Bottoms (2023), menggunakan teori dari Allan dan Burridge (1991) untuk mengidentifikasi delapan jenis disfemisme dan untuk mendeskripsikan tujuh motif penggunaan disfemisme dalam tuturan karakter utama. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif untuk menampilkan dan menganalisis data, dan menemukan total 76 data dalam tuturan karakter utama. Hanya ada lima jenis disfemisme yang teridentifikasi dalam kalimat karakter: obscenity dengan 54 data, dysphemistic epithets dengan 14 data, profanity dengan 3 data, "-ist" dysphemism dengan 3 data, dan dysphemistic euphemism dengan 2 data. Di sisi lain, hanya ada enam motif yang muncul: untuk mempermalukan dengan 11 data, untuk mengekspresikan emosi kuat dengan 26 data, untuk menekankan dengan 18 data, untuk menyatakan situasi buruk dengan 7 data, untuk menunjukkan keheranan dengan 8 data, dan untuk menciptakan humor/menunjukkan keintiman dengan 6 data. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa ekspresi disfemisme yang digunakan oleh karakter utama tidak semata-mata dimaksudkan untuk menghina tetapi melayani beragam tujuan komunikatif, dengan mengekspresikan kemarahan dan menambahkan penekanan menjadi motif dominan. Tuturan karakter utama mengilustrasikan bagaimana disfemisme bekerja dengan beragam motif dalam percakapan kasual, menyoroti perannya melampaui sekadar pelanggaran untuk mengekspresikan ekspresi emosional.

Kata kunci: Sosiolinguistik, Disfemisme, Film Bottoms (2023)

ABSTRACT

Communication was the foundation of human interaction through language, and sociolinguistics studied how language worked in society, including how speakers employed dysphemism to express social identity, emotion, or intention through harsh or offensive language choices in specific contexts. This research examined the dysphemism expressions uttered by PJ and Josie as the main characters in *Bottoms* (2023) film, using the theory from Allan and Burridge (1991) to identify eight types of dysphemism and to describe the seven motives of dysphemism used in the main characters' utterances. This research used a qualitative descriptive method to display and analyze the data, and found a total of 76 data in the main characters' utterances. There were only five types of dysphemism identified within the characters' sentences: obscenity with 54 data, dysphemistic epithets with 14 data, profanity with 3 data, "-ist" dysphemism with 3 data, and dysphemistic euphemism with 2 data. On the other hand, there were only six motives: to humiliate with 11 data, to express strong emotion with 26 data, to emphasize with 18 data, to state a bad situation with 7 data, to show astonishment with 8 data, and to create humor/show intimacy with 6 data. The findings revealed that dysphemistic expressions used by the main characters were not solely intended to insult but served a variety of communicative purposes, with expressing anger and adding emphasis being the dominant motives. The main characters' utterances illustrated how dysphemism worked with diverse motives in casual conversations, highlighting its role beyond mere offense to expressing emotion.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Dysphemism, Bottoms (2023) film



A. INTRODUCTION

Communication is the exchange of messages to convey meaning (Gerbner, 1985), and language works as its medium that is constantly evolving with human life (Garaga et al., 2022). It is shaped by social structures that influence how people use and interpret words (Wardhaugh, 2006). This leads speakers to adjust language based on context, such as dysphemism, by replacing the neutral words with harsh language to express disapproval, offend others, or intensify emotion (Allan & Burridge, 1991, 2006), meanwhile, the intent and context often shape its meaning (Rawson, 1989). Allan and Burridge (1991) continue to state about eight types of dysphemism, such as dysphemistic epithets, name dysphemism, profanity, obscenity, euphemistic dysphemism, dysphemistic euphemism, "-ist" dysphemism, and cross-cultural dysphemism. These types cover seven kinds of motives, like to humiliate, to express strong emotion, to emphasize, to state a bad situation, to show astonishment, to show intimacy, and to show identity of a group (Allan and Burridge, 1991).

Dysphemism is often used in informal conversations, including in social media, films, and novels. Films frequently include dysphemistic language in character dialogue to reflect real-life interactions, especially among teenagers. An example is *Bottoms*, a 2023 satirical comedy directed by Emma Seligman and co-written with Rachel Sennott. Streaming on Prime Video, the film stars Sennott, Ayo Edebiri, and others. It holds a 6.7/10 rating on IMDb and a 90% Tomatometer score on Rotten Tomatoes. The story follows two lesbian teens who start a fight club to impress cheerleaders at their school.

Bottoms (2023) serves as an excellent example of dysphemism due to its setting and characters. Set primarily in a high school, it highlights teenage interactions, offering strong potential for dysphemistic expressions. Although the setting suggests a formal educational environment, the plot centers on informal, colloquial conversations typical among teens. These interactions often involve slang, idioms, and relaxed grammar. This contrast between setting and language use makes the film a compelling subject, sparking the researchers' interest in analyzing it for this study.

Various previous research has investigated dysphemism in films or TV series. Sitanggang et al. (2020) identified various categories of dysphemism and their function in *Deadpool*. On the other hand, Winsantana (2018) explored dysphemism used by prisoners in *Orange is the New Black* series, while Nuthqi et al. (2024) investigated dysphemism in the animated series called *South Park*. However, some of these previous studies focus on the semantic features rather than the social context that affects the characters to use dysphemism.

Following the background, this research aims to identify the different types of rude or offensive language used by the main characters, PJ and Josie, and to understand the motives behind their use of such terms within *Bottoms* (2023) film. This research is based on dysphemism theory by Allan and Burridge (1991), which aimed to categorize the types of dysphemism present by the main characters and describe the motives behind their use in the characters' dialogues.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

This part presents the theory of sociolinguistics and dysphemism, including its types and motives. Subsequent to the theory, it also presents a brief explanation regarding the object of the research, such as film and *Bottoms* (2023).



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1. Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that shows how language operates within its social context, examining the connection between language and social factors like class, gender, ethnicity, age, and so on. It focuses on how people use language to express identity, build relationships, and reflect cultural norms. Trudgill (2000) highlights that sociolinguistics studies language variation and how different social settings shape language use. For example, in informal settings, teenagers often use words that show their age and may sound odd to older people (Holmes, 2013), like slang and taboo words used to show rebellion, create humor, or strengthen solidarity.

2. Dysphemism

Dysphemism refers to words or phrases with taboo connotations (Spears, 1981). Allan and Burridge (1991) define it as offensive or inappropriate terms used instead of neutral or polite ones to show disapproval or offend, which affects both the recipient and those overhearing (Allan & Burridge, 2006). Dysphemism conveys stronger meaning and emotion, marking behavior as intense (Allan & Burridge, 2006), and can also express closeness, raw emotion, or anger depending on context (Allan & Burridge, 1991).

3. Types of Dysphemism

a. Dysphemistic Epithets

Dysphemistic epithets are disparaging terms, often targeting someone or something's characteristics and physical or mental disabilities or comparing individuals with animals (Allan and Burridge, 1991). These terms can also originate from tabooed bodily organs, bodily effluvia, and sexual behaviors, or be based on mental or physical inadequacy, for example, **idiot, fuckwit, shithead,** and **baldy.**

b. Name Dysphemism

Name dysphemism is a type of disrespectful language where someone uses a name or form of address that is too casual, direct, or inappropriate for the situation or relationship "in order to display antipathy to Hearer-or-Named" (Allan and Burridge, 1991, p. 123), like calling parents by their name.

c. Profanity

Allan and Burridge refer to profanity as "bad, unseemly, irreverent, impious" (1991, p. 124), where it involves the inappropriate usage of theological terms or concepts, by taking the God's name irreverently and the concept of hell and devil, such as **God, Jesus Christ, Lord, Gawd,** and **damn**. It also includes expressions like **Holy shit** and **Oh My Fucking God** that merge religious references with sexual or bodily terms.

d. Obscenity

This type of dysphemism refers to explicit terms representing the human body, particularly terms associated with pornography, sexual activity, genitalia, body parts, and excretion. For instances, like **fuck**, **jacking off**, **shit**, **piss**, **cunt**, **pussy**, **cock**, **dick**, **tits**, and **boobs**.



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e. Euphemistic Dysphemism

Euphemistic dysphemism refers to the use of a minced oath to express strong or intense emotion, where "the locution is recognized as a euphemism even though the illocutionary act might be castigated as dysphemistic" (Allan and Burridge, 1991, p. 30). For instance, saying **shoot!** instead of **shit!** or **freaking** instead of **fucking**.

Dysphemistic Euphemism

Dysphemistic euphemism is just the opposite of euphemistic dysphemism, where the locutionary is dysphemism, while the illocutionary act is not. The terms are usually used among close friends with no intention to insult. For instance, calling a friend **dumbass** affectionately.

g. "-ist" Dysphemism

The "-ist" was coming from the offensive terms about racist, sexist, ageist, and so on, when the speakers "fail to demonstrate respect for some personal characteristic that is important to Hearer-or-Named's self-image" (Allan and Burridge, 1991, p. 121). This type reflects dominant social prejudice, reinforces stereotypes, and strips individuals of dignity. For instance, calling Black people with nigger, LGBTQ individuals with faggot, women with dishwasher, or older people with **boomer**.

h. Cross-Cultural Dysphemism

Some words that sound rude or offensive in one culture might hold different meanings in other cultures and have no association with dysphemism (Allan and Burridge, 1991). For example, fag is offensive term for gay man in the U.S. but means cigarette in the U.K.

4. The Motives of Dysphemism

- When the speakers are being mean, they use dysphemism to humiliate, mock, or belittle someone and provoke emotional reactions or assert power.
- When the speakers feel angry, frustrated, or annoyed, they use dysphemism to express b. emotion, release tension, and show how serious or intense their feelings are.
- The speakers use dysphemism to emphasize things by making them sound stronger or more C. vivid and to express feelings clearly and engage listeners.
- The speakers use dysphemism to represent very bad or serious situations and help convey emotional weight and urgency of the condition.
- The speakers use dysphemism to express astonishment or amazement when something unexpected happens and to show how stunned or overwhelmed they feel.
- f. The use of dysphemism also motives to show intimacy, making conversations more playful among close friends or family by using insults or teasing language.
- The speakers use dysphemism to show group identity, defining themselves and building bonds, often using terms accepted only within the group.

5. Film

Film is a sequence of still images projected rapidly onto a screen using light. According to Elliot (2004), film is perceptual, visual, presentational, and literal pictures provided by space as an informing principle. It serves as a medium to tell stories, entertain, or convey messages



through character dialogue. Bordwell (2006) states that films reflect real-life situations by portraying human experiences, societal norms, and cultural values to engage audiences through storytelling. Film also shares literary elements like plot, characters, and themes, making it a "visual counterpart to literary fiction" (Diniejko, 2010, p. 275). Its distinction lies in conveying narrative through both visual imagery and sound, unlike written fiction such as novels or short stories.

C. METHOD

This part presents about the research method that consisted of research design, data and data source, research instrument, data collection, and data analysis.

1. Research Design

The qualitative approach gathered and analyzed the data by focusing on text and images instead of numbers, seeking to uncover meaning through methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis (Creswell, 2007). One kind of qualitative approach was qualitative descriptive, which focused on clearly describing a phenomenon without creating theories or testing hypotheses (Sandelowski, 2000). This research used a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the dysphemism phenomenon in the utterances of the main characters in Bottoms based on Allan and Burridge (1991), by identifying eight types and describing the motives behind their use in context.

2. Data and Data Source

The research used *Bottoms* (2023) film and the unofficial script from transcripts.foreverdreaming.org as the data source. The film was 1 hour and 30 minutes long and was directed by Emma Seligman and Rachel Sennott. Afterwards, this research obtained the data from the main characters' utterances, PJ and Josie, that contained dysphemistic expressions.

3. Research Instrument

In this research, the researchers played as a primary instrument. This research relied on the researchers' personal perspective as a tool to examine the object based on the theory. The researchers independently controlled over aspects of the research process, from observing, collecting, identifying, analyzing, and discussing the data.

4. Data Collection Technique

The data were collected through 4 steps. First, the researchers watched the film on *Loklok*, read the script from transcripts.foreverdreaming.org, and repeatedly checked both to ensure they matched. After understanding the context, the researchers identified utterances by the main characters containing dysphemistic expressions. The data were then collected by highlighting and noting the relevant parts. Finally, the researchers captured the data that aligned with dysphemism theory.

5. Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the researchers analyzed it through data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). In data condensation, the researchers selected and simplified dysphemistic utterances, then categorized them by type and motive. The data were displayed in a descriptive narrative to support clarity. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the research questions after analyzing and organizing the data.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussions derived from the collected and analyzed data regarding the use of dysphemism found in the utterances of the main characters in the film *Bottoms* (2023). This section delved into the context of the utterances, explained why a particular word was categorized in a specific type of dysphemism, and explored the characters' reasons for using the dysphemism expression.

1. Findings

This part of the chapter showed the collected data and aimed to answer the research question, such as to identify types of dysphemism and describe the motives of dysphemism used by the main characters, namely PJ and Josie, based on Allan and Burridge (1991). Five types of dysphemism were employed, like dysphemistic epithets, profanity, obscenity, dysphemistic euphemism, and "-ist" dysphemism. The context and motives were described to reveal the reason behind their dysphemistic expression, including to humiliate, express strong emotion, emphasize, state a bad situation, show astonishment, and make humor as an intimate display. Types and motives were analyzed together to make it easier for the readers to comprehend.

a. Dysphemistic Epithets

This kind of dysphemism uses offensive terms that often target a person's traits, physical or mental conditions, or compare them to animals. The example is as follows:

PJ : I just don't get why girls like guys like that. It's like they're like **dogs**, or **pigs**, or is there a... What's the grossest animal?

(04:05-04:11)

PJ and Josie were the unpopular lesbian students who had struggled for years to eliminate the "losers" label. They visited their school night fair to start their new and fresh identity and rebrand themselves in an effort to become popular. However, when the school jocks emerged, they instantly stole everyone's attention, which fuelled PJ and Josie's frustration. PJ voiced her reaction by using dysphemism instead of using more neutral words could be "*Idon't see the appeal from them.*" She compared the guys with some filthy animals like **dogs** and **pigs** to mock them out of jealousy, because she did not understand the hype surrounding the school jocks.

b. Profanity

This type of dysphemism is associated with the irreverent use of theological or religious terms, including using God's name in vain and invoking hell or the devil. The example is as follows:



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РJ : **Damn**, we're, uh... We're really gonna scare them off.

Svlvie : Nice! Nice!

Josie : I think I'mma help Isabel keep watch, so...

(43:43-43:50)

PJ and Josie made a fight club that disguised itself as a feminist self-defense group, so they could win over their crushes and gain popularity. They grew more solid and helped out when a member needed a hand. In this moment, the fight club members went to Jeff's mansion to seek Isabel's vengeance. They vandalized the mansion using eggs and toilet paper while Jeff remained unaware inside. PJ paused to observe the scene and saw how small the impact on Jeff's huge mansion. The word damn specifically fell into this category because it means "be condemned to hell.", a shortened version of the phrase (May/Let) God condemn (damn) [someone], keeping the shocking idea of divine punishment even without mentioning God. She uttered "damn," to show her astonishment sarcastically, implying their vandalism was so effective it would scare Jeff. She could have used wow, but picking damn as the response simply because it portrayed disappointment, unlike the positive excitement implied by wow.

Obscenity

This category included inappropriate terms associated with sexual or pornographic content or bodily fluids. The examples are illustrated as follows:

РJ : Just do it now.

Josie : *No.*

PJ : Just go fucking ask her.

: No- Isabel, would you like a safety ride? Josie

(07:26-07:29)

PJ and Josie left the school night fair early after failing to make a move on their crushes, Brittany and Isabel. When they vented out their frustration to each other in the car, they overheard an argument between a couple outside the car. They were Isabel, Josie's crush, and Jeff, the ace of their school football team and Isabel's boyfriend. Isabel was mad because her boyfriend always tried to wander his eyes on other girls, while Jeff denied the allegation and tried to calm Isabel down. PJ saw this as a chance for Josie to help Isabel out and made a good impression. She urged Josie to offer Isabel a ride, yet Josie hesitated. PJ completely fed up with Josie's hesitation and employed **fucking** in her utterance to push Josie to act immediately. This fell into this category simply because **fuck** is associated with a sexual act. The equivalent of the neutral form one is "Just go and ask her, right now." Her motive was to emphasize her exasperation by pushing Josie to overcome her reluctance and take the chance to get closer to Isabel.



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PJ : Is she, like, sort of winning or...

Mr. G: No, leave the skin on his face, will you?

Josie : Fuck.

PJ: Oh. Oh, my God.

(58:19-58:29)

The fight club was on the brink of its downfall after the vandalism took place, because Jeff's right hand, Tim, found out about what PJ, Josie, and the club members did to Jeff's house. The situation got even worse after an internal problem between PJ and one of the members, Hazel. Tim saw this as an opportunity to tear the club down by instigating Hazel to tell him the true color of the club, in return for granting Hazel's request to set a match between her and PJ at tomorrow's pep rally. However, Hazel was tricked by Tim into fighting their school's top boxer, and it almost knocked her out. Josie, who was watching, gasped "fuck" instead of "oh no" to express her concern at Hazel. The reason it fell into this category was the same as the previous data, which was associated with sexual acts. Josie's motive by using dysphemism was to show a reaction of genuine shock and concern, specifically to state something bad and distressful that happened to Hazel.

d. Dysphemistic Euphemism

This type refers to the spoken expression as a dysphemism, but the intended meaning is not offensive, and often used affectionately among friends or close acquaintances. The following example illustrates the point:

Josie : You little bitch, it's actually working.

PJ : I told you.

(29:58-30:01)

PJ and Josie started a fight club in the name of "self-defense" after news broke that the Huntington football team, their school's mortal enemy, had been attacking their students. They gradually gained popularity following the fight club's success. Josie appreciated PJ for having convinced her in the past, noting her own nature for always hesitating and being afraid to take risks. She called PJ a "little bitch" instead of calling him dude or bro. This phrase, specifically in this context, can be analyzed by examining Josie's motive. She did not intentionally use a dysphemism to scorn PJ, but rather addressed her in a friendly, affectionate manner. It reflected their close bond as best friends, and it would not affect their friendship because they shared the exact same humor and understanding.

e. "-ist" dysphemism

This type refers to offensive expressions such as racist, sexist, ageist, or other put downs, and used when someone fails to respect a personal characteristic that is important to another person's identity. The example is as follows:



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Josie

: It's me and Matthieu, man. And 'cause he's gay and fearless, he's probably gonna fuck me without protection. Then I'm gonna get pregnant. We're going to have to join a church. He'll be the gay pastor. My whole life's fucked! And yeah, sure, his sermons are good, but everybody knows he's fruity. Everybody knows he's fucking fruity! By the way, our son, Hezekiah, hates us 'cause he knows we're both closeted, but we try to make it work for him, but he's not happy. And yeah, guess what? The deacon's fucking the evangelist, man! He's fucking the evangelist! I don't wanna live like that. Will you come and visit us on Sundays? Please, will you come and visit us on Sundays?

(06:18-06:56)

PJ and Josie left the school fair and headed to their car, while expressing their frustration over their failed attempts to get close to their crushes. Josie was overreacting and imagined a miserable future, planning to marry their gay friend, Matthieu, as the last option. It depicted how hopeless she was about her love life. Josie could say "...but everybody knows he's not straight. Everybody knows he's obviously attracted to men!", but used a dysphemistic expression to give a dramatic effect and to highlight her frustration. The term fruity was identified in this category because it was a targeted mockery to put down gay people, who are part of the LGBTO community. Her motive was to express how frustrated she was after she failed to leave a good impression on her crush, Isabel. It portrayed how hopeless Josie was about her love life.

2. Discussions

This discussion aims to solve two research problems, which are to identify types of dysphemism and to describe motives of dysphemism in Bottoms (2023) film based on the theory from Allan and Burridge (1991). The main characters, PJ and Josie, uttered five types of dysphemism out of eight, such as dysphemistic epithets, profanity, obscenity, dysphemistic euphemism, and "-ist" dysphemism. On the other hand, the researchers also found there are six motives of dysphemism out of seven, including to humiliate, to express strong emotion, to emphasize, to state a bad situation, to show astonishment, and to create humor/show intimacy.

The first type was dysphemistic epithets, which resulted with a total of 14 data. This type was employed by both PJ and Josie with four motives: to humiliate (7), to express strong emotion (5), to emphasize (1), and to show intimacy (1). The most frequent motives were to humiliate and to express strong emotion, where the characters aimed to assert dominance by downgrading others and expressing their unfiltered emotion during conflict. The same occurrences were also found in Winsantana (2018), Sitanggang et al. (2020), and Nuthqi et al. (2024), where characters used dysphemistic expressions to mock others and show anger.

The second type of dysphemism employed by the main characters was profanity, which resulted with 3 data in total. This type was employed by both PJ and Josie with two motives: to emphasize (2) and to show astonishment (1). They used this type to express their astonishment regarding something and to emphasize her statement, with her introverted and less aggressive traits to stress their statements. The same occurrences were also found in Winsantana (2018) and Sitanggang et al. (2020), who highlighted profanity terms to express astonishment of the

The third type was obscenity and was identified with 54 data in total, as the most dominant type of dysphemism. This type was employed by both PJ and Josie with six motives: to humiliate



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(3), to express strong emotion (20), to emphasize (15), and to state bad situations (7), to show

astonishment (7), and to show intimacy (2). The most dominant motives were to express strong emotion and to emphasize their words, where they expressed raw and unfiltered emotion during conflict or heated argument, and added intensity in their words to convince or engage their interlocutors' attention. The same occurrences were also found in Winsantana (2018) and Sitanggang et al. (2020), and Nuthqi et al. (2024), who highlighted the characters' use of dysphemistic terms that were associated with sexual and bodily function.

The fourth type was dysphemistic euphemism, with only 2 data in total. This type was employed by both PJ and Josie with one motive, which was to show intimacy. It was solely to show intimacy between friends, creating a more relaxed and humorous atmosphere in the interaction. The same occurrences were also found in Winsantana (2018), Sitanggang et al. (2020), and Nuthqi et al. (2024), where the characters used dysphemistic expressions to display their closeness with one they were close to.

The last type was "-ist" dysphemism with a total of 3 data. This type was employed by the characters with three motives: to humiliate (1), to express strong emotion (1), and to show intimacy (1). These occurrences were also found in Winsantana (2018) and Nuthqi et al. (2024), where the characters employed dysphemistic expressions to express their annoyance or frustration, degrading someone, or a self-deprecating joke aimed to create a humorous atmosphere.

This research shows that degrading or humiliating others was indeed a major motive, but expressing strong emotions and emphasizing statements occurred more frequently. Dysphemism is used more to show raw, intense feelings or add emphasis than to offend. PJ and Josie's language reflected their emotional expression and age group.

D. CONCLUSION

The analysis of dysphemism uttered by the main characters, PJ and Josie, in *Bottoms* (2023) revealed vast purposes beyond insulting or degrading. The types of dysphemism helped identify expressions used by both characters, showing motives such as emphasizing speech, expressing raw emotion, stating bad conditions, showing intimacy, and expressing astonishment. This variety aligns with sociolinguistic perspectives, which highlight how such language appears in casual teenage speech. The film served as a strong object of study due to its high school setting and focus on teenage interactions, where dysphemism was naturally and frequently used.

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