



A Study of Gender Difference of Using Taboo Words in The *Euphoria* Series

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Article Info

Submitted: 18th May 2023

Revised: 11th June 2023

Accepted: 25th June 2023

Published: 31st August 2023

Keywords: gender difference; taboo words; series

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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.24843/JH.2023.v27.i03.p09>

Abstract

Taboo word is a forbidden word to use in any situation because it can cause discomfort to others, however taboo word can easily be spotted in everyday conversation. With that phenomenon, the analysis is conducted to investigate the use of taboo words and identify the difference between women and men character with the theory from Jay to categorize type of taboo words and a theory from Coates and Lakoff to examine how men and women speak differently. This study used the Euphoria series as a main source of the study due to the popularity of this series among young generation. The findings reveal that out of 229 collected data, ten different categories of taboo words exist in this series which are cursing (17,03%), followed by profanity (8,73%), blasphemy (0,44%), taboo (3,95%), obscenity (8,73%), slang (10,48%), epithet (21,40%), insult and slur (17,47%), and finally scatology (0,87%) and also the difference between women and men in using taboo words. .

INTRODUCTION

Communication is essential for humans because they are social creatures that cannot live without others. Language becomes an essential tool in order for humans to be able to communicate. Language in communication act as a bridge that people use to exchange information, asking opinion, and also help people to express their emotion.

Furthermore, language influences many aspects of human life because everyone has a different way of using language by choosing specific words while communicating that can represent their identity. For example, some people may use certain words to express their anger, which leave a strong impact to

others who hear it. According to Chaika, (1982), aside for being a tool for communication, language can also subtly define a person's personality and cultural upbringing. Regardless of the fact that most individuals communicate using the same language, men and women use different words for different genders. Women and men speak differently, states Wardhaugh, (2006:315) and this applies in the case of language style as well their body language, intonation, facial expressions, emotions, and movements while talking to others.

In every society, there are always some standards to behave as a proper individual, consisting of talking with others using proper language. Generally

speaking, language can be divided into two, bad language, known as taboo language, and proper language, basically a language that acceptable in society. Taboo language is considered as a bad language because it violates social norms; these words mention something harsh that can cause discomfort and threaten others and is not a proper language.

Humans indeed have every right to use language to express everything they want, but there is also a boundary that people need to understand. Even though they can express their selves, some languages must be avoided.

When analyzing the phenomena of employing taboos, Stephens et al., (2009:1) claims that some people use taboos to express their rage or blow off steam as a result of an unpleasant experience or dissatisfaction. Words that were once prohibited are now frequently found in every generation. The fact is that because academic institutions do not tolerate taboos, they were never taught in schools.

However, individuals, particularly those of the younger generation, are taught this forbidden language through the internet or other technological media, such as television, music, movies, including social media, which frequently employ such a word in order to attract more viewers. People began to normalize taboos as part of everyday discussion as a result of this phenomena.

The goal of this study is to identify taboo terms used in the *Euphoria* series, examine them, and explain how each character in the series uses them. Due to the problem of taboo terms, where individuals start to normalize taboos in real life or for amusement purposes, this topic is seen to be interesting to study.

METHOD AND THEORY

The data for this study came from the American television program entitled

the *Euphoria*. The plot of this television series has been chosen as the main source of data since it is unique, controversial, and incredibly entertaining. The dialogue between characters also includes a lot of taboo words, which is crucial and appropriate for this study. The series focused on a group of high school teenagers who had a variety of issues, including drug abuse, drinking, partying, sex, an identity crisis, problems with their families, and problems with their friendships and relationships. In this study descriptive-qualitative analysis is applied to examine the data. Jay (1992) theory that he develops in his book '*Cursing in America*' is used to address the first research problems of this study. And both theory from Coates (2004) regarding to men language and Lakoff (1973) for women language.

Data collection according to Creswell, (2003) there are following with three steps. The first one is to watch the series in drama web series called HBO and understanding the story line of the series with the help of script that were downloaded from internet source using a website *Category: Transcripts / Euphoria Wiki | Fandom* (2019) as a crosscheck before continuing to the next step. This process is important to do in order to understand the context of situation and understand the perspective of each character and the reason behind why they use taboo words. Next step is do a note taking process while watching the series. After doing a note taking, the next step is to make a list of data using a theory that proposed by . Jay (1992), Coates (2004), Lakoff (1973).

The data were organized according to their types, function and also their genders differences of using taboo.

In descriptive analysis study the data is analyzed following three steps, the first one is to identify the data that already collected using a theory from . Jay (1992), in his theory he proposed that

there are ten types of taboo language, the first one is cursing, profanity, obscenity, blasphemy, taboo, epithet, slang, vulgarity, insult and slur and lastly is scatology. And also define them from their function of taboo based on related theory from Jay (1992) which he defines into anger and/or frustration, descriptive-evaluative, joke, surprise and sarcastic irony or humiliation. For the second theory the data identified regarding to the women and men language from their similarities and differences. The next step is to classify the data, this step can be done by re watching the series in order to get the information that needed to draw a conclusion for the study. The last step that uses in analysing the data is to make a description of the data that already being identify and classify to give a clear information with the intention for the ready to understand the point of this study.

For the data presenting, the data used a quote taken from a scene in which a woman and a man character in the *Euphoria* series use words that are considered forbidden in communication. The result of data analysis is based on the research problems of this study (1) what are the types of taboo words uttered by women and men character in the *Euphoria* series? (2) what is the difference between women and men while using taboos in the *Euphoria* series?

Literature Review

To obtain the credible study, there are several previous studies that has been done in analysing taboo language and the gender differences. The first research study is from Alvionita et al. (2021) from their research study is focused on finding the taboo words that applied by character in the movie of *sponge out of water* in the term of translating the forbidden words into a target language. The similarities

that can be spotted from this previous study is the use of theory that proposed by Jay (1992) regarding to the types of taboo language, which in their study there are two types that can be found, epithet and obscenity. The difference that can be spotted is that the previous study also analyses the translation method that were applied in the *sponge out of water* movie in order to delivering the same idea regarding to the use of taboo language into the target language.

For the second study were conducted by Aditia (2011). The analysis uses a *Dustin Lee Abraham's How High* movie with the study aims is to find the type of taboo and swear words in informal based conversation and also the reason why character use those types of word. The result of this previous study shown that there are four in total for types of taboo words which are lavatory, religion private parts of body, and lastly sexual activity. For the swear words the Aditia (2011) explain that there are two types of swear the first one is strong and the second one is weak types of swear words. And for the reason of why character in *Dustin Lee Abraham's How High* use taboo word based on the context of the situation. The similarities that can be found in this previous study is that both finding the purposed of why character using taboo. In this previous study shows the difference of using a theory proposed by Michael Swan regarding to the types of taboo words.

The third previous study is from Dewi & Indriani (2021) with the title swearing and taboo words by the main character in *I, Tonya* movie. The study's aims are to find the types of taboo and swear words that use by main character in *I, Tonya* movie and the emotion that influence character to use taboo and swear words. The similarity that can be found from this previous study is the used of theory by Lakoff (1973) regarding to features of women language

and the theory from theory of Barrett (1985) to analyze the context of emotion. The difference of this previous study is that the main focus is to find the emotional influence from character that makes them swear and use taboo words. This previous study concluded that there are five main emotional influences out of 65 data in total. This study helps the recent study to understand the use of taboo word in context of emotion.

For the international article, this study uses two journal that discussed about gender difference in using taboo language, the first international article is from Ningjue (2010). The aims of this study are to analyze the types of taboo conversation on the internet as their main data source. In this study (Jay, 1992)Ningjue (2010) use three theory regarding to the types of taboo words, the first one is from Jay (1992) which similar with this recent study, Battistella (2005) and Montagu (2001). The result of this previous study is that there are five total types of taboo conversation that can be found in the internet. The first one is sexual harassment, profanity, obscenity and lastly epithets, taken from three theory that used for this previous study. Not only that Ningjue (2010) also aims to find the difference between genders in doing internet based conversation. This previous study concluded that there is difference in mixed-gender conversation that shows male is more active in using taboo words more than female. While for female, the use of taboo word more use in same-gender conversation. This previous study gives a big impact from the recent study because the aims of this study is also to find the difference between women and men while using taboo words.

Last study that used in order to help this recent study is an article write by Gao(2008) which analyze taboo language in *Sex and the City* series. The study aims are to find the gender difference between

character while using taboo alongside with types of taboo and their function. This previous study exactly shares the same research problems and data source which both use series as the primary data. The only difference is that the recent study uses a series entitled *Euphoria* comes out in 2019 makes this series can considered brand new and only a few previous studies have ever analyzed this series. From Gao(2008) study, mentioned that taboo words can be divided into verbal taboo, euphemism and neutral taboo, in this previous study concluded that both gender use the same types of taboo, the difference is that men shows to uttered more taboo than women in the terms of mixed-gender conversation and men use more verbal taboo than women. Even though this previous study share exactly same aims for the recent study, but the data that were used is different from another make the recent study is also shows difference data and difference conclusion.

Theory of taboo word

The origin of taboo actually comes from the Tongan language which speaks by Polynesians, taboo is borrowed by the word 'Tapu' or 'Tabu', the terms of taboo discovered by Cook (1771) in his book that taken from his experience when first visited Tongan back in 1771 to investigate the transit of Venus planet across sun. in his book he stated that 'Tapu/Tabu' were used by Polynesians to describe something forbidden regarding to word or behavior that is banned in their society. according to Allan & Burridge (2006) taboo is referring to an forbidden act that included doing, using or something that violated cultural or forbidden norms. On the other hand Freud & Strachey (2004) stated that unlike moral prohibition and some religious content that is more spontaneous and not based on commandment, taboo is something that

restricts. In the book of cursing in America Jay (1992) explain in detail that there are ten types in total of taboo words, which the first one is cursing, profanity, blasphemy, taboo, obscenity, vulgarity, slang, epithets, insult and slur, and last is scatology. Jay (1992:2) also emphasis that as a emotional creature humans has an argue to explain their feeling which most of the times comes out spontaneous alongside to shows their personal identity traits from their choose of words which makes using an powerful words is one of the easiest way to delivering their emotion.

According to Yule (1986:267) in communication, depending on a person's culture, gender, age, and socioeconomic class, their linguistic style may differ. Yule (1986) stated that language can affect the words, tone, pattern, expression, and other linguistic components of how a speaker tries to convey their genuine intention throughout a conversation. The theory that proposed by Lakoff (1973) mentioned that in women language there are features that makes them different from the way men use language. According to Lakoff (1973 : 286) women in doing a conversation usually avoid strong language they use more super impolite terms and indirect quotes. Women also describe to having a lack sense of humour. In men language a theory proposed by Coates (2004) stated that the language used by men tend to be more harsh and uttered more taboo, because the nature of taboo words itself is a strong language that usually as a term to define a masculinity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

People use taboo words to communicate their own emotions that have just occurred because they are unable to discover more effective phrases without needed to describing in detail the emotions they are experiencing.

The study was conducted out using the data gathered from the Euphoria series. The analysis focuses to find the types of taboo words that uttered by character in the Euphoria series alongside with the function of using those words with the help of theory proposed by Jay (1992), the study result found that each character use every types of taboo which can be categorized as cursing, profanity, blasphemy, taboo, obscenity, vulgarity, slang, epithets, insult and slur, and last is scatology. The next focus for this study is to find the difference between gender in the terms of using taboo words. in the Euphoria series with the help of theory by Lakoff (1973) and Coates (2004). The data shows that women uttered more taboo than men in same gender conversation, there approximately 130 data of women's taboo and 99 data of men's taboo. On the other hand according to Coates (2004) theory in the Euphoria series, in the terms of mixed-gender conversation men indeed use more taboo than women, men spotted use taboo 60 times while women only use 48 times.

As one of the most watched television dramas, especially among younger viewers Euphoria series is aired in 2019 on the American online streamer HBO. Due of the number of forbidden language and behaviour applied by the characters in this series, the idea of this series aligns with this study. The show is well-known for its contentious point of view on high school kids that use foul language, use drugs, and even engage in sexual activity—behaviour that many people consider to be excessively vulgar and inappropriate for high school students.

Table 1. Total of taboo words that occur in the Euphoria series

Amount of Total Taboo	
Women Character	Men Character
130	99

Table 1 reveals that women used taboo words more frequently than men characters did. There are 130 taboo word records for women characters out of the 229 total records found in the *Euphoria* Series, or 56.8% of the total. Only 99 pieces of information, or 43.2% of the total, are available for the men characters in the series.

The fact that men characters in the *Euphoria* Series get so little screen time can have an impact on why they don't use taboo often. The women characters in this series are also noted as being braver and speaking more forcefully, especially in conversations with others of the same gender. They also almost always use forbidden words in their discussion. Even though men only have a little quantity of screen time, there is a difference between mixed-gender and same-gender talks in that men frequently use more taboos than women. This behaviour demonstrates how men characters still want to appear more intimidating and manly.

[1-1]

Cursing

Maddy : What dick pics?

Cassie : The ones you told me about, on his phone.

Maddy : I don't know if your brain is all scrambled from all the Molly you take. But I never said that. If you ever spread a lie like that, I will **fucking come for you**. We good?

Cassie : Yeah

According to Jay (1992), cursing is a words or phrases that have a negative influence on society with the purpose to harm another person. Cursing words can also be used to threaten someone, harm, punish, or destroy them. In data [1-1] cursing was used by character Maddy to threaten Cassie to not spread any rumour or even talk to someone else about the conversation regarding to dick pics that was actually mentioned by Maddy the

day before to her. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word "**fuck**" means to engage in sexual activity with someone, but in this conversation, Maddy used the word to threaten Cassie, implying that she would hurt her if she ever told anyone about their conversation. The reason why Maddy act like she was clueless but actually very angry to Cassie because she feels under pressured due to the secret of dick pics that should not be shared to anyone.

[1-2]

Profanity

Nate : Hey, get on your knees. Come on. Did you seriously think you could rape a girl and nobody would do anything?

Tyler : Oh! Oh, my **God. Fuck!** I didn't do anything, man!

The definition of profane is "secular," "ignorant of the words in a religious belief," or "feeling of disbelief.". Jesus Christ, hell, dammit, and other similar terms fit within this category. According to Jay (1992), using religious phrases and expressions indecently constitutes using profanity. This category shown in data [1-2], Nate was trying to scared Tyler due to his action in McKay party last night when Tyler is making out with Nate's girlfriend. And due to the shock of the unexpected intrusion, Tyler shouted the words "God, fuck." As a respond to Nate. Usually when people use the term of "God" in a spontaneous manner to express anger, fear disbelief, and mostly shock, Tyler's reaction was pure because he was too shocked.

[1-3]

Blasphemy

Ethan : I'm, like, a street vampire.

Kat : I can see that.

Ethan : yeah. Um, you dressed as a **slutty nun?**

Blasphemy is an attack on religion or religious doctrine. While profanity is related to the secular or indifferent (to religion), Blasphemy aims directly at the church. The religious person will find these expressions very unpleasant, yet the unbeliever may find them amusing. Data [1-3] is the only data that can be found in this series. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a nun is a member of a religious community of women who promise to serve God all of their lives and frequently live together in a church. As the situation when the conversation occurred, Kat was dressed as a **'slutty nun'** in a Halloween party with a clear purposed to looked sexy, when she was aware that a nun is a woman who will stay pure for the rest of her life in order to serve God. Therefore, the conversation between Kat and Ethan can be considered blasphemy because they mocked a nun that believer considered holy and need to be respected.

[1-4]

Taboo

Jesse : I'm gonna **fucking rape you**, Dr. Kay!

Dr. Kay: You just bought yourself another 30 minutes in the quiet room, Jesse

According to De Klerk (1992) taboo operates to suppress or inhibit certain act. Taboo is a term used to describe phrases that are not acceptable in society because they can lead to uncomfortable situations, are impolite, and are most likely violated social norm. from data [1-4] was taken in mental hospital when a patient names Jesse try to harassing Dr.Kay and disrespecting her by uttered "I'm gonna fucking **rape** you" due to his illness that makes him lack of moral.

The words "**rape**" is strictly forbidden and should not be used in public. Raped according to Oxford Dictionary is the crime of forcing someone to have sex when they do not consent to it and have no option to decline because they are

powerless to object due to bad circumstances.

[1-5]

Obscenity

Nate : Yeah, that's real classy, you fucking whore.

Maddy : **Suck my dick**.

Obscenity refers to words or expressions that are inappropriate for use in public and considered immoral because they relate to sexual behaviour and excretory functions that can cause disgust. In the case of data [1-5] was taken in McKay's party when Nate caught Maddy try to make out with other man by insulting her behavior, as a respond Maddy uttered "**Suck my dick**," with an attempt to trigger a reaction from Nate. Obscenity mainly refers to physical parts like the dick. These words are typically inappropriate to use in public.

[1-6]

Vulgarity

Roy/Troy: You've probably never **sucked a dick** in your life.

Kat : Yeah, I have

According to Jay (1992), vulgarity is an offensive and unacceptable crude expression. They are employed to minimize the specified or portrayed thing or person. Words or phrases that have pornographic overtones, raw anatomy, or excretory function are considered vulgar. Not everything that is vulgar is damaging, wicked, or obscene. In data [1-6] happened in McKay party when Troy/Roy wants to provoke Kat since they view her as a fat woman, which is why they say, "You probably never **sucked a dick**." They think Kat has never had sex or suck a dick because in society overweight women do not receive as much attention as skinny ones, as they noted in the talk. Word '**sucked a dick**' can categorize as vulgarity because both of them refer to sexual activity literally without any without any hidden meaning.

[1-7]**Slang**

Nate : She loves cars! Shit, thank you for telling me. What the fuck?
Nate's friends: **Dude's** got mad feelings.

In communication, certain sub-groups such as teenagers, musicians, soldiers, drug users, or sports have evolved slang as a lexicon. It is frequently used in spoken language to identify group members and is inappropriate for formal occasions. In data [1-7] occurs when McKay, Nate and their friends is hangout in McKay's room, the topic of conversation is related to McKay current relationship with Cassie, in this data Nate is being sarcastic to McKay to provoke him, to make the situation even worse their friend also mocking McKay by saying "**Dude**" as a slang that usually uses by a group of teenagers to addressing someone that they close with. Word 'dude' in another occasion, especially in the formal situation can be view as an offensive language and impolite that is why it is considered as a taboo words. Word 'dude' in another occasion, may be perceived as rude and disrespectful. For this reason, it is forbidden to use it.

[1-8]**Epithet**

Nate : Welcome home.
Tyler : **Fuck!** What the fuck, man?
Nate : Hi, Tyler

According to Jay (1992), an epithet is a swear word or emotionally explosive language used as an interjection by a speaker to indicate annoyance or emotion without being expressly addressed at someone in particular. In data [1-8] happen after Nate talk with his girlfriend Maddy about her and Tayler try to make out in the pool that makes Nate mad, which lead to Maddy's lying about her being blackout and makes Nate breaks into Tyler's home and waits for him to

vent his anger. A sudden voice that comes out from Nate when Tayler arrive is the reason why Taylor used the word "**fuck**" in addition of being shocked and resentment towards the intruder for startling him.

[1-9]**Insult and slur**

Maddy : Fucking **pigs!** Fuck you!
Detective Riley: Hi Maddy, I'm detective Riley. I understand this is traumatic, but you're going to have to cooperate

Slurs and insults are words that are only used to offend someone else. They do not obtain their authority through societal or religious cohesion. They accomplish this by indicating a true or imagined attribute of the target. An insult may make reference to the target's physical, mental, or psychological traits some also used animal's name as reference, whereas slurs are forbidden phrases with a facial, ethnic, or social connotation. For the case in data [1-9] happen when Maddy suddenly faint in classroom and makes her teacher to call a paramedic which lead them into finding a bruises in her neck. In this case since Maddy in still a minor the help of police department is needed to make sure that she was safe. The only reason why Maddy hysterically and decide to used one of taboo expression is because the interrogation will be questioning her relationship with Nate, make Maddy refuses to conduct any interrogations and becomes upset with Detective Riley. She calls her a "**pig**," to vent her anger, which is offensive and falls under the category of an insult because she used the name of an animal to denigrate her,

[1-10]**Scatology**

Leslie : I don't care. You're not leaving this house until you take a drug test.

Rue : I just **peed!**

Scatology is a type of taboo term that is occasionally used by kids more frequently than by adults. These types referring to human waste such as piss, poop, shit. In the case of data [1-10] found in the scene where Rue's mother caught her daughter went out without her permission. Because the word "**peed**" in this data refers to human waste or has the same connotation as urinating that use by Rue while screaming to her mother. This data proved that Rue use a word that considered to be taboo and part of scatology. In this scene Rue was frightened and tried to seem angry in this moment by raising her voice when she said, "I just **peed**," to make her mother would not have suspected her of lying.

Table 2 Total Function of Taboo

Function of Taboo	Women	Men
Anger/Frustration	35	29
Surprise	14	7
Sarcastic irony or Insult	40	22
Joke	12	13
Descriptive	27	28
Evaluative		

According to the five uses of taboo words listed by Jay (1992), both women and men characters in the Euphoria series uttered them, as seen in the table above. Women characters from the five functional categories frequently utilize taboo phrases to to show insult or being sarcastic during conversation. There are 68 overall data, and 40 of them is from women characters and only 22 data from men. For the second most used function of taboo is to shows anger and frustration. In these types of function, men character spotted to used more out of all types that was mentioned above. Although the amount of total is still

higher from women with 35 data, but in men only case anger is the number one used function with 29 data in total. furthermore, the word taboo that serves a descriptive-evaluative occurs 55 times, revealing 27 data about women characters and 28 more data about men characters. Next is the two least used function of taboo words, the first one is surprise, even though in the previous discussion there are category as epithet which is a burst of emotional language and usually comes spontaneous, some data that used in epithet show more the intention of anger rather than surprise, which lead the data only 14 for women and 12 from men characters. Last but not least are the category of joke, since Euphoria is women-based series, a joke is rarely occurred during the conversation, only 12 times data found from the entire series from women and 13 data from men characters.

Table 3 all type of taboo words

Category	Amount	Percentage
Cursing	39	17,03%
Profanity	20	8,73%
Blasphemy	1	0,44%
Taboo	9	3,93%
Obscenity	20	8,73%
Vulgarity	25	10,92%
Slang	24	10,48%
Epithet	49	21,40%
Insult and Slur	40	17,47%
Scatology	2	0,87%
Total	229	100%

Based on the result of the data analysis, women were observed using 130 taboo words from the ten categories of taboo identified by Jay (1996), compared to only 99 data for men. These categories of taboo include cursing, which accounts for 17,03% of all conversation, profanity (8,73%), blasphemy (0,44%), taboo (3,95%) obscenity (8,73%), vulgarity (10,92%), slang (10,48%), epithet (21,40%), insult

and slur (17,47%) as well as scatology (0,87%).

Table 4 Total of both gender in using taboo in the Euphoria series

Category	Number	Percentage
Women only	82	35,81%
Men only	39	17,03%
Women to Men	48	20,96%
Men to Women	60	26,20%

The majority of the characters in the Euphoria series are women. The entire series demonstrates that women employ taboo language more frequently than male characters; there are a total of 82 instances where women characters engage in women-only dialogue. This may be the case since, of the eight episodes in the Euphoria series, six episodes dealt with issues between women characters, while the other two episodes only addressed issues between men characters. make them only received 39 data of utilizing taboo language in men only conversations. In contrast to the statistics from conversations between people of the same gender, there is a significant degree of variation between women and men when it comes to mixed-gender conversations. The results of this study support Coates (2004:13) theory, which contends that men and women use the same amount of taboo language in conversations with people of the same gender, however men are reportedly more likely than women to use taboo words, particularly in same-gender conversation.

CONSLUSION

Taboo words are those that are taboo in society because they can create discomfort and are unappealing to use in public. In today's situation, although it seems that people start normalizing taboo especially among younger generation, but in cultural environment they still

considered as a taboo because of the used of those word has intention to harm someone or just simply being disrespectful and ignorant to a social norm. In the Euphoria series, there are many phrases that can be described as "taboo words" that refer to things that should not be said out loud since they may come out as rude, harsh, or upsetting to others but in this series become the main attraction for the entire series.

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that women say more taboo than men in conversations with people of the same gender. But in mixed-gender conversations, males are more likely to use taboo than women are, which is compatible with Coates' theory that men uttered more offensive things than women because they think doing so is the pinnacle of masculinity. Women were spotted using 130 taboo words from the ten categories of taboo identified by Jay (1996), with only 99 data for characters. These categories of taboo include cursing, which accounts for 17% of all conversation profanity 8,73%, obscenity 8,73%, blasphemy 0,44%, taboo 3,95% slang 10,48%, epithet 21,40%, insult and slur 17,47%, vulgarity 10,92%, and for the last category is scatology 0,87%.

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