

Pragmatic Analysis of Swear Words in Online Communication via Messaging Apps

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**PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF SWEAR WORDS IN ONLINE COMMUNICATION
VIA MESSAGING APPS**

Diplomski rad

Mentor:

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Zagreb, 2021.

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Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
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Abstract

This thesis will provide an insight into the pragmatics of swearing in online communication. The aim is to show that swearing in online environment is not exclusively insulting or harmful, but rather used for a multitude of different communicational purposes which depend on a range of correlated factors such as the situational context, background knowledge, speaker's intention or emotion, manner of delivery, the position of power, relationship between participants of a conversation, etc. After briefly defining the swearing phenomenon, establishing the theoretical framework and the research methodology, swear words from the author's personal corpus of text messaging on WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger will be classified and analyzed pragmatically according to some of the prominent swearing typologies. The presented data intends to shed light on the function, motivation, frequency, and connotative meaning of swear words in online messaging in Croatian, as opposed to the corresponding findings in English.

Keywords: swearing, swear words, cursing, taboo, context, pragmatics, Croatian, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp

Sažetak

Ovaj diplomski rad pruža uvid u pragmatiku psovke u mrežnoj komunikaciji. Cilj rada je dokazati da se psovke na društvenim mrežama ne koriste isključivo kako bi nekoga uvrijedile ili zlostavljale, već da mogu imati mnoštvo različitih komunikacijskih svrha koje ovise o nizu povezanih čimbenika kao što su situacijski kontekst, pozadinsko znanje, namjera ili emocija govornika, način isporuke, položaj moći, odnos između sudionika razgovora itd. Prvo će se definirati fenomen psovki, zatim uspostaviti teorijski okvir i metodologija istraživanja, te će se na temelju izabranih tipologija analizirati psovke iz autoričinog korpusa tekstualnih poruka preuzetih s Whats App i Facebook Messenger aplikacija za dopisivanje. Analizom tih podataka razjasnit će se funkcija, motivacija, učestalost i konotativno značenje psovki u internetskoj komunikaciji na hrvatskom jeziku, a dobiveni rezultati usporedit će se s odgovarajućim istraživanjima provedenim u engleskom jeziku.

Ključne riječi: psovanje, psovke, tabu, kontekst, pragmatika, hrvatski jezik, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp

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1. Introduction

Vulgarity is common in language use, with vulgar words¹ appearing with a frequency estimated between 0.5% and 0.7% in day-to-day conversational speech (Jay, 2009; Mehl et al., 2007). Profane words can be employed for multiple goals: as an intensifier for subjective opinions, as a way to offend or express hate speech towards others, to describe vulgar activities, or as a way to signal an informal conversation. Understanding the expression of swearing in a naturally occurring text is thus a prolific topic for several disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, and computer sciences. This paper will provide linguistic analysis which aims for better understanding of the pragmatics of swear words. Given the fact that most thoughts can be rephrased so as not to include vulgarity, the use of vulgar words indicates a purposeful attempt of performing a specific function. The analysis will try to determine the pragmatic function of swearing in an online environment via instant messaging applications. The author's corpus of text messages will be employed, and since the corpus is in Croatian, the results of this analysis will be compared to the findings of similar research in English.

In the course of establishing the theoretical framework and the methodology of the research, I will review previous studies on the subject both in English and Croatian, determine the frequencies of swearing in online environment, explore the nature of messaging applications and single out the most frequent swear words in the respective languages. The analysis will focus on the most popular swear words in Croatian, as well as their pragmatic functions, and in doing so the existing typologies of swear words will be thoroughly employed and reviewed. The discussion will more closely examine some of the central issues that emerge in the analysis.

¹ In this paper, I will use terms *swear words*, *curse words*, *profane words*, and *vulgar words* interchangeably to refer to the kind of language that is deemed socially unacceptable, offensive and is explicitly connected to lexemes denoting sexual organs, sexual relations, religion, church, excrement, death, the physically or mentally disabled, prostitution, narcotics, crime, as well as ethnic-racial-gender slurs. It is important to note that there is a slight semantic difference between the four terms. According to Oxford Learner's Dictionary (2021) *swear words* are defined as rude or offensive words used for example to express anger or annoyance, and are synonymous with expletives; *curse words* are listed as a synonym for swear words, but are also linked to oaths and utterances intended to invoke a supernatural power to inflict harm or punishment on someone or something; *profane words* are partially synonymous with the term swear words, but they are usually religious words used in a way that shows a lack of respect for God or holy things; while *vulgar words* are perceived as those lacking sophistication or good taste, making explicit and offensive reference to sex or bodily functions. However, it seems that there is no consensus among the authors of research papers dealing with this kind of vocabulary on the usage of the specific terminology, so any of the given terms could be used to refer to the same language phenomenon.

2. Swear words and their function

Swear words, also referred to as *dirty words*, *vulgar words*, *taboo words/language*, *expletives*, *swearing*, *cursing*, and *cussing* (Dynel 2012, 26), are often identified as a part of speech connected to impoliteness that tends to be deemed solely as impolite, since it is reported to have constituted one of the first strands of research on impoliteness (ibid., 27). Tony McEnery refers to it as *bad language*, along with blasphemous, homophobic, racist, and sexist language, which has been met with censorious attitudes from the public and the media for centuries (2006, 2). However, the lack of universal standards for offensiveness, due to its contextual variability, creates problems for defining what offensive or harmful speech actually is and how to distinguish between various degrees of offensive vocabulary (Jay and Janschewitz 2008, 269). Similarly, the exact nature of harm to befall the speaker, listener, or society using or witnessing an utterance of swear words has never been entirely clear.

Timothy Jay and Kristin Janschewitz defined swear words as “the use of taboo language with the purpose of expressing the speaker’s emotional state and communicating that information to listeners” (ibid., 268). From an evolutionary standpoint, Jay claims that swearing is a unique human behavior that developed for only one purpose and that is to intensify emotional communication to a degree that non-taboo words cannot (Jay 2009, 155). So in comparison to most other speech, swearing is primarily meant to convey connotative or emotional meaning. Therefore, the question of why we swear is even more interesting than the definition of swearing. Research has shown that reasons for using taboo words depend on the conversational goals of the speaker (see Jay 2000; McEnery, 2006; Montagu, 1967). Usage of taboo words can achieve a variety of personal and interpersonal outcomes that may be positive, negative, or inconsequential, in terms of their impact on others. Besides literal or denotative uses (*they fucked*), the primary use of swearing is for emotional purposes, which occurs in the form of epithets or as insults directed toward others. Epithets are offensive emotional outbursts of single words or phrases used to express the speaker’s frustration, anger, or surprise (*holy shit! fuck you!*). Two-thirds of our swearing data are linked to personal and interpersonal expressions of anger and frustration, which seem to be the main reason for swearing (Jay 2009). Apart from venting the speaker’s feelings, swearing can be used positively in jokes, social commentary, sex talk, storytelling, in-group slang, and self-deprecation or ironic sarcasm to elicit humoristic effect or promote social harmony and cohesion. As for inconsequential outcomes, many episodes of taboo word use are a part of casual conversational habits (*this CD is fucking great*) in the absence of any clear social motive other than fitting in with others’ informal use of taboo

words. (Jay 2009, 155-156) Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that even though the speaker's intended outcome of swearing was positive or inconsequential, the listener's perception of it could be highly context-dependent.

Despite the fact that swear words are usually censored, considered impolite, and not typically taught in school in the usual sense, they exist in almost every person's lexicon. Children seem to learn them at a very young age from peers, parents, or media, and continue to use them at their individual rates for the rest of their lives (Suganob-Nicolau 2016, 118). Mehl and colleagues (Mehl et.al. 2007, 82) determined that the average English speaker uses 15,000 to 16,000 words per day out of which 80 to 90 words are swear words. In other words, 0.5% to 0.7% of our daily vocabulary is swearing. To further support the argument that taboo words are common, Mehl and Pennebaker (2003, 863) found that person plural pronouns (*we, us, our*) occurred at a 1.0% rate, which, according to them, language researchers do not perceive as a low-frequency word class. Therefore, swear words are used quite frequently.

Andersson and Hirsch (1985) argued that if we were to divide swear words into general categories, those would be words denoting sexual organs, sexual relations, religion, church, excrement, death, the physically or mentally disabled, prostitution, narcotics, and crime (79). This implies that, although there are hundreds of taboo words, the semantic range of referents that are considered taboo is limited in scope. Taboos in English are placed primarily on: sexual references (*blow job, cunt*); those that are considered profane or blasphemous (*goddamn, Jesus Christ*); they extend to scatological referents and disgusting objects (*shit, crap, douche bag*); some animal names (*bitch, pig, ass*); ethnic-racial-gender slurs (*nigger, fag, dago*); insulting references to perceived psychological, physical, or social deviations (*retard, wimp*); ancestral allusions (*son of a bitch, bastard*); substandard vulgar terms (*fart face*); and offensive slang (*cluster fuck, tit run*) (Jay 2009, 154). Unsurprisingly, sexual taboos, scatological taboos, and religious taboos seem to be the most popular when it comes to the choice of bad language. Based on the comparison of several previous research on the frequency of swearing, Jay put forward that *fuck, shit, hell, damn, goddamn, Jesus Christ, ass, oh my god, bitch, and sucks* constitute top ten English swear words of all time, with *fuck* and *shit* accounting for eighty percent of all swearing (ibid.,156)

Having determined that to swear is to be human and that swearing is essentially connected to the speaker's emotional perception of the message and its conversational context, let us consider the pragmatic outlook on swearing.

3. Pragmatic practice and theoretical framework

Jacob Mey suggested that the study of language could be divided into two, more or less independent parts: the first being a description of its structure (as dealt with by the traditional methods of grammars), the other, a description of its use (to be taken care of by pragmatics) (2001, 5). This implies that pragmatics offers a different perspective on language as opposed to the traditional component view that is typically employed in phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. The primary domain of pragmatics is the way the individual goes about using language, that is to say, pragmatics explores “linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behavior” (Verschueren 1999, 7). George Yule (1998, 3) emphasized that pragmatics is also a two-way street by defining it as a discipline “concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader).” In his view, it is related to the analysis of what people intend to convey by their utterances rather than what the words or phrases in those utterances mean by themselves. Logically, conversation depends on both the speaker, who delivers the message, and the hearer, who concludes the implication of the utterance, which then highly depends on the context in which it occurs. In other words, pragmatics is the study of both speaker meaning and contextual meaning, and can, therefore, be considered as the study of how more gets communicated than is said (*ibid.*, 4). The choice between the said and unsaid is determined by a set of pragmatic factors, such as speaker’s and listener’s familiarity, their closeness², deixis³, presupposition⁴, and implicature⁵. These so-called ‘extralinguistic’ factors can only be excluded from a pragmatic evaluation on the penalty of neglecting the user because a truly pragmatic consideration has to deal with the users in their social context. Therefore, to put it simply: “pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society” (Mey 2001, 6) It is best to illustrate the need for pragmatic scrutiny of language on a practical example.

² On the assumption of how close or distant the listener is, speakers determine how much needs to be said (Yule 1998, 12).

³ The function or use of deictic words, forms, or expressions, i.e. ‘pointing’ with language (Yule 1998, 9).

⁴ A presupposition is an implicit assumption about the world or background belief relating to an utterance whose truth is taken for granted in discourse (Yule 1998, 26).

⁵ An implicature is something the speaker suggests or implies with an utterance, even though it is not literally expressed. Implicatures can aid in communicating more efficiently than by explicitly saying everything we want to communicate (Davis 2019).

For instance, imagine if a person was to say *we should fuck with them!* and another person replied *for sure!* without the knowledge of the aforementioned extralinguistic factors and their social context it is impossible to decipher what the utterances meant. They could suggest a range of meanings: from physical attraction, a call for a practical joke, a sarcastic comment, a suggestion to make someone angry, to encouragement for an enjoyable activity. This is precisely why pragmatics can and should be employed when analyzing swear words.

The same applies to other individual swear words. For example, let us take a look at how this approach is employed in practice on the two most commonly used English swear words – *fuck* and *shit* (Jay 2009, 156). If someone accidentally stubbed their finger on a nail and yelled *fuck*, the word would show the expression of pain from the speaker not intended to offend anyone else. However, if somebody else stepped on the speaker's foot their utterance of the word *fuck* would be considered offensive and directed towards the other person expressing the speaker's anger. In case of an unpredicted or unfavorable situation, the speaker might use the word *fuck* to express their shock in the lack of other appropriate words. The speaker might also choose to use the word *fuck* in a group environment to commiserate with another person on their unfortunate circumstances (Pinker 2007, 350). Similarly, *shit* can express almost any emotion or concept. For instance, it can be used as a generic mass noun similar to *stuff*, as an interjection to fill the silence in a socially awkward situation, instead of *fuck* (*What the shit is going on?*) or to add emphasis to an utterance. A speaker can yell *shit* out of shock (*Shit! My credit card is maxed out.*) or impatience (*Shit! I am late again!*), in which case there is no negative outcome. On the other hand, the word could also be used to directly offend the listener (*How did you manage to lose our money? Shit!*). In addition, it may be used as a term of endearment, as in the phrase *you little shit*. That being the case, it is quite clear that plenty other instances of swearing could easily be found in various environments and uttered with different interpersonal goals in mind, apart from being offensive.

One of the first linguists to connect swearing with pragmatic practice was Ashley Montagu (1967), who differentiated two functions of swearing, *annoyance swearing* and *social swearing*, with annoyance swearing serving primarily intra-individual functions (e.g., catharsis), which stem from frustration and stress, whereas social or conversational swearing refers to swearing which mainly serves various inter-individual functions (87). Likewise, Goddard argued that swearing falls into the pragmatic territory rather than semantic, primarily because the use of swear words is heavily context-sensitive and because their meaning is perceived as “expressive” rather than referential or descriptive (2015, 2). Therefore, what

primarily binds swear words as categories is not their semantic meaning, but their emotional intensity, purpose, and offensiveness, or in other words, how swearing functions as a form of behavior in a communicative context. This claim is additionally supported by the idea that people learn to assess when, where, and at whom it is appropriate to swear or where swearing would be offensive. Naturally, over time, various linguists approached swearing pragmatically and proposed their classifications for it. Trudgill and Andersson (1990, 61) categorized swear words based on four pragmatic functions:

- Expletive: used to express emotions; not directed towards others
- Abusive: intended to harm the hearer
- Humorous: often looks like abusive swearing, but has the opposite function
- Auxiliary: swearing as a way of speaking; often or always non-emphatic

Wajnryb (2005, 25) lists only three basic functions of swearing which she calls *cathartic*, *abusive*, and *social*. Cathartic swearing is an emotional outburst, for example when a person is angry or in pain; abusive is directed at a specific target, be it a person or a thing, and social fulfills the purpose of joking and strengthening in-group social bonds. On the other hand, Steven Pinker, who approaches language from a psychological point of view (2007, 350), believes that people swear in five following ways:

- Descriptive swearing: Let's fuck!
- Idiomatic swearing: It's fucked up.
- Abusive swearing: Fuck you, motherfucker!
- Emphatic swearing: It's fucking amazing.
- Cathartic swearing: Fuck!

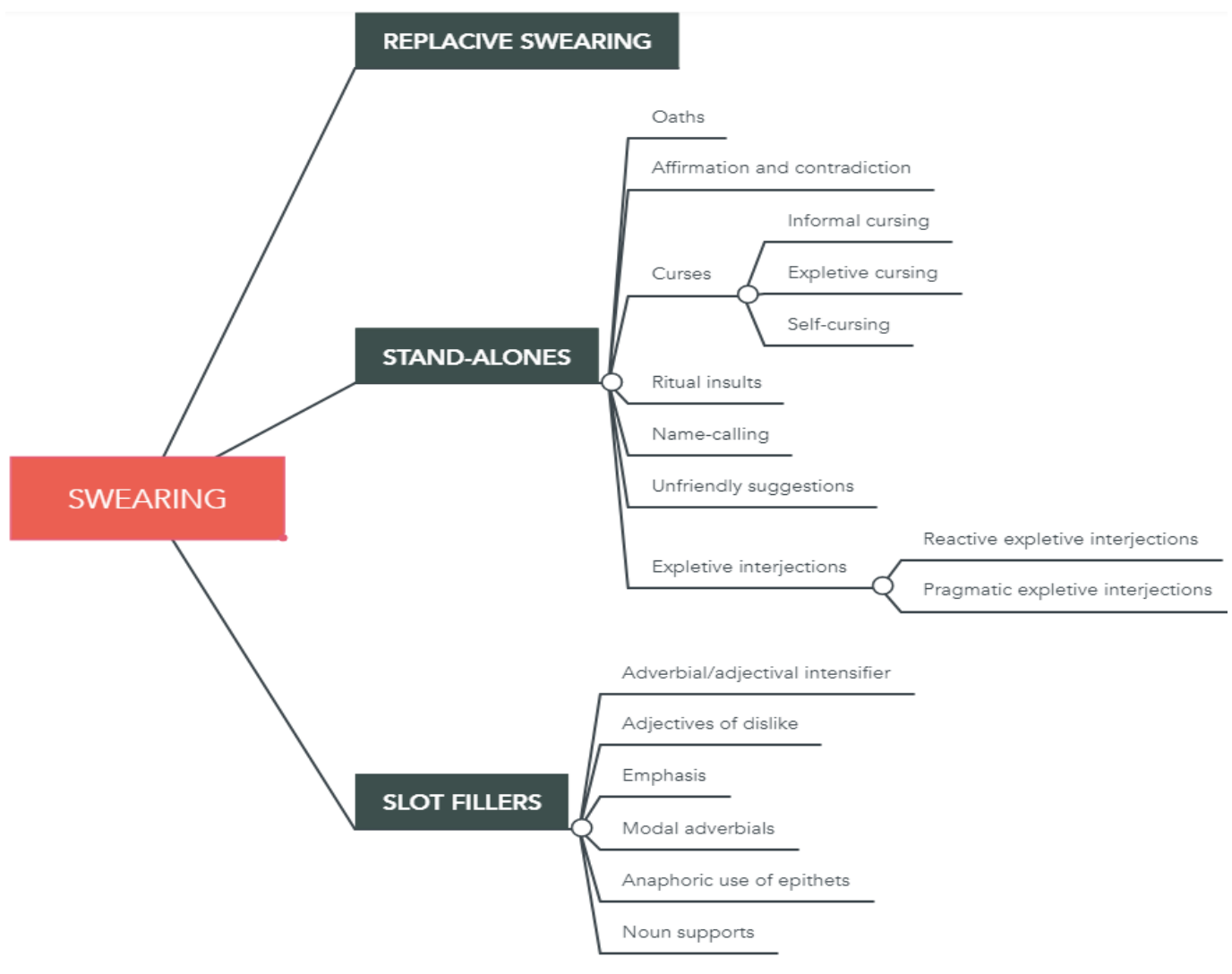
On the other hand, McEnery's categorization of bad language (2006, 32) offers fifteen different uses of swear words:

- Predicative negative adjective: The film is shit.
- Adverbial booster: fucking marvellous, fucking awful
- Cursing expletive: Fuck you/me/him/it.
- Destinational usage: Fuck off! He fucked off.
- Emphatic adverb: He fucking did it.
- Figurative extension of literal meaning: to fuck about
- General expletive: (Oh) Fuck!
- Idiomatic set phrase: fuck all, give a fuck
- Literal usage denoting taboo referent: We fucked.
- Imagery based on literal meaning: kick the shit out of

- Premodifying intensifying negative adjective: the fucking idiot
- Pronominal form with undefined referent: got shit to do
- Personal insult referring to identified entity: You fuck/That fuck
- Reclaimed usage with no negative intent: Niggers/Niggaz used by rappers
- Religious oath used for emphasis: by God!

The most comprehensive typology of swearing functions so far was presented by Magnus Ljung (2011) in his cross-cultural linguistic study, which was not only based on usage of taboo words in English, but also in other languages such as Arabic, Cantonese, Dutch, Estonian, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Norwegian, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, Urdu, etc. Through interviews with native speakers and a study of British National Corpus he separated the functions of swearing into two major groups – *the stand-alones* and *the slot fillers* – and added a third smaller functional category of *replacive swearing*. The categories are further divided into subcategories in the following manner:

Figure 1. Graphic representation of Ljung's swearing categories (2011, 30-35)⁶



In this elaborate classification of swearing, stand-alones refer to swear words that can stand on their own, in a sentence or as a sentence, while slot fillers cannot stand alone, but have to fill a slot in a larger unit (NP, VP, clause, etc.) (Ljung, 2011, p. 143). Replacive swearing, however, is defined as “usage of the taboo words that may replace an almost infinite number of ordinary non-taboo nouns and verbs that are in that case given new literal meanings, which are interpreted in terms of the linguistic and situational settings in which they are used” (2011, 35). Ljung adds that, in replacive swearing, the metaphorical meaning of the swear word needs to be relatively close to its literal meaning in order to be understood correctly. He gives an example with the word *hell* as in *my day turns to hell*. Due to the complexity of this typology, individual subcategories of swearing will be fully further explained on relevant examples.

Through this analysis of swearing in online communication, Ljung’s typology will be prioritized, but others will also be referenced and consulted, because I believe that each of them might present some issues, such as categories spilling over into each other or unnecessary subdivisions of swear words that can easily be placed in the same category. The classification will be followed by the discussion of possible similarities and/or problems in used typologies, which will in turn enable a better understanding of the pragmatic meaning of a given swear word.

4. Studies of swear words in English online discourse

Even though there are countless ways to curse in English, research has shown that most taboo word usage in written or spoken language involves ten frequently used terms that account for roughly 80% of swearing: *fuck, shit, hell, damn, goddamn, Jesus Christ, ass, oh my god, bitch, and sucks* (Jay 2009,156). This set of swearing words remained essentially unchanged throughout the years (1986, 1997, and 2006), as cited in Jay (2008), indicating that, contrary to the popular belief that the most frequent swear words are in constant flux, the majority of people have a stable swearing lexicon. However, in the context of the analysis of online swearing, the crucial question is whether there is a difference between face-to-face swearing and Internet-based swearing?

As the research of online swearing shows, swear words are present just about everywhere online: in email messages, chat rooms, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, Instagram, and Reddit. One of the earliest studies of swearing rates in online communication was conducted by Subrahmanyam, Smahel, and Greenfield (2006), who reported that 3% of chat room utterances contained obscene words, which is a rate of about one swearword every

two minutes. In another study, Thelwall (2008) indicated that a 0.2% swearword rate was found in the usage of UK MySpace (94). According to the study in Wang et al. (2014), the rate of swear word use in English Twitter is 1.15% (454), almost double compared to its use in daily conversation (0.5 – 0.7%) as observed in previous work (Jay, 1992; Mehl and Pennebaker, 2003). The work by Wang et al. (2014) also reports that a portion of 7.73% of tweets in their random sampling collection contains swear words, which means that one tweet out of thirteen includes at least one swear word. Interestingly, they also observed that a list of only seven words covers about 90% of all the swear word occurrences in their Twitter sample: *fuck*, *shit*, *ass*, *bitch*, *nigga*, *hell*, and *whore*. More recent research of swearing trends on Reddit showed (Thomä 2017) that overall swear words make up 0,4% of the whole corpus (59). On average, there are swear words in every eighth comment, or, formulated differently, there is a swear word in 12% of the comments (ibid.). In comparison, the swear word usage on Reddit is double that on MySpace. The difference between the two platforms is only 0.2% as MySpace provides an overall rate of 0.2%-0.3% (Thelwall 2008, 93). Compared to the results by McEnery (2006), the swear word usage on Reddit mimics the swear word usage in spoken English, when it comes to the number of swear words used. Thomä (2017) also found that the most popular swear words on Reddit were: *fuck*, *shit*, *damn*, *ass*, *dick*, *bitch*, *piss*, *retard*, *cunt*, *cock*, *bastard*, *fag*, and *nigga* (24). Vocabulary-wise, online swearing and offline swearing have four words in common that appear in all the research carried out so far: *fuck*, *shit*, *ass*, and *bitch*. In short, swearing in English happens on the internet and social media sites at roughly the same rate as outside of it, including the same or roughly similar swear words.

Regarding the function, the goals of offensive word use in online communication are similar to those in spoken discourse according to Jay (2018, 109). Wang et al. (2014) arrived at the same conclusion in their study of cursing on Twitter by saying that cursing was most closely associated with two negative emotions, sadness (21.83% of cursing Tweets) and anger (16.79%), but it was also used to express some positive emotions such as love (4.16%), thankfulness (3.26%) and joy (2.5%) (419). Similarly, in his analysis of swearing on Reddit, Thomä (2017) found that the use of swear words is rated positively. Swearing in humorous comments seems also very likely and swear words usually express emotions and emphasize certain points or enhance opinions that are shared by the Reddit community (2017, 65). This again shows that swearing is multifaceted, even in online discourse. It is still mainly used to express negative emotions, although its positive usage, such as emphasis or social cohesion, should not be overlooked. One of the latest research on abusive swearing on social media

(Pamungkas et al. 2020, 6241) drew attention to the fact that out of 1,511 instances of swearing from 1,320 tweets, 620 swear words were annotated as abusive and 891 marked as non-abusive, with non-abusive contexts of swearing being dominated by emphatic and cathartic swearing function.

Despite the points of similarity, Jay (2018, 110) claims that there are two fundamental differences between online and offline swearing discourse: 1) the powerful effect of online users' anonymity or hidden identity, and 2) the lack of a shared physical context or social presence (both users in the same place) where forms of the social status usually operate (authority, social-economic class, physical size, and eye contact). In a, by their own accord, "informal" study of swearing on Youtube, Dynel (2012, 27) shows the heavy use of swear words on an online platform seems to be motivated by anonymity (ibid., 35). In these messages, impoliteness seems to be intended while using very offensive swear words. Dery (1994, 1) also sees anonymity as a reason to drop any potential restraint one might have to use swear words. Following this observation, the nature of the medium should be taken into account when analyzing online swearing discourse, because compared to MySpace and Twitter, where people often register with their own names, users on Youtube and Reddit tend to use nicknames to stay anonymous. Apart from anonymity, Maia and Rezende found that other contributing factors could be the "we versus them mentality", which is prominent on sites where more swearing occurs, and solidarity within a group of like-minded individuals, where swearing represents a part of the group's identity. They also noted there was more respectful communication in homogenous forums than those populated by users representing opposing views on Youtube, blog, and Facebook sites (Maia and Rezende 2016, 124-127).

Still, it seems that not nearly enough research has been done regarding online swearing considering how rapidly the virtual environment is changing. For example, there is no research on swear words on Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok, which were the fastest growing social media sites of 2020 (Target Internet 2021). Therefore, our understanding of cursing on social media remains very limited.

5. Research methodology

5.1 WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger

Over the last decade, social media has become an integral part of our daily lives. According to the 2012 Pew Internet & American Life Project report, 69% of online adults use

social media sites, and the number is steadily increasing (Maeve and Brenner 2012, 2). Another Pew study in 2011 (Madden et.al.) shows that 95% of all teens ages 12-17 are now online, and 80% of those online teens are users of social media sites. People communicate on these sites/apps to share their daily activities, happenings, thoughts, and feelings with their contacts, and keep up with close social ties, which makes social media a valuable data source, as well as a great target for various areas of research and practice, including the study of swear words.

The latest available statistics show that WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger are by far the most popular global mobile apps⁷ that fall under the social media category, based on the number of monthly active users (Tankovska 2021). Both are used for private one-on-one or group conversations which include sending and receiving text messages, voice messages, photos, videos, and carry multiple other almost identical features (emojis, GIFs, stickers, *message seen* feature, *last online* feature, video chat, etc.). That is not surprising since they are owned by the same company, Facebook, Inc. (O'Flaherty 2019). Apart from their user interface design colors, no significant distinction has been found in the way customers use them (Knowels 2018). The two apps, being a crucial part of everyday life (Insil 2021), offer access to vast volumes of naturally occurring user-generated content, with language use containing a high level of expression of thoughts, opinions, and emotions. WhatsApp and Facebook conversations also give a realistic representation of how language is used in the virtual environment, while simultaneously serving as a perfect platform for linguistic creativity and innovation among users (Pimentel and Diniz 2014, 2135). Therefore, they are ideal for observing the usage of vulgar words and allowing the study of the socio-cultural context of this phenomenon.

This paper investigates the use of swear words on WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger in written form. The analysis is going to be conducted on the corpus of the author's private text message correspondence in Croatian, which took place from 2015 until May of 2021. Due to the size of the corpus and inability of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger to list all hits in the corpus for a specific swear word, this research was based on the corpus of the twelve longest-running and most active group conversations in author's messaging applications.⁸ Four of those conversations were led on WhatsApp (C1-C4), while the rest took place on Facebook Messenger (C5-C12). The conversations were downloaded, compiled and the direct link to the

⁷ They can be used on computers as well.

⁸ From now on they will be referred to as C1- C12.

created corpus of messages is available in the Appendix section. To ensure the anonymity of chat participants, their names or other significant personal references will be excluded from the research. It is also important to note that these online conversations might lack some of the prominent features of the ‘typical’ Internet communication such as anonymity and openly abusive swearing, since they were used for casual communication among colleagues or friends in an informal environment characterized by a friendly atmosphere.

5.2 Swearing in Croatian

Taking into consideration the cultural and linguistic differences between Croatian and English, it can be concluded that the swearing conventions in these languages slightly differ (see Ljung 2011). Therefore, it is only logical to look for and analyze swear words that occur most often in Croatian online discourse, rather than those deemed most frequent in English. However, the task of determining the most popular Croatian swear words proved to be quite challenging. In contrast to the plethora of linguistic research on swear words in English, the number of studies on Croatian swearing is significantly limited. Swear words are still a somewhat neglected part of the Croatian language in terms of research, even though Croatians are one of the most avid swearing nations in Europe (Ćurković 2021). There is some qualitative research of Croatian swearing that is mostly concerned with the history of swearing, and its semantic fields (that correspond to the above-mentioned semantic fields in English) (Gavran 1962, Opačić 2013), communicative features and impoliteness (Badurina and Palašić 2020), and pragmatic functions (Badurina and Pranjković 2016). Unfortunately, no quantitative research was ever conducted on any type of written, spoken, or online corpora, which makes it difficult to determine which swear words are most frequently used among Croatian speakers. However, it was identified in multiple observations (Užarević 1999; Pilch 2011) that Croatian swearing is very phallogentric, in other words, it stems from the male perception of sexual acts. According to *Phenomenology of the Curse* (1999) by Užarević, the most objective report on Croatian swearing so far, the swearing practice of Slavic languages is primarily based on the vocabulary connected to the “lower part” of the body and sexual sphere of human behavior (1999, 192). Although Užarević singled out the three most common swear words in Croatian – *kurac* (cock), *pička* (cunt), and *jebati* (to fuck), he did not produce any actual research or numbers to support that they are, in fact, most frequently used (ibid, 195). His claims might seem outdated as well, but 14 years later Pavličić (2013) confirmed that, across Croatia, verbs denoting sexual activities and nouns denoting genitals were still the most popular swearing tool, which supports the claim that Croatian swearing lexicons are generally stable.

The fact that these three are the most popular swear words seems logical to a native speaker and is considered common knowledge, according to previously mentioned research (2013). Still, since there was no quantitative data of any kind concerning the usage of *kurac*, *pička*, and *jebati*, and there is no corpus of Croatian swear words to consult on this matter, I decided to search these three, along with other popular Croatian swear words, in *hrWaC*. By doing so, I wanted to find out if data provided by Užarević and Pavličić was still relevant or the recurrence of these swear words has changed over time. When choosing other Croatian swear words to run against the corpus database and compare to the frequency of *kurac*, *pička*, and *jebati*, I have taken into account Ljung's claim that the mother theme is heavily used in Slavic languages, and can at times replace the profanity itself since it implies it in the given context (2011, 41). For instance, this is the case in *pas mater*, *pička materina*, *bog mater*, *mater ti*. Pavličić's (2013) claim that Croatians do not refrain from using religious taboos when cursing was also considered and represented in form of swear words such as *isuse bože* and *k vragu*. Besides these, I used some of the most frequently mentioned swear words in prior research on swearing in Slavic languages (Pilch 2011; Babič and Voolaid 2018) based on scatological and sexual taboos, such as *sranje* (*shit*), *govno* (*crap*), *kurva* (*bitch*), and *odjebi* (*fuck off*). All of the swear words are listed below in descending order accompanied by the number of hits and frequency in *hrWaC*.

hrWac is a Croatian web corpus consisting of texts downloaded from websites with the top domain of Croatia, i.e. those having a ".hr" label. The corpus was developed by the Department of Information and Communication Sciences at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. There are 1,9 billion tokens in its latest version (2.0), making *hrWac* the most extensive online corpus of the Croatian language. The corpus is comprised of exclusively written texts of various genres such as news articles, forum posts, blog comments, and even product reviews. The authors set the number of the text topics to 20, and the topics were manually named by examining the keywords. The most prominent ones are crime, soccer, the web, politics, religion, lifestyle, automobiles, health, music, arts, and online forums (Ljubešić and Erjavec, 2011). Therefore, we must bear in mind that the swearing frequencies obtained from this corpus might be significantly different from those found in the corpus of instant messaging applications, such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger.

Table 1. Frequency of swear words in Croatian web corpus *hrWaC*

	Number of hits	Per million words
jebati	61,196	43,78
sranje	47,062	33,67
kurac	39,679	28,39
govno	23,355	16,71
pička	13,259	9,49
kurva	12,364	8,85
k vragu	3,356	2,40
odjebi	2,306	1,65
pas mater	1,529	1,09
isuse bože	458	0,33
mater ti	398	0,28
pička materina	152	0,11
bog mater	110	0,08

It is not surprising that the verb *jebati* proved to be the most popular taboo word used for swearing in Croatian since it is almost a synonym for swearing (Užarević 1999, 196.) However, it is quite interesting that *sranje* (*shit*) occurred more often in online discourse than *kurac* (*cock*), and that *govno* (*crap*) was more commonly used than *pička* (*cunt*). These findings indicate that a subtle change took place in the swearing practice of Croatians, caused either by time or the nature of computer-mediated communication. Another reason that might explain the findings is the difference between spoken and written swear word usage. For example, it may be that people use certain swear words more spontaneously in the spoken discourse, but opt for others, less offensive ones, in the written discourse since words uttered in such environment are longer lasting in the sense that instant messaging applications archive the conversations.

Be that as it may, the most common swearing vocabulary at present time is no longer based exclusively on the sexual sphere of taboos, as Užarević previously claimed. Even

though *sranje* is still connected to the “lower part” of the body, which supports his theory, it belongs to a scatological group of taboo language. This change does not necessarily mean that the semantic range of Croatian swearing has drastically expanded to scatological referents and disgusting objects, such as *sranje* and *govno*, since they have always been a part of cursing vocabulary. However, it does point to a change in their frequency, especially in online communication. That being the case, the following sections provide the analysis of online messaging through Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp that will focus on the pragmatic features of the three most popular swear words in Croatian online communication – *jebati* (to fuck), *sranje* (shit), and *kurac* (cock).

6. Analysis and discussion

6.1 Pragmatic analysis of *jebati*

The verb *jebati* (to fuck) is considered a type of hypernym because it functionally unites almost the entire semantic space of Croatian swearing. It is the fundamental curse from the category of sexual taboos. According to Pilch, most swearing utterances in Croatian⁹ are likely to contain the verb *jebati* accompanied by several objects and adverbials (25, 2011). Without a doubt, the most common swearing phrase containing the verb is *jebem ti mater*¹⁰, however, the object of the verb together with its adjunct (denoting a human trait, nationality, or intensifying the curse itself) can refer to anything depending on the speaker's creativity (ibid., 26), as in: *jebem ti lajfstajl blogere* (C5), *jebem ti jebeni parking* (C9), *jebem ti nevolju* (C10) or *jebem im krv krvavu dal da im jebem* (C10). This type of usage can cover a wide range of functions such as abusive, cathartic, emphatic or humorous swearing. At the same time, due to its popularity, the verb *jebati* and some of its most frequent objects merged over time into *jebemti*, *jebote* and *jebiga*, three individual and very popular swearing version of *jebati*, which often serve as various types of conversation fillers and are representative of cathartic swearing (ibid., 27). In the context of this corpus, the verb *jebati* was sent and received exactly 2166 times, making it the most popular of the three in the messaging corpus.

⁹ A swearing utterance in Croatian can be quite complex and composed of more than one taboo word, for instance in *jeboti bog isus mater*, four out of five words of the phrase are deemed as taboo language.

¹⁰ This analysis will include some idiomatic phrases since they came up quite often in the corpus, however, their figurative meaning, origin, and other characteristics will not be discussed. They will be analyzed in the same fashion as individual swear words, according to their pragmatic function in a conversation.

To begin with, let us analyze the pragmatic spectrum of the most popular swearing phrase containing the verb *jebati* – *jebem ti/mu/joj/im mater* – and all of its grammatical and syntactic variations.¹¹ Here are some examples of abusive swearing (according to Pinker's (2007), Wajnryb's (2005), and Trudgill and Andersson's (1990) classification) containing the phrase:

Example 1. (C8)

A: Kraljica još nije došla
 B: ček ti se zajebavaš
 C: di jeee
B: jebem ja njoj milu mater
 D: u krivom je

Example 2. (C7)

A: I to, hahah, njima se zgrade još nisu prestale njihati od jučer u 12
 A: H bedekovcini petarde hičeju **jeba im bog mater** kaj nam nije dosta stresa
 B: A i to je po meni nepristojno zbog tragedije u glini i petrinji...
 B: A svi su veliki rvatine
 C: Svakome bi uzela 100 evra

Example 3. (C10)

A: Look at her being married rich
 A: Just having to be pretty
 B: The bitch
 C: Money money money
D: Majku joj jebem

The three swearing acts are directed at a specific recipient or recipients, and from the context, it is easy to guess the reasons why they are being targeted. In *Examples 1* and *2*, the speaker is motivated by anger, while in *Example 3* the speaker is motivated by jealousy. What is more, in all three examples members of the group conversation are not abusively swearing at each other, but at outsiders, about whom they all agreed were in the wrong. If we were to consult Ljung's (2011) classification, *Examples 1, 2*, and *3* would primarily be categorized as ritual insults, since they “contain formulaic expressions connected to the ‘mother theme’” and are likely to “develop various abbreviated versions such as *Your mother* and *Your mother's*” (2011, 32), which is true for *jebem ti/mu/joj/im mater* and its shortened version *mater ti/mu/joj/im*. However, the problematic part considering the category of ritual insults is that they are by definition (and tradition of verbal dueling) “an all-male affair” (ibid., 118), and in each of the

¹¹ Unfortunately, the mentioned grammatical and syntactic, or even stylistic modifications to this phrase that naturally occur in informal language are the main reason I cannot provide the exact number of hits for it in the corpus, as I intend to do for the rest of the featured swear words.

provided examples, the speakers were female¹². In my mind, these instances of swearing seem to fit Ljung's category of swearing using an unfriendly suggestion, rather than the one connected to ritual insults, since the unfriendly suggestions are used to express animosity towards somebody and are often used in dialogue to indicate the speaker's reaction to what is said. Moreover, they are usually not real suggestions, even if their literal meanings may encourage such interpretation, and their content tends to be demeaning or involves implausible sexual acts (ibid., 33). Therefore, it seems that in the case of *jebem ti/mu/joj/im mater* two of Ljung's swearing categories overlap, while the other above-mentioned classifications see it as a simple case of abusive swearing, or as a cursing expletive, according to McEnery (2006), which is again marked as abusive.

Owing to the fact that the tone of the twelve analysed chats was mostly friendly and bright, and their main purpose was to make plans or comment on the shared experiences of the members, it was very difficult to find clear examples of abusive swearing using the phrase *jebem ti/mu/joj/im mater* in the corpus. Quite the opposite, it was easy to find examples where *jebem ti/mu/joj/im mater* was used to fulfill other functions.¹³ There were numerous examples of this phrase being employed in emphatic swearing (as in *Example 4* and 5), cathartic swearing (*Examples 7, 8, and 9*), and some examples with figurative extensions of its literal meaning (*Example 6*).

Example 4. (C10)

- A: šta stvarno nitko sa mnom ne će u kino?
 B: **jebemu mater** ljudi, odite s njom u kino ☹
 C: a ne mogu ☹
 A: osjećam se ko da kugu imam
 B: a ljubavi ne
 D: nemaš, samo obaveze ☹

Example 5. (C1)

- A: Hahahahha al da mi bar laska kaj sam ga tolko povrijedila 😊 trenutno mi je samo bed, pogotovo jer je cijela ta saga toliko grozna i neda mi se vise
 A: Sad bar vozim auto koji se sam upali kad se ugasi i nema rucnu
 B: pa mislim **jebemu mater** nitko nije dužan lojalnost instruktoru vožnje jbt
 B: ak ti ne valja frizerka promijeniš

¹² I do not intend to reveal the gender of the speakers for each of the examples. However, in these examples, it was relevant to state their gender.

¹³ The literal usage denoting a taboo referent was naturally also frequently used, but since they were pragmatically uninteresting I decided not to analyze them for any of the featured swear words.

Example 6. (C5)

A: naravno kao i svake godine imam tehnički problem i studomat me nemre i ne želi upisati
A: i naravno da sam otišla u referadu, a oni su dobili naredbu da nema više ručnog upisivanja
A: dok nisam napravila scenu i **jebala im mater** 😊
A: neš ti mene **majku ti jebem**
B: E volim te 😊
A: znači zadnji put kad sam se sama upisala je valjda bilo na 2. godini preddiplomskog

Example 7. (C5)

A: vidjela sam di je napisao da je 1250 kn sasvim ok kao studentski part time job. doslovno sam
blenula u to, **jebem ti mater**
A: još bolje mi je kad si ti to sad rekla za njega
B: ovo me sad fakat razjebalo
B: jebem ti boga isusa retardiranog. istu sekundu sam mu otišla na profil. i vidim da se razgovor već
razvezao popriličino. i vidim da su mu ljudi već napisali sve kaj ga ide. sve kaj je meni palo na pamet,
al on i dalje sere
B: nek si jebe mater
A: baš me zanima kako je on živio dok je studirao

Example 8. (C1)

A: **Jebem ti majku**, idem slagat ormar nakon xy mjeseci, složiti si robu za posao, sve jebene majice do
pupka ili super Mario na njima
B: ajme da pa ti moraš biti gospođa again

Example 9. (C9)

A: In better news, Rage Against the Machine is having a reunion tour. 2020. F**k yeah
<https://9gag.com/gag/a9RnRV0?ref=9g.wsa.mw>
A: To! **Mamu im jebem!**

Swearing motives in examples of emphatic swearing are pretty straightforward. In *Examples 4 and 5*, *jebemu mater* was used to attract attention or add significance to the statement in question. Cathartic swearing in *Example 7* provides relief for the feeling of disbelief, in *Example 8* for frustration, while in *Example 9* the same swear word is used to show off joy and excitement for the upcoming event. By contrast, in *Example 6* two variants of *jebem ti/mu/joj/im mater* were used to illustrate the animosity towards the target in two different ways. The first instance, in line three, is a great example of what McEnery (2006) calls a figurative extension of literal meaning, whereas the second instance in line four can be interpreted as either abusive swearing or emphatic swearing, depending on one's perception of the described situation. If we were to consult Ljung (2011) on how to appropriately interpret and classify this set of examples, we would be confronted with the same dilemma between unfriendly suggestions and ritual insults. The only possible solution would be to classify examples of cathartic swearing (7,8, and 9) as expletive interjections since Ljung bends his typology by

saying that any language construction can qualify as an expletive. More precisely, these utterances constitute what Ljung calls pragmatic expletive interjections because they meet its primary requirement, which is conveying the speaker's attitude (ibid., 83-87). This then leaves us with *Examples 4, 5, and 6*, out of which *Example 4* and *5* could be categorized as either pragmatic expletive interjections or, if we analyze them as slot fillers (which they are not since they are able to stand alone), as empathetic swear words, despite the fact that meaning of *jebemu mater* in the given sentences is not limited to emphasizing only the following noun, but rather the entire utterance. However, there are three alternative placements for the second instance of swearing in *Example 6* (*A: neš ti mene **majku ti jebem***), the first one being pragmatic expletive interjection, the second empathetic swearing (if we treat it as a slot filler), and in the third case, it could be interpreted as affirmative swearing, even though these usually occur as a reply to another person's statement. Another issue here is that although pragmatic expletive interjections seem to somewhat fit most of the discussed examples, this subcategory is defined as a feature of spoken language (ibid., 56), but it may be that in some cases instant messaging applications simulate the environment of face-to-face conversations and allow some features of spoken language to enter the textual discourse.

In reality, *Examples 4-9* further demonstrate how inadequate Ljung's cross-cultural typology becomes when trying to pragmatically analyze *jebem ti/mu/joj/im mater* used in a non-abusive manner because none of the mentioned categories fully fit the use of this swear word in its respective context. Of course, every individual swearing occurrence happens under different circumstances and each speaker has a specific goal in mind at the moment of utterance, but it would be very helpful to be able to linguistically classify the neutral version of a swear word prior to its interpretation in a conversational context.

The second swear word I chose to analyze that stems from the verb *jebati* is *jebote*, and it was sent 231 times altogether. *Jebote* is a shortened form of the verb *jebati* merged with its direct object *tebe/te*, and it could be, in some cases, followed by an indirect object or a subject as in *jebote pas* (C1) or *jebote led* (C2). Still, this analysis is not going to delve into possible collocations of swear words or their idiomatic meaning, since they require extensive research outside the limitations of this thesis, and as such could present for a separate paper.

This favorite Croatian filler has a similar range of usage as its sibling *jebem ti/mu/joj/im mater*. Besides being used to express strong feelings such as shock, surprise, or regret, *jebote* can also be utilized to bring attention to a certain utterance or a word.

Pragmatically speaking, this swear word could be divided into two broad categories – cathartic and emphatic swearing. Naturally, there is also the abusive category that many consider central. However, I was unable to find an instance of swearing in the corpus where *jebote* was unmistakably used with abusive intentions towards another person or an object. Consequently, such observation made me mindful of the fact that *jebote* is more frequently used with abusive connotations in spontaneous spoken discourse rather than in written online discourse, since the latter could never be as impulsive as the spoken language.

In the sense of swearing that involves a display of speaker's emotions, I managed to find examples of *jebote* expressing surprise (*Example 10*), sadness (*Example 11*), frustration (*Example 12*), compassion (*Example 13*), shock (*Example 14*), disbelief (*Example 15*), happiness (*Example 16*), and approval (*Example 17*) which were on occasions supported by emoji:

Example 10. (C5)

A: **Jebote** pa da, to je danas!
A: ja sam umislila da je sutra koncert hahhahah
B: Ne hahahahahha
A: Bome bi ti mene zvala di sam. A ja u pidžami i masne kose

Example 11. (C6)

A: Meni se niš neda, a rokovi su. :') ja bi van, pit. Nekaj.
A: **Jebote** ☹

Example 12. (C10)

A: Ste vidjeli rezultate ili?
B: Jok
C: **Jebote** život više

Example 13. (C2)

A: Kod susjeda curila voda dva mjeseca. Mokri nam zidovi i komplet hodnik.
B: A **Jebote** :/

Example 14. (C2)

A: *a photo of sunburns*
B: **JEBOTE!!** :O
C: FAKTOR 50 LIDL CIEN 30 KUNA

Example 15. (C5)

A: Nekog su pokupila vatrogasna kola, al je hitna došla i ok bi trebala bit
B: **Jebote**. Ne vjerujem. Se zna kak je došlo do toga?
B: Jadni ljudi.
A: Vjerojatno je netko ostavio nešto upaljeno u kuhinji.

Example 16. (C2)

A: *screenshot of an email*
B: Ajmeee, bravo!
C: Sto sam ti rekla ;) bravo!
D: Wooot najs **jebote**!!

Example 17. (C1)

A: *photo of a new haircut*
B: **Jebote**, ovo je brutalno!!!! Super ti stoji!
A: hvalaaaa

Essentially, the intent of the speaker here is to let others know how they feel about what is being discussed. Therefore, this kind of usage of *jebote* can be characterized as cathartic swearing (Wajnryb 2005, Pinker 2007) or in (too) simple terms as an expletive (Trudgill and Andersson 1990, McEnery 2006). That said, in *Example 13* the speaker uses *jebote* together with an emoji to let another chat member know that they understand the gravity of their situation. In other words, the speaker is swearing out of solidarity and expressing their sympathy. This brings us to the social dimension of swearing motivated by interpersonal reasons (with the aim of nourishing and maintaining personal connections), which is defined as social swearing according to Wajnryb's typology (2005, 176). It seems that once again categories of swearing are spilling into one another.

In line with Ljung's (2011) typology of swearing, *jebote* could generally be considered a slot filler, which is true in some cases, especially when swearing is auxiliary (1990), i.e. when it serves a social function, or when it is providing emphasis for a following or preceding statement or a phrase (*Example 10, Example 12, and Example 16*). On the other hand, in *Example 11, 13, 14, 15, and 17*, *jebote* should be considered an expletive interjection, because these instances reflect the speaker's reactions to certain situations (2011, 83). I would also argue that they should be categorized as pragmatic expletive interjections (that reflect the speaker's attitude), but then again, what makes us so certain that the swearing in *Example 14* is not an automatic reactive expletive interjection? Therefore, even though the complete archived history of these conversations is available for analysis, in some cases it is impossible to construe the speaker's intended meaning from the textual record of a conversation.

The second broad pragmatic category involving *jebote* that was previously mentioned was emphatic swearing, which is a term used by Pinker (2007), McEnery (2006), and Ljung

(2011). *Jebote* was often used to simply emphasize utterances. Sometimes it was used to express the importance of the expression (*Example 18, 20*) or to make it sound like the speaker truly meant what they said (*Example 19*), or to make their attitude seem stronger to persuade the listener (*Example 21*). Other times *jebote* was used out of habit just to fill a pause in the conversation (*Example 23*), or a casual instance of swearing which fit well in the social context of the conversation (*Example 22*). In any case, *jebote* was used in these instances to somehow elevate and support what was being said. Consequently, Ljung would classify such usage as emphatic swearing using slot fillers, or, depending on the case, as slot fillers functioning as modal adverbial/noun support, while Wajnryb (2005) might place focus on social aspects of such usage which are characteristic of building and maintaining in-group identity (176). Take a look at the examples:

Example 18. (C11)

A: **Jebote** ovaj potres
A: usro sam se
B: i ja ajme pa sto nisu rekli da nakon misec dana vise nema straha?

Example 19. (C5)

A: znači nazvali su me neki norvežani, **jebote** kak su ti ljudi simpatici i dragi <3 pa ja nemrem
B: a daaaaaaaaj
B a ne naše sirovine

Example 20. (C6)

A: Ne zelim misliti na seks dok sam u karanteni
B: I second that
A: Tu **jebote** moram u celibate biti
B: Meni govoris
B: Pet mjeseci u poljskoj i sad još ovo

Example 21. (C6)

A: Bum dosla bez sminke
B: No **jebote** smnika
B: Ko da ima nekog bitnog tu

Example 22. (C5)

A: Ne znam jesam ikad fangirl-ala oko nekog koliko oko njega u srednjoj
B: A jbg. Lik je bio jako depresivan i još je jučer bio Cornellov rođendan. ./ a pjevao mu je na spovodu. Tužno, al za razumjet.
B: **Jebote**, svi smo bar malo slušali linkin park. Ne znam tko nije.

Example 23. (C11)

A: *sent voice message*
A: Jel ok? ☺

A: uvijek kad krećem mislim si **jebote** šta da napišem

I would also like to note that in some of the mentioned situations, both emphatic and cathartic, *jebote* could be easily replaced by another word, *čovječe*, which is not a swear word at all, and if that was the case the meaning/intent behind some of those statements would remain the same. This implies possible synonymy between swear words and other words not containing taboo and brings us to Ljung's category of the replacive swearing and its main feature, which is replacing taboo words with an almost infinite number of ordinary non-taboo words, as is the case here (35). Such possibility makes me wonder what does that mean in terms of swearing? Could it be that swearwords which can be substituted with other words are not as vulgar or as severe as the others, and therefore should not be treated equally? It is up to scholars to do more research and possibly interview speakers about their opinions on it in order to shed light on this matter.

Individual cases of *jebemti* and *jebiga* are not going to be analyzed at this time because I believe their usage corresponds to the functions which were examined with *jebote* to a great degree, and due to the limitations of this paper, it is better to cover as much ground as possible without going into details of one specific curse word. However, to finish the discussion on *jebati*, we will have a look at the adjective *jeben/a/o/i* (*fucking*), which stems from the verb *jebati*, because I noticed that this swear word displayed an unusually large number of hits in the corpus. To be exact, it was used 997 times, which accounts for 46% of the total number of tokens for the verb *jebati*.

Generally speaking, the adjective *jeben/a/o/i* has two primary pragmatic functions, the first one being a slot filler performing the task of the adjective of dislike, and the second one classifies as replacive swearing (Ljung 2011). Here are some examples of *jeben/a/o/i* functioning as an adjective of dislike:

Example 24. (C1)

A: Ja mogu, al nemrem predugo i divlje. Javili mi jučer iz autoškole da imam sljedeći tjedan **jebenu** prvu pomoc, a i jedino kad stignem uciti su subota i nedjelja.

B: Oke, oke. Samo lagano!

Example 25. (C4)

A: Ajme uzasuzasuzas

A: 2020 **jebena**

A: Daj prodi kroz stan malo i pregledaj stvari i zidove

Example 26: (C1)

A: Mjerila prije pol sata 37,6, mjerim prije 10 min, 38

A: A osjećam se ko da nemam niš

A: Znači koji **jebeni** kurac

B: hjaaj, dej zovi onaj 113

B: ili doktora odmah da ti daju kam da ideš

Example 27. (C3)

A: Poanta je da je ON trebao nama PRIJE MJESEC DANA REĆI

A: Da nemre napraviti jingle od ovog sto smo poslali

A: A ne da mi to kaze prosli tjedan

A: I naravno da smo mi to snimile tek jučer

A: Jer nisam JA MOGLA SNIMIT SVE PA DA BUDE SAMO MOJ **JEBENI** GLAS U TRI
EMISIJE

Example 28. (C2)

A: Ono jedem piletinu, proteinske shejkove, i **jebeno** povrće

B: jebiga, nemres očekivati nakon toliko funkcioniranja pod kemijom da sve bude normalno

Example 29: (C2)

A: Ma u krivu da, ovisi o strukturi recenice, nista hvala na **jebenom** pitanju

Example 30. (C10)

A: koji će im kurac toliki **jebeni** papiri meni to nije jasno

B: Nikome nije jasno

Example 31. (C10)

A: Ljudi zna li ko od vas kako nama funkcioniraju promocije

A: Imamo li dvije

B: Mislim da je jedna zajednička but idk

A: Kako može bit zajednička

B: Idk

A: **Jebeni** faks

B: Im pretty much guesstimating my entire academic career so

Even though in all of the examples above *jeben/a/o/i* is modifying a noun and as such cannot be anything else but adjective of dislike, I would argue that in each of the statements the swear word displays cathartic and emphatic qualities as well. For instance, in *Example 30* and *31* the speakers are venting their negative feeling towards excessively complicated administrative procedures, whereas in *Example 27* *jebeni* is used to stress the importance of host and vocal diversity for the radio programme.

Similarly, in *Example 32* the speaker seems fairly disturbed by their neighbours and is complaining about the situation, however *jeben/a/o/i* is here in the role of modal adverbial since it is premodifying a verb:

Example 32. (C10)

A: JA ĆU **JEBENO** POPIZDIT S KIM JA ŽIVIM I JOŠ JE PONOĆ I SPAVA MI SE I ONDA
OVAKVE STVARI MORAM SLUŠAT

B: deep breaths babe

B: što je bilo?

Whereas the first set of examples using the adjective *jeben/a/o/i* denoted negative sentiments, in the following one exclusively positive connotations (such as approval, joy, and happiness) were attached to the same curse word:

Example 33. (C1)

A: odlučila se za Rovinj

A: to je kad si pametna i yolo solo, pa te ništa ne ograničava

B: Istra je fakat **jebena**. Boli ju kurac. Ima pravo

Example 34. (C1)

A: Spavala sam ko beba znajući da ne moram nazad

B: Pretpostavljam da je to tak **jeben** osjećaj

A: stvarno da

Example 35. (C2)

A: Didaktika 3!

B: **Jebeno** stara!

Example 36. (C2)

A: 5 IZ SUSTAVNE hvala mačke na potpori haha

B: Wooooaaaah **jebeno!**

C: BRAVO!

Example 37. (C11)

A: što više slušam špicu to mi je bolja

A: ko vino

A: ivanov glas je državno blago

A: **jebeno**

Example 38. (C11)

A: jel mozemo ga na instagram posherat?

B: Ofskroz

A: **jebeno**

B: Aha ne znam jel može gif

B: Ček da vidim

B: Može se 😊

A: **jebeno**

Example 39. (C5)

A: pa metal days mi obično ima dosta nezanimljiv lajnap, tak da me to za početak to već ne privlači 😊
punk rock holiday izgleda **jebeno**, al nova rock mi je 😊😊 ove godine je bil **jeben** 😊 al jbg,
siromašna sam bila

A: nadam se da bum druge godine manje hahaha dogovoreno 😊

Example 40. (C1)

A: *a photo of a person trying on clothes*

B: Ovo ti tak **jebeno** stoji! Uzmi! Obavezno!

If we were to substitute *jebeno* in *Example 40.* with *krasno*, *lijepo*, *predivno*, *genijalno*, *nevjerojatno*, *fantastično*, or any similar flattering adjective, the meaning of the utterance would remain unchanged. Therefore, *jeben* and *jebeno* in this context passed the ultimate test for replacive swearing. As I already mentioned, replacive swearing is a separate category in Ljung's (2011) typology and is explained as the usage of taboo words instead of the almost infinite number of ordinary non-taboo words. Additionally, taboo words in replacive swearing are given new literal meanings interpreted in terms of the linguistic and situational settings in which they are used. In this specific case, the adjective *jeben/a/o/i* (*fucking*) can be easily replaced by adjectives such as *izvrsno* (*excellent*), *odlično* (*great*), *genijalno* (*brilliant*), *super* (*awesome*), or a noun *zakon*, functioning as an adjective¹⁴, without sounding unnatural or losing any of its original meaning.¹⁵

Therefore, *jeben/a/o/i* can be employed to carry both positive and negative implications depending on the context and mutual understanding among the group. As far as classification is concerned, in the examples conveying negative meaning *jeben/a/o/i* functioned as adjectives of dislike or modal adverbials, depending on the word class they premodified, while in sentences with positive connotations the swear word fit the category of replacive swearing. In spite of that, I cannot help but wonder if it is possible for a swear word to simultaneously be representative of replacive swearing and cathartic swearing, and function as pragmatic expletive interjection as well? Or why adjectives of dislike or modal adverbials could not also be somehow rated based on the speaker's level of subjectivity or their intent?

6.2 Pragmatic analysis of *sranje*

Sranje (*shit*) proved as the second most popular swear word in *hrWaC*, Croatian web corpus. Yet, in the corpus of this research *sranje* was used only 90 times in total. This result

¹⁴ A very popular Croatian colloquialism that incorporates the meaning of all the substitute adjectives.

¹⁵ I also believe that this exact principle could be applied to the previously discussed examples of cathartic swearing with *jebote*, only in that case *jebote* could be replaced by words such as *ajme* or *čovječe*.

could reflect the nature of the corpus. As I already mentioned, texts in *hrWaC* are comprised of various types of online discourse, from articles, forum posts, blog comments, and even product reviews, while private chat groups might be focused on completely different topics and resemble spoken language, which is somewhat different from the public Internet posts. The advantage of such a small number of hits for *sranje* is that allows detailed analysis and enables us to classify all types of its usage.

Example 41. (C8)

A: E fkt dodji ranije ak nemas kartu
A: Ili online mos uzet
A: Ja sam odustala od danasnje kupnje
B: Ma ne radi mi int bankarstvo
A: Ma ne ides u koprivnicu
B: Tj nis ne mogu kupovat prek int
B: Totalno **sranje**
B: Jer su debili

Example 42. (C2)

A: Petrova je u kurcu
A: to je **sranje**
B: baš gledam
A: I dijete je umrlo
A: 15 god
B: a jebote
B: u bolnici baš?

Example 43. (C6)

A: Kaj srcani ili?
A: Bas mi je zal 😊
B: Mozdani ili srcani
B: Tak neke
A: Da, nema kaj drugo biti
A: Bas **sranje**

Example 44. (C8)

A: Jeste upuceni u ovaj shitshow sa umjetnicima
B: Ej ne da je shitshow nego **sranje** stoljeca
B: Na stranicama ministarstva objavili popis onih koji su dobili potpore + njihove oibe, adrese, prihode
B: Medjutim, osim što im je netko mogao ukrasti identitet (da, ziher ukrasti ću identitet nekom umjetniku i dic kredit) još su 2 problema

Example 45. (C6)

A: A kaj ti nis od lijekova ne pomaze?
B: imam morsku vodu u spreju, kortikosterodini sprej i antihistaminik i ništa. rokam ketonale za glavu
B: i dalje ništa.
A: **Sranje** bogte
A: Nemoj se na bicu vozit dok ti ne prejde malo

Example 46. (C1)

- A: Koje **sranje**
A: Sjednem u auto i krenem vec vozit, a kad ono instructor debil “e, hehehe, mozda ti imam coronu.”
B: *facepalm*
C: OMG
C: KOJI KURAC
D: E jebemu miša

In the examples above (41- 46) swear word *sranje* displayed cathartic qualities (Wajnryb 2005, Pinker 2007). In some sentences, it was used to express anger or resentment and release frustration (*Example 41, 44, and 46*), while in others it displayed compassion (*Example 42, 43, and 45*). It is uncertain whether cathartic swearing could also be classified as social in terms of Wajnryb’s typology (2005). However, I will argue that in *Examples 42, 43, and 45*, the social component as a part of the swearing incentive is undeniably present. Essentially, the speakers are swearing to express their feelings and attitudes, but at the same time their intention is to show that they understand somebody else’s position and agree with the rest of the members in the conversation. In this case, Ljung’s complex and at times ambiguous typology of swearing proved very suitable because all of the examples above could be recognized as stand-alones and put into the category of pragmatic expletive interjections, since the same interjection *sranje* on different occasions communicates different feelings (2011, 86).

I was unable to find any instances of abusive swearing in the chosen corpus involving *sranje*, which could be attributed to the overall benevolent nature of the casual conversations among friends and colleagues. But I did find that *sranje* was most abundantly used in the form of the so-called replacive swearing (Ljung 2011), in contexts where it could have easily been replaced by another, non-vulgar word. In the examples below, instead of *sranje*, words such as *stvar* (*a thing*), *glupost* (*nonsense*), *problem* (*a problem*), or many others could have been chosen by the speakers. However, by selecting *sranje* speakers most likely had meant to indicate their attitude (without using a separate clause and going into details) towards the subject matter.

Example 47. (C4)

- A: Nemrem ga prodat po cijeni koju zaslužuje, a hocu ono **sranje** od hladnjaka u smecu
A: A lepi je ormar

Example 48. (C1)

- A: jebeš Xanax, veće **sranje** nastane s krivim korištenjem antibiotika
A: to je baš jako ozbiljno

Example 49. (C4)

A: Nisam znala da je to **sranje** tak skupo
B: Opaaaa, fensi ;)
B: Koliko para?
A: 750
B: Uh, dosta

Example 50. (C12)

A: ocemo pitat sefa da sastancimo u petak da se dogovorimo sto s parama od fonda i koliko cemo bit placeni za radionice
B: ja sam za, iako mi stvarno ne treba još jedno **sranje** u petak
B: al sprči me, svijete

Example 51. (C2)

A: Ides na ispravak
A: Poglej si pitanja, ponavljaju se
B: Fala
B: Još nekaj
B: Zbilja su pitanja ovakva **sranja**?
B: *sent a photo*

Example 52. (C5)

A: možda je život **sranje**, al danas sam platila jednu čokoladicu, a iz automata su ispale dvije.
B: Hahaha jebeno! 😊
A: male stvari 😊

Example 53. (C1)

A: Moja mama je radila kremu od svinjske mast i nevena
B: a kaj kupuješ na Notinu?
C: hahahahaha najvaznije pitanje
B: Ma bjezi, ne cu to **sranje** stavljat na usne, jos da lizem omnomnomnom
B: Uzela sam si umjetne trepke i eos labello od meda

Example 54. (C12)

A: Zasto ljudi iz knjiznice upravo polazu ono **sranje** o sigurnosti na radu a mi ne
B: jel poslana uopće neka obavijest o tome ili kaj

Example 55. (C8)

A: ima li netko od vas ili zna nekog tko ima masku konja? Ono **sranje** koje je bilo popularno prije par godina lol
B: Njeeeeeeeemham
C: Jesi ti boomer danas 😊
D: Danas lol
D: Dad jokes 💕
B: Burn 😊

Example 56. (C9)

A: Btw savjetujem da sad kupite na akciji dimljene svinjske lopatice/šunke i slicna **sranja** šta je ostalo od uskrsa, pa zamrznut za maneštre... 0.54 kg 14 kuna 😊

Trudgill and Andersson (1990) would most likely identify such utterances involving *sranje* as examples of auxiliary swearing, also known as ‘lazy swearing’ (ibid., 37). This terminology refers to the kind of swearing that represents any kind of vocabulary for which the speaker has less preference, and it is usually employed when people have no other words at their disposal or are lazy to think of one. In other words, these examples of swearing could be socially motivated (the intent of the speaker might be to appear ‘cool’), but in most cases it is symptomatic of a poor vocabulary.

Almost all swearing instances involving *sranje* fall into one of the two previously analyzed groups of swearing (replacive or cathartic), except for *Example 57*, which perfectly fits into McEnery’s (2006) category in which taboo language is employed as a figurative extension of literal meaning. In this specific example, *sranje* refers to gossip or criticism towards a person that, figuratively speaking, can be interpreted as taking a shit on someone. Still, according to Ljung (2011), this would probably qualify as yet another case of replacive swearing, but that does not mean that it can automatically meet the requirements of auxiliary swearing. That is so because, in *Example 57*, by saying *sranje* instead of *criticism* or *gossip*, emphasis is added to the statement so as to illustrate just how heavy criticism could potentially be or how immoral it is to talk about your friend behind their back. I believe this kind of meaning is more frequently conveyed in Croatian by the verb *sрати* (*to shit*), rather than a verbal noun, as it is here.

Example 57. (C5)

A: Bilo je dobro, al awkward na trenutke. Povremeno me i znatizeljno upitao nesto, al bi me njegova zena prekinula total random s nekim pricama. I tak odu moji monolozi u kurac.
Al kaze on da se nada da cemo ponovit, i to za manje od mjesec dana 😊 mozda bu eto drugi put bolje. Valjda mu Bro Code ne dopusta neko pretjerano **sranje** po frendu. Al je rekao, da sa svog objektivnog stajalista i sam vidi kolko je ovo sve ispalo "lose" i "krivo"

The ways in which people used *sranje* seem to be straightforward and the motivations behind it very easily identifiable, even though there were some dilemmas in their categorization resembling the ones that were previously encountered. From the pragmatic perspective, there were no abusive or hostile swearing statements involving *sranje*, and the swear word was mostly used as a replacement for some other common nouns or as an expletive with a cathartic function. The latter was used only when speakers wanted to communicate negative sentiments, for instance, anger, frustration, or resentment, while the majority of positive emotions such as surprise, joy, or excitement were not manifested through this swear word. Interestingly, if we

look at it from the perspective of social swearing as defined by Wajnryb (2005), it is possible to recognize that some of the cases of swearing express sympathy for other group members or those whose circumstances were being discussed.

6.3 Pragmatic analysis of *kurac*

This lexeme was used 500 times in total across 12 online conversations, meaning that in the context of instant messaging via WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, *kurac*, which was the third most commonly used swear word in *hrWaC*, proved to be more popular than *sranje*, which ranked second in *hrWaC*. It is no secret that Croatians tend to use it generously, especially in spoken language. The reason behind such frequent usage of *kurac* lies in the semantic versatility that enables this swear word to stand for almost anything animate or inanimate. Another factor contributing to its popularity could be that the sexual taboo domain in Croatian is still prevalently based on the male perception of sexual acts, i.e. Croatian has a phallocentric swearing system (Užarević 1999, 189), and *kurac* is, logically, its central swear word. Consequently, the spectrum of usage of this swear word could potentially be the widest of the three. Moreover, the analysis of swearing featuring *kurac* will also include some idiomatic phrases (such as *koji kurac*, *pun kurac*, *puši kurac*, and *nabijem na kurac*) because they account for a large portion of recorded swearing. Those instances will be analyzed in the same manner as the rest of the examples, according to their pragmatic function in online conversation, while their figurative meaning and additional properties will not be discussed in detail because the analysis of swearing phrases with formulaic meaning introduces a separate field of linguistic research into swearing.

To begin with, there was little abusive swearing in the corpus with *kurac*, and the few examples that were found targeted people who were not members of the conversations, but were being discussed in group chats. All instances of such abusive swearing should be classified as unfriendly suggestions since their function was to insult others and openly show dislike for them by suggesting implausible acts referring to the sexual taboo (2011,33). In *Example 58* the insult was delivered using the phrase *puši kurac* (*suck dick*), in *Example 59* the insult was shortened from the longer phrase *idi u kurac* to just *u kurac*, while in *Example 60* *nabijem na ih na kurac* was used. All three phrases from the examples below are very common phraseological units in Croatian which rarely carry literal meaning and most of the time stand for *go fuck yourself*.

Example 58. (C10)

A: *photo*
A: jebeš ti njega
A: neka puši **kurac**
B: oh <3

Example 59. (C10)

A: u **kurac** i ona i ta jebena knjiga više
B: pusti ju vidiš da žena ima životne krize, možda nalazi inspiraciju u self-help literaturi
C: She useless
B: she fine

Example 60. (C8)

A: Sve to stoji, ali nabijem na **kurac** te petty ljude koji se javljaju
A: Necu se svadjat, al me zanima ko je obriso tj zasto je obriso
A: Da mu mogu lijepo odgovorit
B: Nezz o čem se radi, fakat

Still, I cannot help but wonder if these straightforward examples of idiomatic swearing (McEnery 2006, Pinker 2007) could also be marked as cathartic and emphatic swearing. After all, *puši kurac* and *idi u kurac* placed in this context were meant to simultaneously insult somebody, offer the speaker catharsis, attract the attention of the other members of the conversation, and at the same time continue setting the informal character of the conversation. This line of thinking, once again, brings into question the viability of the set theoretical framework I have been discussing throughout the analysis.

A more productive category of swearing was that of cathartic swearing (Wajnryb 2005, Pinker 2007) using the swear word *kurac*. The following examples illustrate that *kurac* can function as a swear word that offers catharsis for different types of emotions such as frustration (*Examples 64 and 66*), regret (*Example 63*), compassion (*Examples 61 and 62*), and maybe even sadness or shock (*Examples 65 and 67*).

Example 61. (C1)

A: Kaj je i tebe uhvatilo? :O il si bila samo u kontaktu?
B: Ma samo kontakt, agent na poslu dobio simptome i odmah sljedeci dan dobio nalaze da je pozitivan
A: A u **kurac**. Nadam se da vas nije bilo puno u uredu

Example 62. (C1)

A: nisam dobila posao.
B: ☹ **kurac**, a zakaj?
C: nijanse
D: bezveze

Example 63. (C1)

A: Cure moje, dosla mi je narudzba iz Manga jucer
A: *photo*
A: Znaci predobra je

B: OMG OMG ☹️☹️☹️☹️
 C: preprepreeejebena je
 A: joss am i ovu narucila
 A: *photo*
 C: Yaaaaas!
 A: obukla sam ih odmah jucer
 A: I pala mi celjust na pod
 B: daj fotke!!!
 A: Aaa **kurac**
 A: Nisam se slikala

Example 64. (C2)

A: Može u srijedu?
 B: Ne mogu srijedu
 C: E moze srijeda
 C: **Kurac!**

Example 65. (C1)

A: Momku je jučer baka umrla pa nisam vise sigurna jel bumo isli ili ne ☹️
 A: U strci/zbrci sam vam skroz zaboravila javit
 B: Uffff ☹️
 C: A u **kurac**. Moja sucut ☹️

Example 66. (C5)

A: U **kurac**. I Jefree Star je stigao u Njemački douglas. Srećom pa smo siromašne

Example 67. (C5)

A: Žene, vinnie paul umro
 B: U **kurac**
 C: ☹️ vidim! Krcat mi newsfeed
 Baš ne zanima od čega
 Možda srce? Bio je nešto deblji

Another extremely popular phrase containing swear word *kurac* is *koji kurac* that translates as *what the fuck*. Similarly, this phrase that would at first also be classified as idiomatic swearing, was primarily used fo fulfill cathartic purposes of describing the feelings of shock, surprise and disbelief as *Examples 68, 68, 69, and 71* show.

Example 68. (C2)

A: Kod mene je zastoj prometa, tramovi ne voze
 A: Kao doći će bus
 A: Aj javim ti ak ulovim išta kaj se kreće
 B: Jebiga...ja sam sad sjela u 3
 B: hahaha
 B: Vidimo se do pol 10
 C: Koji **kurac**?
 C: pala je kisa, a ne sekire

Example 69. (C8)

A: U centru ispumpavaju vodu iz zgrada
A: Užas
A: Nema kraja
B: Koji mrtvi **kurac** jebote
B: Ova 2020
B: Drzte se ekipa

Example 70. (C6)

A: Issss koji **kurac**
A: Predivne su kutije
A: Kak to dela uopce????
A: Preeeeedobroooooo

Example 71. (C11)

A: <https://reci.hr/strast/erotske-price/erotska-prica-kad-zavolis-svoju-zenu/>
A: koji **kurac** sam ja upravo procitao

According to Ljung (2011), the vulgar outbursts from the two previous sets of examples belong to the category of stand-alones and are clear examples of expletive interjections. Expletive interjections are defined as words, phrases, or clauses that are produced spontaneously to express emotion. Due to it, they are nonpropositional and usually reflexive (ibid., 83), meaning that they reflect the speaker's condition and do not address other people (Wajnryb, 2005). However, whether they are reactive (strictly outburst provoked by an outside stimulus without additional meaning) or pragmatic expletive interjections (serving different types of conversational functions apart from the initial spontaneous reaction, involving additional meaning) is open to debate.

There were also some examples in which *kurac* was used to emphasize certain statements or claims, but they were not nearly as numerous as those expressing catharsis. Emphasis was always expressed with a set phrase *pun kurac* (*shitload*) or a comparison *ko kurac* (*like a penis*) and never with the individual swear word. *Pun kurac* means *many* or *lots of something*, but the statement could easily function without adding *kurac* to *puno*, however by adding it, emphasis is put on the amount of whatever the noun to which it refers is representing. The same applies to *ko kurac*, because the statements could again function without it, but with it, their meaning comes across as stronger. For instance:

Example 72. (C5)

A: Imam **pun kurac** posla s diplomskim ovaj vikend

Example 73. (C5)

A: a sam evo malo počela učiti, al strah me previše o tome da ne preplašim i ne otjeram to malo volje



B: Hahahaha je. Ko plaha srna se došulja

B: Ne znam kak nam je to prije uspjevalo jebote
A: Pa sad se školujemo već 18 godina pa pretpostavljam da nam je već
pun kurac učenja 😊

Example 74. (C8)

A: znas kaj, imamo na popisu pun **kurac** previse ljudi da jedna osoba sve to dogovara
B: Gle svi cemo
A: E pa to sam isla pisat, jel moze sudjelovat tko zeli, a da jedan bude kao odgovoran?

Example 75. (C5)

A: bome ni ja 😊 i ja imam volje, pun **kurac**. al nemam vremena i energije.
B: ja ne ću doma, i opće mi se ne da.
A: ovaj tjedan sam svaki dan na jobu. nema šanse

Example 76. (C6)

A: Super su mi svi ti ljudi.
A: ALI GLUPI KO **KURAC**.
A: '99 generacija.

Example 77. (C7)

A: dakle ovo je objektivno
A: moje mišljenje: 1. talijani, 2. ukrajina, 3. srbija, 4. rusija, 5. nizozemska
A: vidi se da imam krizu identiteta. 😊😊
A: i naravno, belgija mi je super.
A: ali samo da ova jebena francuska ne pobijedi
dosadna je ko **kurac**

In *Examples 72-77*, phrases involving *kurac* are used to modify either nouns or adjectives, therefore, in line with Ljung's (2011) theoretical framework, they should be viewed as either noun support or adjectival intensifiers. In any case, even though *Examples 72-77* qualify as emphatic use of swearwords, I will still argue that there would be no need for emphasis if the speakers were indifferent to what they were expressing. So, in my opinion, emphatic swearing is in practice inseparable from the cathartic function of swearing.

The most prominent category of swearing with *kurac* was definitely replacive swearing. As mentioned before, replacive swearing is defined as swearing in which "taboo words may replace an almost infinite number of ordinary non-taboo nouns and verbs which are given new literal meanings interpreted in terms of the linguistic and situational settings in which they are used." Ljung adds that "the meanings established in replacive swearing are not literal ones associated once and for all with certain words, but represent the listener's interpretation of the words involved, words which in another context may be assigned quite different meanings." (Ljung 2011, 35) This definition accurately describes how *kurac* is used in Croatian regardless of the speaker's dialect (Pavličić 2013). Let us take a look at some of the examples:

Example 78. (C1)

A: Jel zna netko od vas neki normalni frizerski salon kaj radi nedjeljama il nekog frizera kaj ide doma k tebi po dogovoru? Imamo svadbu uskoro koja je u jebenu nedjelju
B: nedjeljama ti rade ovi u šoping centrima
C: hvala na info, nisam ni ja to znala.
A: Vidla sam da, al nekak se bojim da bum tam nafrizirana ko neka baba.
B: jednom davno mi je trebalo
B: ma koliko se može feniranje sjebat
A: Neću u principu niš komplicirano. Neki vintage Brigitte Bardot messy half up half down **kurac**.

Example 79. (C1)

A: Zbogom zaful kupaci kostimi
B: Jep
B: Asos jedino ostaje
C: sva sreća izliječila sam se od potreba za nerazumnom kupovinom, al opet
B: I tako neke firme iz EU
B: Hahahha
A: Lako je opet zarazit se
A: Uvijek nam neki **kurac** treba

Example 80. (C10)

A: pa ne izmišljam ovdje vlastiti jezik
A: na četvrtoj sam godini neki **kurac** engleskog i znam
B: Ne znaš
C: what is word

Example 81. (C8)

A: Ma mene sam jebe sta ce oni imat u programu? Ak je to drive in kino onda je to isti **kurac** ko sva ostala drive in kina, ak nije, neka stave prograaam
B: da, ne znam
B: mogu se raspitat pa javim što su planirali i jel im išta potvrđeno al ono i drive in kino bi bio lijepi spas

Example 82. (C1)

A: Aaa gledam sve vise ove usporedbe i koje su jeftinije verzije tih skupljih pudera da uopce nema smisla trosit pare...ove zenke na yt-u su sve! Svaki **kurac** su isprobale 😊

Example 83. (C2)

A: Ja sam danas dosla na jedno predavanje jedina, prefoesor ima vise od 80 let sigurno, čital mi je neki **kurac** na osmanskome
A: Isuse sad kad se sjetim

In the examples above, the noun *kurac* can be replaced by a number of non-taboo nouns and pronouns such as *frizura* (hairstyle), *odjevni predmet* (an item of clothing), *nešto* (something), *stvar* (a thing), *kozmetički proizvod* (a cosmetic product), *tekst* (a text), etc. Depending on the context of the conversation (education, beauty, culture, shopping), *kurac* can carry a variety of meaning. In fact, I believe that the number of replacive swearing nouns for *kurac* is potentially

limitless. As I already argued, replaceive swearing, even though it may come spontaneously to native speakers lacking proper vocabulary, can also be socially motivated. In that case, we should also attribute replaceive swearing with some of the features of the auxiliary swearing according to Trudgill and Andersson (1990). Despite the fact that examples from the author's corpus of instant messaging conversations do not necessarily meet all the requirements for this kind of swearing, some of the selected examples indicate that replaceive swearing can carry features of cathartic and emphatic swearing as in *Example 80.* and *Example 81.*

Lastly, the most curious category of swearing involving *kurac* is its function of negating clauses. In other words, a noun denoting *penis* can, syntactically speaking, take the role of a negative particle and negate the verb to which it refers. This kind of usage was also recognized and confirmed by Croatian linguistics (Badurina and Palašić 2020, 100), and there are examples to prove it:

Example 84. (C1)

A: oćemo na sljeme jedan dan?
 B: ma oću **kurac**, pingivni žicaju za antifriz
 A: hahaha
 B: pitaj me kad temperature pređe 20 opet

Example 85. (C12)

A: Kaze da smo mu isprintali isti ugovor ko i prosli misec tj s istim brojem
 A: Sta je nemogućeeeeeee
 B: Jesmo **kurac**
 C: Kurac smo

Example 86. (C12)

A: Kaze da mu damo zapisnik
 B: Ma dat cu mu **kurac**, neka pocne vodit dnevnik i zapisivat sta je kome rekao
 C: Btw, Imamo li zapisnik sa tog sastanka?
 C: Ako nemamo, ocemo ga izmisliti?
 B: Ne, ali svi smo bili tamo
 C: Super. Napisimo zapisnik.

Example 87. (C6)

A: A di se bumo onda na kraju nasle? ☺
 B: A bbf?
 A: E ima kakva svirka danas tam? Jer onda se **kurca** cuje i prevelke su guzve
 B: Ma najbolje krivi i amen

Native speakers seem to be aware of this kind of usage since a discussion about it took place in one of the twelve conversations.

Example 88. (C5)

A: Kad ti studij dođe na tu razinu da smiješ psovati pred profesorom.

A: Jer istražuješ vulgarizme, a ona traži, citiram, "najmasnije"

A: Pa jebotebog 😊

B: Osjećam da bi toliko toga mгла pridonijeti tom kolegiju 😊

A: ♥ eto!

A: Sad sam naučila da je "**kurac**" negacijska čestica 😊

B: Genitalno-koitalni vulgarizmi

In spite of the fact that Ljung mentions that, for replaceive swearing, it is necessary for a taboo word to be replaced by a non-taboo word of the same word class, and that is not the case here, I still believe the provided swearing function of *kurac* falls under the category of replaceive swearing, which makes *kurac* the only swear word in Croatian swearing system that can change word classes in replaceive swearing.¹⁶ The function of a noun as a negative particle could be connected to the overall unfavorable and impolite connotations this curse carries, so its presence in a linguistic environment could as a result apply to the entire clause and the main verb. In any case, the choice between the standard negative particle and taboo word *kurac* depends on the individual speaker and the context of utterance; nevertheless, negating a clause with a swear word would be considered a marked usage. In *Examples 84 – 87* this usage seems to be motivated by the speaker's negative emotions towards the proposition from the previous statements and as such should be considered cathartic as well as emphatic. In addition, there is a possibility of viewing these examples from another perspective, and that is the perspective of contradiction (Ljung 2011). Upon closer examination, each of the provided examples is a reply to a question or an observation, and a contradictory one showing blatant disagreement with what was said or proposed. Such contradiction is often referred to as emphatic denial and is common in other languages, as in *the hell it is* (ibid., 105). In English and other languages, emphatic denial is expressed by taboo words from the category of scatological referents. However, in Russian, this function is performed by "dick used as negation" (ibid., 107) which confirms this classification could be applied to Croatian since both Russian and Croatian belong to the Slavic group of languages.

6.4. Discussion

Before I conclude this paper, it is important to address some of the issues concerning the analysis. The first issue was that of technical nature. Unfortunately, it is impossible to

¹⁶ However, Ljung categorized similar examples in Russian language as emphatic denials which fit under the category of oaths (2011,106).

download archived conversations from Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp in a format that allows easy search and compilation of the messages without encryption. In case you extract them in some other format without their HTML code they are not searchable. Due to this, I was unable to determine the exact frequency of cursing in percentages for each swear word, since parts of the code also counted as words, and in that case the true frequency of cursing in conversations becomes distorted by words that are not otherwise part of the conversation, but lines of the code, time stamps, participant's names, etc. Therefore, I only included the number of hits per swear word. However, I believe that the frequency of swearing in private conversations on instant messaging applications would certainly match the data from the previous research on online swearing, and might even prove that swearing in such a setting is more productive than in public forums or social media.

Apart from technical issues, a thing that caused a minor inconvenience in the analysis was the fact that Croatian is an inflectional language and many swear words take different cases, so for each of the swear words I had to check the number of hits for each case. In addition, many swear words consisting of more than one word were sometimes syntactically positioned in an unusual order, including swearing phrases that were split into two messages. Also, a prominent characteristic of instant messaging is the lack of grammatical and syntactical rules, as well as many spelling mistakes and abbreviations (such as *jbt* instead of *jebote*). So I might have missed some examples of swearing owing to the typographical errors or usage of abbreviated forms. In that way, it seems that this form of written language resembles or at least tries to imitate spoken language in some of its features, such as dropping letters, combining two words into one, spelling words in nontraditional ways to suggest pronunciation and/or intonation, mimicking the rhythm of speech, using slang, etc. (Haas et.al. 2011, 394)

If we compare the four most popular swear words in English online swearing (*fuck*, *shit*, *ass*, and *bitch*) to the four most popular swear words in this research (*jebati*, *kurac*, *sranje*, and *govno*), two out of four swear words are the same despite considerable language differences. The same applies to the emotions cursing conveyed in this analysis when compared to the data from Wang et al. (2014). Swearing in the corpus of messaging applications was rarely abusive, and most often connected to negative emotions of anger and sadness, but it was also used to express some positive emotions such as excitement, happiness, and surprise, as the analyzed examples showed. What is responsible for such a low occurrence of abusive swearing in this research is probably the similarity or shared experience of chat participants outside of the

conversations. Since all of them were colleagues and friends of similar mindset, their communication was respectful and friendly for the most part, just as Maia and Rezende proved that abusive swearing rarely occurred in homogenous forums populated by users representing similar views (2016, 125).

Another thing that needs to be mentioned is the fact that I, the author of this research, was also an active participant in all of the conversations and that my words have been quoted in some of the featured examples. However, I would like to emphasize that all of the used conversations were started years before I chose to do my thesis on swearing in instant messaging applications, and at the time of writing any of the messages, I was in no way influenced by the research intent, as I had no idea which conversations I am going to analyze and from which mobile messaging application they would be downloaded.

Regarding the used theoretical framework, I believe that all the typologies I used are flawed, given that their categories are mutually inclusive, have questionable boundaries, and are not easily applicable in practice as many of the analyzed examples showed. Trudgill and Andersson's (1990) categorization of pragmatic functions of swearing was too simple and lacked many categories such as emphatic swearing and social swearing, while the humorous category felt a bit redundant, and was not clearly defined. Furthermore, I believe that humor is subjective, so the classification of certain swearing utterances as humorous is not scientifically valid or methodological. Wajnryb's (2005) typology is also missing the category of emphatic swearing, while cathartic and social swearing, in my opinion, sometimes overlap. However, I do appreciate that she decided to include a category of social swearing, which fulfills the purpose of joking and strengthening in-group social bonds as one of the three major ones, and it proved to be very applicable to swearing in the analyzed corpus. Pinker's (2007) five ways of swearing, which are rooted in human psychology, seem pretty reasonable. However, from a linguistic standpoint, his category of idiomatic swearing is not compatible with the rest of the categories as it suggests that all swearing with idiomatic properties should be put into a single category and cannot be employed with different pragmatic functions in mind, such as abusive, cathartic or emphatic. McEnery's categorization of bad language (2006), even though it consists of fifteen specific ways people use swear words, was difficult to use, and was, in my opinion, the most confusing of all categorizations. Apart from missing a specialized category for cathartic swearing (which I suppose should be included in the category of general expletives), and having a single category for idiomatic phrases, it had a few categories which seemed

completely irrelevant to this research, and, in my opinion, to the study of swear words in general. Some of these categories include: destinal usage (which could be included in the idiomatic category or any other, depending on its function and motivation), pronominal form with undefined referent (for which the referent should be clear from the context), and personal insult referring to the identified entity (that could easily be covered by the category of cursing expletives). In addition, some of his categories were focused on the semantics of a swear word, others on its pragmatics, and the rest on its syntactic function, which seems inconsistent. On the other hand, Ljung's categorization performed pretty well compared to the rest. His division between stand-alones and slot fillers is clear. The division of stand-alones was based on their meaning and function, while slot fillers were divided by their syntactic nature. However, at times I wondered if slot fillers could also take on some of the functions of stand-alones and vice versa. Several examples fit well into his categorization, while others were ambiguous so his typology opened multiple options for their interpretation. Nevertheless, the same problem was encountered in the application of other typologies. I also wish he offered a subdivision for replacive swearing, since he proved that it performs differently in various languages. Be that as it may, I found his typology systematic and somewhat applicable in practice.

I do understand that each of the theoretical approaches was based on specific research and a corpus of swearing that might have been completely different from that of instant messaging, and some of them were exclusively based on the English language. Therefore, this outcome was expected. All in all, only when combined were the discussed typologies helpful in describing the nature and the function of the swear words I analyzed. However, the fundamental problem I had with all of the classifications of swear words was that they were one-dimensional in their description and assessment of swearing. Why could an example of swearing not be simultaneously replacive in nature, syntactically placed as a premodifying intensifying negative adjective, and functionally deemed as cathartic? Or why should a swear word in a sentence be purely emphatic when there is a clear motivation in the speaker's mind for the placed emphasis which is partially cathartic?

Finally, after testing the performance of the existing classification of swear words, I would propose that future analyses of swearing be more descriptive and less limited by strict typologies, especially when trying to uncover and explain their meaning and function in a given context. That type of evaluation would be more suitable if we take into account the inherent changeability and development of language, and specifically those parts of it which are not

explicitly regulated, such as swear words. Naturally, this descriptive approach should be systematic, and to achieve that, some key points and terminology should be established. In light of this analysis, I would suggest a three-level classification that could be applicable in more than one branch of linguistic research and not limited to a single language. The first level would be related to the word class and syntactic properties of a certain swear word in its base form, outside of context. The second level of analysis would determine speaker's underlying motivation for choosing a swear word over any other non-taboo words, and the third one would consider the function of a swear word in a specific context and the meaning it communicates.

7. Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to offer a better understanding of how swear words in online text messages were utilized. To do that I compiled a list of the most frequently used swear words in Croatian based on the data from *hrWaC*, Croatian web corpus. Having found out that *jebati*, *sranje*, and *kurac* were the most popular swearing tools of Croatian online communication, I analyzed them in the corpus of twelve instant messaging conversations from my WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger archive. By relying on existing typologies of swear words I found out that abusive swearing directed towards other subjects or objects was the least represented category of swearing according to its function, and that swearing could be suggestive of multiple intentions apart from insulting others. Expressing joy, approval, compassion, frustration, and sadness proved to be some of the most typical aims of swearing. In addition, swearing was employed to emphasize statements, as well as to fulfill social norms of informal setting and group cohesion. In other words, this paper demonstrated that online messaging is filled with examples of swearing where serious swearing phrases or words can be successful at conveying a wide variety of meanings. The analysis also showed that the choice of swear words in instant messaging was slightly different from that in other online texts represented by *hrWaC*, because in the corpus of this research, *sranje* had a significantly lower number of hits than *kurac*. Most importantly, through the process of analysis, I became aware of the multiple flaws in each of the existing typologies of swearing and proposed a descriptive way of analyzing the functions and aims of swearing.

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9. Appendix

You can access the corpus of conversations [here](#).