The evolution of swearing in television catchphrases

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Abstract
Catchphrases have long been a hallmark of US-American sit-coms and dramas, as well as reality, game and variety show programming. Because the phenomenon of the television catchphrase developed throughout the era of network, commercial broadcasting under Federal Communications Commission guidelines regulating profanity in network television, catchphrases traditionally have not included swear words. Nevertheless, certain past television catchphrases can be regarded as euphemistic alternatives of swearing expressions (e.g. ‘Kiss my grits!’), while contemporary catchphrases from cable or streaming series do include explicit swearing (e.g. ‘Don’t fuck it up!’). We examine a database of 168 popular catchphrases from a 70-year period of US-American television programming according to categories for bad language and impoliteness formulae. We identify three categories of catchphrases based on structural-functional similarities to swearing expressions, and we trace the distribution of these categories over time and across networks. The data reveal a trend towards explicit swearing in catchphrases over time, not only in series on cable and streaming services, but across networks. We conclude that the expressive nature of catchphrases and their structural-functional properties render the inclusion of swear words both more palatable to a television audience and more compatible with television norms, thus propagating catchphrase swearing on cable and streaming television services, and mitigating the use of swear words on network television. Due to appropriation phenomena, swearing catchphrases may serve to blur the lines between actually swearing and simply invoking a swearing catchphrase, thereby potentially increasing tolerance for swearing both on television and off.

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1. Introduction

Since the dawn of television, catchphrases have been a hallmark of US-American sit-coms and dramas, as well as reality, game and variety show programming. A television catchphrase is a ‘psychologically salient’ (Bednarek 2010: 137) expression, which is typically associated with a particular television character or personality by virtue of repeated use. Catchphrases are so called because they are ‘catchy’, that is, they ‘catch on’ and are appropriated widely. As such, they are both well-known and frequently used (Alexander 1983: 73) and create a sense of community among television viewers (Richardson 2010: 104). Some well-known American television catchphrases include Homer Simpson’s ‘D’oh!’ (The Simpsons, Fox, 1989–), Sergeant Phil Esterhaus’s ‘Let’s be careful out there.’ (Hill Street Blues, NBC, 1981–1987) or Regis Philbin’s ‘Is that your final answer?’ (Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?, ABC, 2000–2002).

Because the phenomenon of the television catchphrase developed throughout the era of network, commercial broadcasting under the guidelines of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which regulates the use of ‘profane’, ‘indecent’ or ‘obscene’ speech in network television, catchphrases traditionally have not included swear words. Nevertheless, certain television catchphrases have similarities with or can be regarded as euphemistic alternatives of swearing expressions, for example, ‘Kiss my grits!’ (from Alice, CBS, 1976–1985). Further, explicit swearing expressions occur in series broadcast on cable or streaming services (not covered by the FCC regulations), such as ‘Don’t fuck it up!’ (from RuPaul’s Drag Race, Logo TV, 2009–). Such explicit swearing invokes taboos which are culturally and socially recognised as likely to cause offence or otherwise elicit an emotional reaction (Hughes 1991; Jay 1999; Ljung 2007; McEnery 2006). In this paper, we examine popular catchphrases from a 70-year period of US-American television programming, arguing that the expressive nature of catchphrases and their structural-functional properties render the inclusion of swear words both more palatable to a television audience and more compatible with changing television norms, thus propagating catchphrase swearing on cable and streaming television services, and mitigating the use of swear words on network television.

The study is structured as follows: we begin by outlining characteristics of catchphrases, distinguishing them from taglines, memorable quotes and signature interjections (section 2). We then provide the theoretical background on the use of swear words in TV series (section 3) before presenting the catchphrase database (section 4) and explaining our analytical approach (section 5). Next, we present our results (section 6), discussing how past catchphrases have performed the functions of swearing without the explicit use of swear words, in effect paving the way for the gradual implementation of swearing in television catchphrases. We also consider the development of the catchphrase dataset over the 70-year time span. Ultimately, we propose (in section 7) that swearing catchphrases serve to make the use of swear words more palatable to the viewing audience and, due to appropriation phenomena, may also serve to blur the lines between actually swearing and...
simply invoking a swearing catchphrase, thereby potentially increasing tolerance for swearing both on television and off.

2. Catchphrases

In the context of screenwriting advice, a catchphrase is defined as follows:

A catchphrase will be a short phrase or expression used by a specific character, that recurs in a similar form throughout the course of the script. This will be the phrase that audiences leave the theatre reciting, imitating your character. But it is also important to your character as it makes clear to the audience what the character actually values. (https://industrialscripts.com/character-development/ (accessed 9/7/2021)

Screenwriter, producer and screenwriting educator Martie Cook also notes that ‘catch phrases […] are always character-specific, meaning when we hear the word or phrase, we immediately associate it with that character’ (Cook 2014: 242). According to screenwriter/producer Robert Berens, a catchphrase is a character’s ‘calling card expression’ and catchphrases […] play with the audience’s familiarity with these characters and their expectations of these characters […] [a] lot of what people watch TV for is the familiar, the familiar told in a way new enough that it doesn’t feel like a waste of time and that it’s stimulating, it’s satisfying. So it’s that balance between the old and the new, and catchphrases are a distillation of that familiarity (interview, 31/3/2017).

While a catchphrase normally originates with one single character, it can also be invoked by other characters throughout a series (such as ‘Black Jesus!’ in Black-ish). As such, recurrence may be the more essential characteristic of catchphrases. Television series tend to run over a lengthy period of time, providing opportunity for recurrence of a catchphrase, which must be sufficient to become noticeable, but not so excessive that its use would impact on its effect (Richardson 2010: 100). The recurrence of catchphrases serves a foregrounding purpose similar to repetition (Bamford 2000; Bazzanella 2011), and this repeated nature of catchphrases renders them formulaic. As such, episodic narratives can be built around catchphrases, which can serve to ‘draw together the threads of the narrative to that point’ (Norrick 2000: 54). The phenomenon of repetition and recurrence in media texts such as ‘telecinematic discourse’ (Piazza et al., 2011) is known as ‘intratextual repetition’ and ‘intertextual repetition’ (Gordon 2009: 9), where the former refers to repetition within texts and the latter to repetition across texts, which in the current context would be episodes of a television series. Intratextual and intertextual repetition in television episodes in particular tend to result in ‘intertextual quotation’ (Beers Fägersten 2012a), referring to telecinematic dialogue (such as catchphrases) that is appropriated by viewers and used in subsequent, independent interactions (see also Richardson 2010: 102). Repetition and the potential for appropriation thus constitute two important features of catchphrases, in addition to their connection with specific characters or personalities.
From a stylistic point of view, catchphrases are multifunctional, and play a role in characterization, the creation of humour and the establishment of consistency (Bednarek 2018: 76). Catchphrases reward loyalty among viewers, and promote appropriation (Richardson 2010). Indeed, according to Partridge (1992) a catchphrase is precisely ‘a saying that has caught on, and pleases the public.’ Richardson (2010: 100–103) shows that audiences have an important role to play in creating and sustaining television catchphrases, including playing with their structure.

A catchphrase must be distinguished from a tagline or memorable quote, the former of which can be understood as a series’ slogan, while the latter is a noteworthy extract of dialogue. A series tagline, for example, the Gilmore Girls’ (The WB, 2000–2007) tagline, ‘Life’s short. Talk fast’, serves a marketing or descriptive purpose, but is not sourced from any actual dialogue. Memorable quotes, on the other hand, are extracts of telecinematic dialogue that are often attended to, retained and when socially motivated, produced in subsequent spontaneous interaction (Harris et al. 2008: 36). Memorable quotes, such as ‘I am the one who knocks’ (Walter White, Breaking Bad, AMC, 2008–2013), share these features with catchphrases, but unlike catchphrases they are not repeated within or across episodes.

Many catchphrases such as ‘D’oh!’ (Homer Simpson, The Simpsons, Fox, 1989–) or ‘Bazinga!’ (Sheldon, The Big Bang Theory, 2007–2019, CBS) take the form of interjections, and as such need to be distinguished from what Bednarek (2010: 131) calls ‘signature interjections’. A signature interjection is first identified as an interjection that is ‘produced by one speaker most frequently compared to other characters’ and then, among one such character’s interjections, is also ‘the one that is most frequent for that character’ (Bednarek 2010: 131). Bednarek’s examples of signature interjections from Gilmore Girls, such as Lorelai’s ‘ugh’ or Rory’s ‘wow’, indicate that one way interjections can differ from catchphrases is in their ordinariness. In other words, one would not necessarily recognise ‘ugh’ or ‘wow’ as a specific reference to Gilmore Girls as readily as one would be able to identify ‘D’oh!’ as invoking Homer from The Simpsons. In Bednarek’s (2010: 137) terms, catchphrases are ‘very clearly psychologically salient’, such that catchphrases may also be signature interjections, but a signature interjection does not necessarily constitute a catchphrase.

Some linguistic research on television series has commented on the linguistic form or meaning of catchphrases. Richardson (2010: 101) argues that it is ‘not untypical’ for catchphrases to be ‘unremarkable, linguistically’, but that they are sometimes ‘witty or linguistically playful’. In addition, some catchphrases have a template, a partially fixed structure that allows viewers to insert new elements into a particular slot (Richardson 2010: 102). Bednarek (2010: 137) hypothesized that expressive (particularly emotional) resources are often used as catchphrases, but did not explore this hypothesis any further. More recently, Bednarek (2019a: 14) proposed that ‘swear/taboo words often act as character catchphrases’, providing examples such as ‘son of a bitch’ (Sawyer, Lost, ABC, 2004–2010), ‘shiiiiit’ (Clay Davis, The Wire, HBO, 2002–2008) and ‘absofuckinglutely’ (Big, Sex and the City, HBO, 1998–2004). To our knowledge, however, no systematic analysis has been undertaken to test these claims. In this article, we aim to fill this gap by undertaking systematic analysis of the formal and functional properties of catchphrases, especially in comparison to those of swearing expressions. This in turn will provide
evidence for our hypothesis that catchphrases play an important role in propagating swearing and making it more palatable to audiences.

3. Swearing

The presence of swear words in television series is influenced by censorship (affecting broadcast/network television), by time (changes in social attitudes, laws, regulations) and by culture (cultural differences). The presence of swear words also impacts on the voluntary ratings that are assigned to TV series (e.g. TV-MA). These aspects interact with narrative-stylistic factors, including the characters, storylines and target audience of particular series and episodes (Bednarek 2019a, 2020). Swear words are frequent in US television series because they fulfill multiple functions for the televisual narrative, as shown through both interviews with screenwriters and through linguistic analysis. They can function to create characterisation, realism, humour and consistency; to convey ideologies and control viewer emotion; and to contribute to establishing settings and developing plotlines (Bednarek 2019a).

For some viewers, the use of swear words is noticeable as well as entertaining (Bednarek 2019b), but there are also pressure groups who monitor and complain about their use (Kaye & Sapolsky 2009). While swearing occurs most frequently in situation comedies, it is most often delivered in non-humorous ways and directed at another character (Kaye & Sapolsky 2001: 922). For this reason, it may not just be the abundance of swearing but the kind of swearing in US-American television programming that, predictably, generates complaints. Editorials and opinion polls testify to the recurring concern and widely-held belief that ‘verbal vulgarities on television lead to more cursing in everyday conversation and to a general breakdown in civility and personal values’ (Sapolsky et al., 2010: 45). This stance is particularly interesting in the catchphrase context: On the one hand, the catchphrase as a ‘joke format that foregrounds repetition and recognition’ (Darlington 2014: 134) represents the culmination of an episodic narrative, functioning as a punchline and encouraging a humorous interpretation – in contrast to previous observations of non-humorous swearing (Kaye & Sapolsky 2001). On the other hand, catchphrases are intended to catch on and be appropriated in subsequent, everyday conversation, thus potentially facilitating swearing in real life.

More generally, swear words have important stylistic functions but are also strongly affected by social attitudes and legislation, resulting in a range of different practices and uses, including euphemisms, innovations, metalinguistic commentary and using milder swear words (Bednarek 2019b). As mentioned above, federal law restricts swearing and governs network television but not subscription-based television such as cable or streaming services. The frequency and distribution of particular swear words (e.g. *hell, god, damn, ass, fuck*) therefore depend on the nature of the dataset that is analysed, for example, whether it includes older primetime programs versus more recent programs from broadcast and cable, or focuses on particular series/episodes which can be outliers (Bednarek 2020: 57–59).

In relation to change over time, various studies by Kaye and Sapolsky have traced swear word usage in American prime time television since the 1990s, revealing clear tendencies towards an increased usage. This overall increase represents a steady decrease
in percentage for milder swear words and an increase in stronger swear words, in particular sexual and excretory words, during the period 1990–1994, while values decreased from 1994–1997 (Kaye & Sapolsky 2001: 316). In 2001, values for all types of swear words had increased since 1997, in particular excretory words (Kaye & Sapolsky 2004: 561), and by 2009, ‘the proportion of profanity represented by mild-other words [had] steadily decreased [...] indicating a gradual coarsening of language spoken in primetime’ (Kaye & Sapolsky 2009: 32). The fact that instances of swearing on prime time television have increased is unsurprising, but it is interesting to note that there has been a steady shift in the kinds of swear words used, such that Quaglio’s observation that avoidance of some words is reflected in a preference for others (Quaglio 2008: 205–206) can be applied to stronger and milder swear words, respectively.

Werner’s (2021) study of selected swear words in TV and movie subtitles clearly illustrates the change in swear words in relation to external factors such as production codes, changes in the TV industry and shifting cultural attitudes. In relation to television, milder swear words (hell, damn) were largely avoided until the 1970s, but have become more and more acceptable. Werner also confirms a general increase in swear word use. These results reflect changes in cultural attitudes and a decrease in perceived taboo-ness, as well as the rise of uncensored cable/streaming services which are not subject to federal regulation. This in turn prompts network television programming to assert their right to include more adult content and language (Sapolsky et al., 2010: 45). As restrictions ease and prime time television adopts the linguistic practices of cable and pay television, it appears that milder swear words give way to stronger ones. Instances of swearing, in particular catchphrase swearing, highlight these changing norms of television and media language (Beers Fagersten 2014; 2017).

In addition to results about swear words in television differing depending on the analysed dataset, they also depend on the researchers’ definition of swear word. In fact, defining swear words is both a necessity and a real challenge: Definitions are often subjective and either too inclusive or too exclusive (Beers Fagersten & Stapleton 2017: 3) and there is no consensus around how terms such as swearing, expletive or swear words are used (Beers Fagersten 2012b; Bednarek 2019a, b). Without getting involved in this debate, we treat a word as swear word if the word or its use is considered taboo, and the word has literal and non-literal meaning, and the word can be used to express emotion or attitude. Identity-based slurs (e.g. kraut for someone German) are not included, while words such as god or jesus are considered ‘marginal’ members of the swear word category as only some would consider their non-literal use taboo (for further detail, see Bednarek 2019b). Swearing is used to refer to the use of such words, while expletive (following Ljung 2011) refers to a grammaticalized swearing expression used specifically for an interjective, mainly reactive function. The use of expletives is thus a specific, interjective form of swearing.

Since this article focuses on catchphrases, we will also define the categories with which we work here:

- Non-swearing catchphrases: Catchphrases that do not contain any swear word
- Pseudo-swearing catchphrases: Catchphrases that have structural and functional similarities with or can be regarded as euphemistic alternatives of swearing expressions
- Swearing catchphrases: Catchphrases that contain at least one swear word
4. The catchphrase dataset

The catchphrase dataset used for this study consists of 168 catchphrases from US-American television programming and culled from online, curated lists. The main data source is Wikipedia’s ‘List of catchphrases’, which includes 106 American television catchphrases. This list was supplemented by additional entries in TV Land’s ‘The 100 Greatest TV Quotes & Catch Phrases’; TV Guide’s ‘TV’s 60 Greatest Catchphrases’; Click Americana’s ‘10 top TV catchphrases of the ’60s’, ‘10 top TV catchphrases of the ’70s’ and ‘10 top TV catchphrases of the ’80s’; E! News’ ‘The 26 Best ’90s TV Catchphrases’: The Wichita Eagle’s ‘Great TV catchphrases of the past decade’ (2000s); and Uproxx’s ‘Let’s Crown A Definitive TV Catchphrase Of The 2010s’ (see Appendix 1). Finally, additional examples of catchphrases from more contemporary television series were solicited from Reddit.com (11 June 2021). While Richardson (2010: 101) notes that catchphrases are associated with sitcom and sketch comedy rather than drama, we neither target nor exclude catchphrases according to genre or format. Instead, the use of externally curated lists allows us to focus on catchphrases that have emerged as well-known, memorable or popular, and thus amenable to subsequent appropriation.

The initial compilation was edited to delete any catchphrases that did not originate from US-American television series, serving to exclude catchphrases from television commercials (e.g. ‘Where’s the beef?’) or political speeches or debates (e.g. ‘Read my lips: No new taxes.’). Additionally, we note that the Wikipedia entry defines a catchphrase as a ‘short phrase or expression that has gained usage beyond its initial scope’ and emphasises that entries in the ‘List of catchphrases’ are not necessarily ‘catchy’ but, rather, ‘are notable for their widespread use within the culture’. Catchphrases were only included in the dataset, however, if they satisfied the criterion of repeated usage (either within one episode or across episodes) in line with our definition of catchphrases (see section 2). Thus, any single-occurrence catchphrase was excluded. Repetition of catchphrases that can potentially lead to intratextual quotation or appropriation by the audience (see section 2) is relevant to our inquiry of swearing catchphrases with regards in particular to their potential to mitigate swearing, rendering the instance less of an original production with a potential social risk, and more of a practice of quotation that carries cultural clout.

The final list that comprises the dataset (see Appendix 2) is by no means exhaustive; indeed, there are certainly notable exclusions. However, it does represent a compilation based on catchphrase familiarity and popularity among the general public. The dataset of 168 catchphrases represents a total of 129 different television series spanning a period of more than 70 years, from 1948 to 2021. Figure 1 shows the distribution of catchphrases over time, based on the decade in which the respective television series debuted; the list includes no catchphrases from series that debuted later than 2018.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of catchphrases by original network. Not depicted in this table are the networks Bravo, Cartoon Network, Food Network, Logo TV and PBS, with one catchphrase each; Nickelodeon with two catchphrases; and Comedy Central, Netflix and MTV, with three catchphrases each. A total of seven catchphrases are from series that were distributed in syndication. Representing a collection of catchphrases that have emerged as popular, the database also reflects a shift in viewing patterns, such that
more cable and streaming series are included as time goes by. In this aspect, we neither target nor exclude catchphrases according to network; while series on cable and streaming networks dominate the category of swearing catchphrases, traditional network television series are also represented. Across all networks, situation comedies are the most common type of programming represented in the database; a total of 116 catchphrases come from situation comedies, versus 29 from drama series and 23 from reality series or news programming. This distribution may reflect a greater acceptability of (pseudo-)swearing on television in humorous as opposed to serious contexts.

5. Catchphrase analysis

To substantiate our hypotheses about the potential of catchphrases for making swearing more palpable, we investigate (i) the association of catchphrases with expressivity/emotionality and (ii) the extent to which past catchphrases have performed the functions of swearing without the explicit use of swear words, in effect paving the way for the gradual implementation of swearing in television catchphrases.

To do so, we first categorised each catchphrase in our dataset according to sentence type, that is, declarative, imperative, interrogative and exclamative. Declarative and exclamative sentences differ in that the former relay information in a neutral manner,
while the latter show strong emotion. This difference is usually conveyed via intonation and further encoded in punctuation, with declaratives conventionally ending in a period and exclamatives ending in an exclamation point. This analysis will provide first insights into whether catchphrases are associated with expressivity/emotionality, as claimed by Bednarek (2010). However, the main focus of our analysis is to apply frameworks developed for the functions of swearing and impoliteness to our catchphrase dataset. These frameworks focus on structural-functional properties rather than broad functional categories of swearing which have been described in the relevant literature on swearing.

Early research (see Montagu 1967; Ross 1961) recognised that swearing is not necessarily negative and distinguished between two broad categories of swearing, ‘annoyance swearing’ and ‘social swearing’, the former associated with tension release and mostly negatively charged, while the latter foregrounds positively charged aspects of social relationships and interactions. These broad functions have since been further developed, resulting in additional categories, such as abusive, cathartic and social swearing (Wajnryb 2005), or descriptive, idiomatic, abusive, emphatic and cathartic swearing (Pinker 2007). Much of the swearing that occurs in face-to-face interaction tends to serve particular interpersonal functions, which Stapleton (2003) identifies as expressing emotion, constructing/displaying identity, social bonding and building solidarity and conveying humour and verbal emphasis. While examples help to distinguish the different functions from each other (e.g. abusive ‘Fuck you, motherfucker!’ vs. cathartic ‘Fuck!!!’), accurate categorisation largely depends on access to the social context of interaction. Television catchphrases are certainly fully contextualized when delivered, but their formulaic nature (a property that Ljung 2011: 4 also identified in swearing expressions) lends itself to extraction from original context and application in a new one – indeed, the desired fate of a catchphrase. For this reason, television catchphrases are more suitable to a structural-functional analysis, and we make use of both McEnery’s (2006) ‘Categorization of bad language’ presented in Table 1 and Culpeper’s (2011) ‘Impoliteness formulae’, further below.

Table 1. McEnery’s “Categorisation of bad language” 2006: 32; original emphasis.

| Category description                                      | Example                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Predicative negative adjective                            | ‘the film is shit’                                           |
| Adverbial booster                                          | ‘Fuck you!/Me!/Him!/It!’                                    |
| Cursing expletive                                          | ‘Fuck off’ ‘He fucked off’                                   |
| Destinational usage                                        | ‘He fucking did it’ ‘in the fucking car’                     |
| Emphatic adverb/adjective                                  | ‘to fuck about’                                              |
| Figurative extension of literal meaning                    | ‘(Oh) Fuck!’                                                 |
| General expletive                                          | ‘fuck all ‘give a fuck’                                     |
| Idiomatic ‘set phrase’                                     | ‘We fucked’                                                  |
| Literal usage denoting taboo referent                      | ‘kick shit out of’                                           |
| Imagery based on literal meaning                           | ‘the fucking idiot’                                          |
| Premodifying intensifying negative adjective               | ‘got shit to do’                                             |
| Pronominal form with undefined referent                    | ‘You fuck!’ ‘That fuck’                                      |
| Personal insult referring to defined entity                | For example, Niggers/Niggaz as used by African American rappers |
| Reclaimed usage - no negative intent                       | ‘by God’                                                     |
| Religious oath used for emphasis                            |                                                              |
While McEnery provides prototypical examples, Culpeper (2011: 135–136) makes use of a template to itemise conventionalized and evidence-based impoliteness formulae. The impetus for using this impoliteness framework is the fact that Culpeper identified these formulae as reflecting expressions which showed a tendency to be experienced or challenged as impolite. The inclusion of swear words as in the formulae warrant their application to the catchphrase dataset. In the list below, bracketed words indicate structural characteristics and slashes separate example alternatives; the alternatives have been edited for brevity:

Insults

1. **Personalised negative vocatives**
   - [you] [fucking/etc.] [moron/etc.] [you]

2. **Personalised negative assertions**
   - [you] [are] [so/such a] [shit/ugly/etc.]
   - [you] [can’t do] [anything right/etc.]
   - [you] [disgust me] / [make me] [sick/etc.]

3. **Personalised negative references**
   - [your] [stinking/little] [mouth/etc.]

4. **Personalised third-person negative references (in the hearing of the target)**
   - [the] [daft] [bimbo]
   - [she] [’s] [nutzo]

Pointed criticisms/complaints

- [that/this/it] [is/was] [absolutely/etc.] [bad/crap/etc.]

Unpalatable questions and/or presuppositions

- why do you make my life impossible?
- which lie are you telling me?
- what’s gone wrong now?
- you want to argue with me or you want to go to jail?

Condescensions (see also the use of ‘little’ in Insults)

- [that] [’s/is being] [babyish/childish/etc.]

Message enforcers

- – listen here (preface)
- – you got [it/that]? (tag)
- – do you understand [me]? (tag)

Dismissals

- [go] [away]
- [get] [lost/out]
• [fuck/piss/shove] [off]

Silencers
• [shut] [it] / [your] [stinking/fucking/etc.] [mouth/face/trap/etc.]
• shut [the fuck] up

Threats
• [I’ll/I’m/we’re] [gonna] [beat the shit out of you/etc.] [if you don’t] [X]
• [you’d better be ready ... to meet with me/do it] [or] [else] [I’ll] [X]
• [X] [before I] [hit you/strangle you]

Negative expressives (e.g. curses, ill-wishes)
• [go] [to hell/fuck yourself]
• [damn/fuck] [you]

(Culpeper 2011: 135–6).

While many television catchphrases are explicitly positive, for example, ‘You look mahvelous!’ (Fernando, Saturday Night Live, 1984–1985\(^3\)), others are neutral or ambiguous, for example, ‘The truth is out there.’ (Agent Mulder, The X Files, 1993–2002, Fox). Such catchphrases are not first and foremost those that function in ways similar to swearing expressions, even if some swearing expressions can be considered inoffensive or positive. Instead, we are interested in television catchphrases that align with the more prototypical expletive/exclamative structure and impoliteness function of swearing, as exemplified in McEnery’s categorisation and Culpeper’s formulae.

In our analysis, we first categorize the catchphrase dataset according to McEnery (2006). This initial categorisation allows us to identify to what extent the catchphrases have the structural-functional properties of swearing expressions, thereby excluding any irrelevant catchphrases from further analysis. We then consider which catchphrases among the resulting subset correspond to Culpeper’s impoliteness formulae. Crucially, we then trace this development over time, to test the claim of a gradual implementation of swearing in television catchphrases by examining lexis, that is, the explicit use of swear words, and gradability, that is, the comparative offensiveness/impoliteness of a word or expression.

6. Findings

6.1. Catchphrases by sentence type

Figure 3 shows the sentence type (i.e. declarative, imperative, interrogative and exclamative) of each catchphrase in the catchphrase dataset.

Declarative sentences account for 16% (n = 27) of the 168 catchphrases, for example, ‘I’m listening.’ (Frasier, Frasier, 1993–2004, NBC). Over half (57%, n = 96) of the catchphrases in the dataset are exclamatives, such as, ‘Dy-no-mite!’ (J.J., Good Times, 1974–1979, CBS). Exclamatives are predictable sentence types for catchphrases, as
emotion renders them psychologically salient. However, in the dataset, there are even catchphrases of imperative (19%, n = 31) and interrogative (8%, n = 14) type which show emotion. Examples include, ‘Don’t have a cow, man!’ (Bart, The Simpsons, 1989–, Fox) and ‘Did I do that?’ (Urkel, Family Matters, 1989–1998, ABC). In total, emotive expressions comprise over 80% of the catchphrase dataset across three sentence types, which aligns with the suggestion that emotionality is a key defining feature of television dialogue (Bednarek 2012; 2018). These results also confirm Bednarek’s (2010:137) hypothesis that emotional resources are often used in catchphrases. Since emotion is also a criterion of swearing expressions, it is, at this point, fruitful to move on from the basic formal properties of catchphrases to consider how their functional properties align with those of swearing expressions.

6.2. Results of the structural-functional analysis

As a first step, we excluded catchphrases that do not share the structural-functional properties of swearing expressions (see section 5). This resulted in an exclusion of 79 catchphrases (47% of 168), examples of which include, ‘Just one more thing...’ (Det. Columbo, Columbo, 1971–1978, NBC), ‘Baby, you’re the greatest!’ (Ralph Kramden, The Honeymooners, 1955–1956, CBS) and ‘How you doin’?’ (Joey, Friends, 1994–2004, NBC). Note that these catchphrases may nevertheless incorporate expressive/emotional resources, as evident from the analysis in section 6.1.

Of the remaining 89 (53% of 168) television catchphrases, a total of nineteen (11% of 168) were categorised as structurally and functionally similar to ‘general expletives’ (cf. McEnery’s (Oh) Fuck!), corresponding to emotive responses. Each of these catchphrases, however, represents a positive emotive response, such as ‘Dy-no-mite!’ (J.J., Good Times, 1974–1979, CBS), ‘Cowabunga!’ (Bart, The Simpsons, 1989–, Fox) or ‘Pop pop!’ (Magnitude, Community, 2009–2015, NBC). One additional catchphrase, ‘Sock it to me!’ (Goldie Hawn/Various, Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-In, 1967–1973, NBC), was also identified as representing a positive emotive response, but in the form of McEnery’s ‘idiomatic “set phrase”’. While none of these twenty catchphrases include explicit swear words, their expressivity and structural and functional similarity to expletives and
idiomatic swearing can nevertheless be considered to prime the viewing audience for more explicit forms.

Of the now 69 remaining catchphrases, 47 (28% of 168) were identified as emotive responses invoking swear word substitutes, euphemisms or pseudo-swearing expressions. It is this set of catchphrases which represents the middle ground between catchphrases in the form of positive, non-swearing emotive responses and catchphrases in the form of explicit swearing. Notably, these pseudo-swearing catchphrases, with the exception of five (e.g. ‘Freaking sweet!’ and ‘Making whoopie!’, see below), convey negative emotive responses and correspond to a range of McEnery’s categories, as shown in Table 2.

As they are not explicit swearing expressions, these 47 pseudo-swearing catchphrases do not correspond exactly to McEnery’s category examples. The structural and functional similarities, however, suggest that swearing is being evoked in the non-swearing locations. Due to restrictions on swearing on television, the use of alternatives can be expected. In turn, viewers can also be expected to have a basic familiarity with the restrictions imposed upon television dialogue and thereby recognise the illocutionary force of pseudo-swearing, in particular such expletive- and cursing-like catchphrases as ‘Blergh!’ and ‘Kiss my grits!’

The final 22 catchphrases (13%) are those that include explicit swearing. These catchphrases also represent a range of categories as shown in Table 3, but in contrast to the mostly negative emotive responses populating the pseudo-swearing subset, the swearing catchphrases reflect both positive (‘This guy fucks!’) and negative (‘Fuck off!’) emotive responses.

Table 2. Number of pseudo-swearing catchphrases by bad language category.

| Description                          | Example                                                        | No. of instances |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Adverbial booster                    | ‘Freaking sweet!’ (Peter Griffin, Family Guy, 1999–, Fox)       | 1                |
| Figurative extension of literal meaning | ‘Homey don’t play that!!’ (Homey the Clown, In Living Color, 1990–1994, Fox) | 1                |
| Imagery based on literal meaning     | ‘It stinks!’ (Jay Sherman, The Critic, 1994–1995, ABC)          | 1                |
| Literal usage denoting taboo referent | ‘Making whoopie!’ (Bob Eubanks, The Newlywed Game, 1966–1974)    | 1                |
| Premodifying intensifying negative adjective | ‘If it weren’t for you meddling kids!’ (Various villains, Scooby Doo, Where Are You?, 1969–1970, CBS) | 1                |
| Idiomatic ‘set phrase’               | ‘Cut. It. Out’. (Joey, Full House, 1987–1995, ABC)              | 3                |
| General expletive                    | ‘Blergh!’ (Liz Lemon, 30 Rock, 2006–2013, NBC)                   | 7                |
| Religious oath used for emphasis     | ‘Holy (X), Batman!’ (Robin, Batman, 1966–1968, ABC)              | 9                |
| Personal insult referring to defined entity | ‘You eediot!’ (Ren, The Ren & Stimpy Show, 1991–1996, Nickelodeon) | 11               |
| Cursing expletive                    | ‘Up your nose with a rubber hose!’ (Vinnie Barbarino, Welcome Back, Katter, 1975–1979, ABC) | 12               |
| Total                                |                                                                | 47               |
The structural-functional analysis thus reveals that over half (53%) of the catchphrases in the 168-item database show similarities to or direct correspondence with swearing expressions according to McEnery’s (2006) bad language categories. A small percentage of these 89 catchphrases (22%, n = 20) were identified as positive emotive responses, the majority of which (19) were exclamatives similar in structure and function to general expletives. These catchphrases can, thus, evoke the act of swearing. The status of this subset of catchphrases as positive emotive responses, however, excludes them from an analysis according to Culpeper’s impoliteness formulae, which instead can, in the next section, be applied to the pseudo-swearing and swearing catchphrase subsets.

### 6.3. Results of the impoliteness analysis

The application of both McEnery’s (2006) categorization of bad language and Culpeper’s (2011) impoliteness formulae highlights a notable characteristic of the pseudo-swearing and swearing catchphrase subsets, namely, the fact that they can be broadly divided into catchphrases with or without addressees or targets. Indeed, Culpeper’s impoliteness formulae are evidence based, such that an experience of impoliteness needed to be evident in at least 50% of the cases on which the list is based. It follows that swearing or taboo expressions not directed at a specific addressee or target would not be immediately experienced (or challenged) as impolite. For this reason, there are several examples in the pseudo-swearing and swearing catchphrase subsets that do not correspond to any impoliteness formula, as shown in Table 4 and Table 5.

Excluding those that cannot be accounted for by the impoliteness formulae, the most common type of catchphrase is insult. An interesting difference to note between the two subsets, however, is that all eleven insults in the pseudo-swearing subset are genuinely
negative emotive expressions, while three of the nine insults in the swearing catchphrase subset invoke the word ‘bitch(es)’ for the interpersonal function of displaying group identity and solidarity. Examples of such usage include ‘Hug it out, bitch!’ (Ari Gold, *Entourage*, 2004–2011, HBO) and ‘Wild card, bitches!’ / ‘What’s up, bitches?’ (Charlie and Mac, respectively, *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, 2005–, FX). In general, a greater percentage of the 47 pseudo-swearing catchphrases represent negative emotive responses (85%, n = 40) compared to 64% (n = 14) of the 22 swearing catchphrases. The pseudo-swearing catchphrases thus more consistently perform the prototypical functions of swearing expressions as negative emotive responses than the catchphrases that include explicit swearing. Among the catchphrases not corresponding to impoliteness formulae are a further eight pseudo-swearing (17%) and five swearing (23%) catchphrases that count as positive emotive responses, such as ‘Freaking sweet!’ (Peter Griffin, *Family Guy*, 1999–, Fox) or ‘Don’t fuck it up!’ (RuPaul, *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, 2009–, Logo TV), which serve the interpersonal functions of displaying identity and building solidarity, respectively. The catchphrase dataset suggests that pseudo-swearing catchphrases generally align with annoyance swearing (‘D’oh!’, ‘You eediot!’, ‘Good grief!’, ‘Holy crap!’, etc.), while swearing catchphrases comprise both annoyance and social swearing (‘Fuck off!’ and ‘Dumbass!’ vs ‘Absofuckinglutely!’ and ‘This guy fucks!’). The overall impression is that non-swearing catchphrases as generally positive emotive responses characterised by an exclamative structure have paved the way for pseudo-swearing

### Table 4. Number of pseudo-swearing catchphrases by impoliteness formula.

| Impoliteness formula                  | Example                                                                 | No. of instances |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Insult-3rd person negative reference  | ‘Dumb babies.’ (Angelica Pickles, *Rugrats*, 1991–2006, Nickelodeon)    | 1               |
| Unpalatable question                  | ‘What’choo talkin’ ‘bout, Willis?’ (Arnold Drummond, *Diff’rent Strokes*, 1978–1986, NBC) | 1               |
| Condescension                         | ‘Don’t have a cow, man!’ (Bart, *The Simpsons*, 1989–, Fox)             | 2               |
| Dismissal                             | ‘No soup for you!’ (The Soup Nazi, *Seinfeld*, 1989–1998, NBC)          | 2               |
| Threat                                | ‘God’ll get you for that.’ (Maude, *Maude*, 1972–1978, CBS)             | 2               |
| Criticism                             | ‘It stinks!’ (Jay Sherman, *The Critic*, 1994–1995, ABC)                | 3               |
| Insult-personal negative assertion    | ‘You are the weakest link.’ (Anne Robinson, *The Weakest Link*, 2001–2003, NBC) | 3               |
| Negative expressive                   | ‘Sit on it!’ (Various, *Happy Days*, 1974–1984, ABC)                    | 4               |
| Silencer                              | ‘Stifle!’ (Archie Bunker, *All in the Family*, 1971–1979, CBS)          | 6               |
| Insult-personal negative vocative     | ‘You big dummy!’ (Fred Sanford, *Sanford and Son*, 1972–1977, NBC)      | 7               |
| No correspondence                     | ‘Holy motherfucking shirtballs!’ (Eleanor, *The Good Place*, 2016–2020, NBC) | 16              |
| Total                                 |                                                                         | 47              |
catchphrases as negative emotive responses approximating general expletives and impoliteness formulae. These, in turn, have paved the way for swearing catchphrases. However, as swearing catchphrases comprise both negative and positive emotive responses, the explicitness of the swearing expression is mitigated. As this summary implies a linear development of catchphrases, the next section focuses on the 70-year period of the catchphrase dataset.

6.4. Catchphrases over time

As noted in section 3 above, swear word usage in television has changed significantly over time, which necessitates integrating a temporal dimension. In order to establish any development or progression among the four subsets of the television catchphrase dataset, each subset was hence tracked over time. Figure 4 shows the number of catchphrases per subset for each of the eight decades represented.

Figure 4 makes clear that the largest subset of catchphrases (n = 79), those that do not correspond to any of McEnery’s (2006) categories of bad language (e.g. ‘I’m listening.’), is the only catchphrase type to appear in all decades, with fairly consistent distribution, peaking every other decade. Of the remaining catchphrase subsets, the non-swearing catchphrases (n = 20; e.g. ‘Bazinga!’) appear in television series from the 1960s to the present, the pseudo-swearing catchphrases (n = 47; e.g. ‘Kiss my grits!’) appear from the 1950s to the present, while the swearing catchphrases (n = 22; e.g. ‘Bite my shiny metal ass!’) do not appear until the 1990s, also continuing to the present. Figure 4 reveals furthermore a steady increase in pseudo-swearing catchphrases until the 1980s, coinciding with the appearance of swearing catchphrases, which increase over two decades, while pseudo-swearing catchphrases gradually decrease from 1990 until the present time, aligning with Kaye and Sapolsky’s (2009) observed shift (see section 3). These trends also align with the above-mentioned industry shift in viewing patterns reflected in the increased presence of cable/streaming series in the database (see section 4).

Table 5. Number of swearing catchphrases by impoliteness formula.

| Impoliteness formula       | Example                                      | No. of instances |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Dismissal                  | ‘Fuck off!’ (Logan Roy, Succession, 2018–, HBO) | 1                |
| Condescension              | ‘Good God, Lemon!’ (Jack Donaghy, 30 Rock, 2006–2013, NBC) | 1                |
| Unpalatable question       | ‘Peter, what the hell?’, Lois Griffin, Family Guy, 1999–, Fox | 1                |
| Negative expressive        | ‘Bite my shiny metal ass!’ (Bender, Futurama, 1999–2013, Fox) | 2                |
| Insult-personal negative vocative | ‘You son of a bitch!’ (Lilly, How I Met Your Mother, 2005–2014, CBS) | 9                |
| No correspondence          | ‘Son of a bitch!’ (Sawyer, Lost, 2004–2010, ABC) | 8                |
| Total                      |                                              | 22               |
The general decrease in the 2010s for all subsets should be considered a reflection of the lack of available catchphrase data as opposed to pointing to an overall trend. However, the advent of streaming services and an abundance of television programming may contribute to a dispersion of viewing patterns, such that it is difficult for specific catchphrases to attract widespread attention. Our findings thus appear to be in line with Richardson’s (2010) hypothesis that ‘the catchphrases of the future are less likely to achieve the distribution that those of the past were able to do, as the proliferation of TV channels and, arguably, the drift away from television as the domestic entertainment medium of first choice continues to fracture national audiences’ (2010: 101). It may also be the case that catchphrases need more time to enter the collective consciousness and populate curated lists, such as those used for this study’s data collection. In any case, our findings provide an empirical baseline that can now potentially be tested in future studies of other catchphrase datasets.

7. Discussion

In this paper, we have investigated the evolution of catchphrase swearing on US-American television programming by considering 168 popular television catchphrases over a 70-year period. We have found that over half of these catchphrases show a range of structural and functional similarities to swearing expressions and impoliteness formulae, such that exclamative, non-swearing catchphrases reflecting positive emotive responses have stably co-existed with and effectually provided contrast to pseudo-swearing catchphrases, dominated by negative emotive response-type. Pseudo-swearing catchphrases appeared in the 1950s and steadily increased to the 1980s, when explicit swearing catchphrases appeared and have increased, while pseudo-swearing catchphrases have decreased. In contrast to pseudo-swearing catchphrases, a greater percentage of swearing catchphrases comprise positive emotive responses. A lack of data for the 2010s prevents clear observation of continued trends.
In the introduction to their listing of the top ten television catchphrases of the 1970s, the Click Americana website states, ‘Whether we’re doing it for a laugh, to share a bond, or to cement our status as being in-the-know, Americans love a good catchphrase’. The implication of this statement is that American viewers not only recognise television catchphrases, they show their appreciation by subsequent appropriation, which in turn is appreciated as shared background knowledge. To understand and use catchphrases means to ‘belong to the cultural community’ (Richardson 2010: 1010). The fact that catchphrases can be invoked ‘for a laugh, to share a bond, or to cement our status as being in-the-know’ not only speaks to their multifunctionality in interpersonal interaction, but also suggests a transformative process. Catchphrases are not first and foremost invoked for their propositional content, but rather for their status as catchphrases and the cultural clout that they award those who invoke them and those who recognise them. In other words, the catchphrase is greater than the sum of its parts, ‘providing a mutually recognisable cultural shorthand for larger ideas, concepts, characters, and stereotypes’ (Darlington 2014: 123).

While we have not investigated the phenomenon of catchphrase appropriation and propagation in this paper, we can reasonably assume that television catchphrases are indeed appropriated as the Click Americana quote suggests, and by virtue of their being recognised as ‘popular’ or ‘best’ in curated lists. Additional support for this assumption comes from Harris et al. (2008), who found reported appropriation among 100% of their participants in a study of movie quoting, and from Bednarek (2017), who includes examples of the use of catchphrases on fan T-shirts and as hashtags on Twitter. While some may suspect that, due to social taboo, swearing catchphrases would resist appropriation, we propose instead that the catchphrase format makes swearing all the more palatable and mitigating: when appropriating a swearing catchphrase, the act of invoking a popular cultural reference eclipses the act of swearing. The use of swear words in television catchphrases and the subsequent appropriation of these thus increases tolerance and acceptability which, in turn, could lead to more swearing both on and off television.

The language of television series can both influence and be influenced by linguistic trends. It is important to point out that we are not claiming to have shown that swearing catchphrases have resulted in increased swearing in the ‘real’ world, nor do we have evidence that ‘real’ world swearing has led to more swearing catchphrases. What we have demonstrated, however, is the way in which catchphrases have evolved over time with respect to both pseudo-swearing and (explicit) swearing. In addition, our argument is that catchphrases have several properties which, together, may facilitate the spread of swearing: (i) catchphrases are highly salient due to their repetition, (ii) catchphrases tend to be appropriated by audiences and to become widespread, (iii) pseudo-swearing catchphrases have similarities with swearing catchphrases, (iv) the use of catchphrases has a community-creating function which may counter qualms about swearing and (v) the use of catchphrases can be considered as ‘mentioning’ rather than using swearing, thus blurring the use-mention distinction. All of these features make it likely that the evolving use of swearing and pseudo-swearing catchphrases may not only reflect changing industry norms, but also facilitate swearing as a pop-cultural phenomenon.

A recent development in television that supports our proposal is the growing number of television series titles with swear words. Articles such as, ‘What’s behind naughty TV titles?’ (Thompson, 2012), ‘Why are there so many swears in titles now?’, and ‘A
definitive guide to the worst tv show titles in recent history’ (Cosman 2014) deride the use of swear words in titles as a marketing ploy, even criticizing such shows such as Don’t Trust the B— in Apartment 23 (2012–2013, ABC), Good Christian Bitches (2012, ABC) and $#*! My Dad Says (2010–2011, CB) not for including swear words in principle, but for including a swear word that will need to be censored or abbreviated, which then makes it either difficult to pronounce the title or encourages the explicit use of the swear word, prompting calls for boycotts (Heussner 2010). A similar example is the Canadian series Schitt’s Creek (2015–2020, CBC). Reviewing the series for NPR’s Fresh Air, David Bianculli said the following:

The name of the town also is the name of this TV series, and there’s a reason the deed to the town was bought as a joke. It’s a joke I can’t say on the radio, but the second word is creek. The first is spelled S-C-H-I-T-T—apostrophe-S and rhymes with spits. From now on, I’ll just call it ‘Creek’. (Bianculli 2015: n.p.)

Swearing catchphrases package swear words in such a way that mitigates acts of swearing, a strategy evident in the titles of such series as those listed above as well as the recent releases The End of the F***ing World (2017–, UK Channel 4) and Kevin Can F**k Himself (2021–, AMC). Additional series currently in development include, Fuck! I’m In My Twenties (NBC); How The Fuck Am I Normal (ABC), Dumb Fuck (ABC) and Grow The Fuck Up (NBC). These latter titles are conspicuously catchphrase-like in structure and evidently function as emotive responses, suggesting that swearing catchphrases are indeed catching on. Further research would ideally investigate this development and attitudes towards swearing whether used in catchphrases, in the titles of television series, or more generally invoked for popular cultural references.

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Notes
1. Percentages are intended to provide a proportional perspective, and as they are rounded up or down to the nearest whole number, the total may not equal 100.
2. Saturday Night Live has run from 1975 to the present; these dates indicate the period that the catchphrase was used.
3. The four subsets comprise: (1) those excluded from McEnery’s bad language categorisation, (2) non-swearing catchphrases, (3) pseudo-swearing catchphrases and (4) swearing catchphrases.

4. https://www.avclub.com/fuck-there-are-a-lot-of-fucking-new-tv-shows-with-fuc-1798234480

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Appendix 1. List of catchphrase websites

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_catchphrases#In_American_television
https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/tv-land-lists-the-100-greatest-television-catchphrases/
https://www.tvguide.com/news/tvs-60-greatest-catchphrases-1070102/
https://clickamericana.com/media/television-shows/10-top-tv-catchphrases-of-the-60s
https://clickamericana.com/media/television-shows/10-top-tv-catchphrases-of-the-70s
https://clickamericana.com/media/television-shows/10-top-tv-catchphrases-of-the-80s
https://www.eonline.com/news/801701/the-26-best-90s-tv-catchphrases-ranked
https://www.kansas.com/entertainment/tv/article1019705.html
https://uproxx.com/tv/tv-catchphrases-2010s/

Appendix 2. The television catchphrase dataset

| Non-swearing catchphrases | Bad language category | Impoliteness formula |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Yabba dabba do! Fred Flintstone, *The Flintstones* | 1960–1966 | ABC | General expletive | N/A |
| 2. Surprise, surprise, surprise! Gomer Pyle, *The Andy Griffith Show* | 1960–1968 | CBS | General expletive | N/A |
| 3. Sock it to me! Various, *Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-In* | 1967–1973 | NBC | Idiomatic set phrase | N/A |
| 4. Hey hey hey! Fat Albert, *Fat Albert* | 1972–1985 | CBS | General expletive | N/A |
| 5. Aaay! Fonzie, *Happy Days* | 1974–1984 | ABC | General expletive | N/A |

(continued)
## Non-swearing catchphrases

| Number | Phrase                  | Performer/Show                          | Year(s) | Network   | Bad language category | Impoliteness formula |
|--------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------|-----------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 6.     | Dyn-o-mite!             | J.J., *Good Times*                      | 1974–1979 | CBS       | General expletive     | N/A                  |
| 7.     | Schwing!                | Wayne and Garth, *Saturday Night Live*  | 1975–    | NBC       | General expletive     | N/A                  |
| 8.     | Hey hey hey!            | Dwayne Nelson, *What's Happening!*      | 1976–1979 | ABC       | General expletive     | N/A                  |
| 9.     | Cowabunga!              | Bart, *The Simpsons*                    | 1989–    | Fox       | General expletive     | N/A                  |
| 10.    | Excellent!              | Mr. Burns, *The Simpsons*               | 1989–    | Fox       | General expletive     | N/A                  |
| 11.    | Whoa!                   | Joey, *Blossom*                         | 1990–1995 | NBC       | General expletive     | N/A                  |
| 12.    | Hey now!                | Hank Kingsley, *The Larry Sanders Show* | 1992–1998 | HBO       | General expletive     | N/A                  |
| 13.    | Bam!                    | Emeril Lagasse, *Emeril Live*           | 1997–2007 | Food Network | General expletive | N/A                  |
| 14.    | Dude!                   | Hurley, *Lost*                          | 2004–2010 | ABC       | General expletive     | N/A                  |
| 15.    | Legendary!              | Barney, *How I Met Your Mother*         | 2005–2014 | CBS       | General expletive     | N/A                  |
| 16.    | Bazinga!                | Sheldon, *The Big Bang Theory*          | 2007–2019 | CBS       | General expletive     | N/A                  |
| 17.    | Cool, cool, cool!       | Abed, *Community*                       | 2009–2015 | NBC       | General expletive     | N/A                  |
| 18.    | Pop, pop!               | Magnitude, *Community*                  | 2009–2015 | NBC       | General expletive     | N/A                  |
| 19.    | A-mah-zing!             | Penny, *Happy Endings*                  | 2011–2013 | ABC       | General expletive     | N/A                  |
| 20.    | Wubba lubba dub dub!    | Rick, *Rick & Morty*                    | 2013–    | Cartoon Network | General expletive | N/A                  |

## Pseudo-swearing catchphrases

| Number | Phrase                  | Performer/Show                          | Year(s) | Network   | Bad language category | Impoliteness formula |
|--------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------|-----------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 21.    | Now cut that out!       | Jack Benny, *The Jack Benny Program*    | 1950–1965 | NBC       | Cursing expletive     | Silencer             |
| 22.    | Bang, zoom, straight to the moon! | Ralph Kramden, *The Honeymooners* | 1955–1956 | CBS       | Cursing expletive     | Threat               |
| 23.    | Gee, Mrs. Cleaver...    | Eddie Haskell, *Leave it to Beaver*     | 1957–1963 | ABC       | Religious oath        | Condescension        |

(continued)
| Pseudo-swearing catchphrases                                    | Bad language category | Impoliteness formula |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 24. Nip it! Barney Fife, The Andy Griffith Show                  | CBS                   | Cursing expletive    |
| 25. Ruh-roh! Astro, The Jetsons                                | ABC                   | General expletive    |
| 26. Good grief! Charlie Brown, Peanuts specials                 | CBS                   | Religious oath       |
| 27. Makin’ whoopie Bob Eubanks, The Newlywed Game               | ABC                   | Literal usage        |
| 28. Holy (X), Batman!                                          | ABC                   | Religious oath       |
| 29. If it weren’t for you meddling kids! Various, Scooby Doo, Where Are You? | CBS | Premodifying negative adj |
| 30. Oh my nose! Marcia Brady, The Brady Bunch                   | ABC                   | General expletive    |
| 31. Ruh-roh! Scooby-Doo, Scooby Doo, Where Are You?            | CBS                   | General expletive    |
| 32. Stifle! Archie Bunker, All in the Family                    | CBS                   | Cursing expletive    |
| 33. You big dummy! Fred Sanford, Sanford and Son                | NBC                   | Personal insult      |
| 34. God’ll get you for that. Maude Findlay, Maude               | CBS                   | Religious oath       |
| 35. Sit on it! Various, Happy Days                             | ABC                   | Cursing expletive    |
| 36. Up your nose with a rubber hose! Vinnie Barbarino, Welcome Back, Kotter | ABC | Cursing expletive    |
| 37. Jane, you ignorant slut. Dan Aykroyd, Saturday Night Live  | NBC                   | Personal insult      |
| 38. Kiss my grits! Flo, Alice                                  | CBS                   | Cursing expletive    |
| 39. Oh nooooo! Mr. Bill, Saturday Night Live                   | NBC                   | General expletive    |
| 40. What’choo talkin’ ’bout, Willis? Arnold, Drummond, Different Strokes | NBC | Idiomatic set phrase |
| 41. How rude! Stephanie, Full House                            | ABC                   | General expletive    |
| 42. Cut. It. Out. Joey, Full House                             | ABC                   | Idiom                |

(continued)
| Pseudo-swearing catchphrases | Bad language category | Impoliteness formula |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 43. Have mercy! Jesse, *Full House* | 1987–1995 | ABC | Religious oath | N/A |
| 44. Oh mylanta! Various, *Full House* | 1987–1995 | ABC | Religious oath | N/A |
| 45. Don’t have a cow, man! Bart, *The Simpsons* | 1989– | Fox | Cursing expletive | Condescension |
| 46. Eat my shorts! Bart, *The Simpsons* | 1989– | Fox | Cursing expletive | Negative expressive |
| 47. Why you little…! Homer, *The Simpsons* | 1989– | Fox | Personal insult | Insult (PNV) |
| 48. D’oh! Homer, *The Simpsons* | 1989– | Fox | General expletive | N/A |
| 49. No soup for you! The Soup Nazi, *Seinfeld* | 1989–1998 | NBC | Cursing expletive | Dismissal |
| 50. Hello, Newman! Jerry, *Seinfeld* | 1989–1998 | NBC | Personal insult | Insult (PNV) |
| 51. Homey don’t play that! Homey the Clown, *In Living Color* | 1990–1994 | Fox | Figurative extension | Criticism |
| 52. Dumb babies! Angelica Pickels, *Rugrats* | 1991–2006 | Nickelodeon | Personal insult | Insult (P3P) |
| 53. You eediot! Ren, *Ren & Stimpy* | 1991–1996 | Nickelodeon | Personal insult | Insult (PNV) |
| 54. It stinks! Jay Sherman, *The Critic* | 1994–1995 | ABC | Imagery | Criticism |
| 55. Holy crap! Frank Barone, *Everybody Loves Raymond* | 1996–2005 | CBS | Religious oath | N/A |
| 56. Freaking sweet! Peter Griffin, *Family Guy* | 1999– | Fox | Adverbial booster | N/A |
| 57. What the deuce? Stewie, *Family Guy* | 1999– | Fox | Idiomatic set phrase | N/A |
| 58. You are the weakest link. Anne Robinson, *The Weakest Link* | 2001–2003 | NBC | Personal insult | Insult (PNA) |
| 59. You’re fired! Donald Trump, *The Apprentice* | 2004–2017 | ABC | Personal insult | Dismissal |
| 60. Later boners. Dee, *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* | 2005– | FX | Personal insult | Insult (PNV) |
| 61. Shut it down! Liz Lemon, *30 Rock* | 2006–2013 | NBC | Cursing expletive | Silencer |
| 62. Blergh! Liz Lemon, *30 Rock* | 2006–2013 | NBC | General expletive | N/A |
### Pseudo-swearing catchphrases

| Catchphrase | Actor/Source | Year(s) | Channel | Bad language category | Impoliteness formula |
|-------------|--------------|---------|---------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 63. Shut up, Leonard! | Various, *Community* | 2009–2015 | NBC | Cursing expletive | Silencer |
| 64. You know nothing, Jon Snow. | Yvette, *Game of Thrones* | 2011–2019 | HBO | Personal insult | Insult (PNA) |
| 65. Ya basic! | Eleanor, *The Good Place* | 2016–2020 | NBC | Personal insult | Insult (PNA) |
| 66. Holy motherfucking shirtballs! | Eleanor, *The Good Place* | 2016–2020 | NBC | Religious oath | N/A |
| 67. Holy chalupas! | Max, *Fuller House* | 2016–2020 | Netflix | Religious oath | N/A |

### Swearing catchphrases

| Catchphrase | Actor/Source | Year(s) | Channel | Bad language category | Impoliteness formula |
|-------------|--------------|---------|---------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 68. Oh. My. God! | Janice, *Friends* | 1994–2004 | NBC | Religious oath | N/A |
| 69. Oh, my God! They killed Kenny! You bastards! | Stan and Kyle, *South Park* | 1997–2006 | Comedy Central | Religious oath/Personal insult | Insult (PNV) |
| 70. Dumbass! | Red, *That 70s Show* | 1998–2004 | Fox | Personal insult | Insult (PNV) |
| 71. Absofuckinglutely! | Big, *Sex and the City* | 1999–2013 | HBO | Adverbial booster | N/A |
| 72. Bite my shiny metal ass! | Bender, *Futurama* | 2002–2008 | Comedy Central | Cursing expletive | Negative expressive |
| 73. Peter, what the hell? | Lois, *Family Guy* | 1999– | Fox | Idiomatic set phrase | Unpalatable questions |
| 74. Shiiit. | Clay Davis, *The Wire* | 2002–2006 | HBO | General expletive | N/A |
| 75. I’m Rick James, bitch! | Dave Chappelle as Rick James, *Chappelle’s Show* | 2003–2006 | Comedy Central | Personal insult | Insult (PNV) |
| 76. Hug it out, bitch! | Ari Gold, *Entourage* | 2004–2011 | HBO | Personal insult | Insult (PNV) |
| 77. Son of a bitch! | Sawyer, *Lost* | 2004–2010 | ABC | Idiomatic set phrase | N/A |
| 78. You son of a bitch! | Lilly, *How I Met Your Mother* | 2005–2014 | CBS | Personal insult | Insult (PNV) |
| 79. Wild card, bitches! | Charlie, *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* | 2005– | FX | Personal insult | Insult (PNV) |

(continued)
| Swearing catchphrases       | Bad language category      | Impoliteness formula |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 80. What’s up, bitches?     | Mac, It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia | 2005–FX | Personal insult | Insult (PNV) |
| 81. Goddamnit!             | Various, It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia | 2005–FX | Religious oath | N/A |
| 82. Good God, Lemon!       | Jack, 30 Rock             | 2006–2013 NBC | Religious oath | Condescension |
| 83. Yo, bitch!             | Jesse, Breaking Bad       | 2008–2013 AMC | Personal insult | Insult (PNV) |
| 84. Don’t fuck it up!      | RuPaul, RuPaul’s Drag Race | 2009 Logo | Idiomatic set phrase | Negative expressive |
| 85. Suck a dick, dumbshit! | Various, Bo Jack Horsemann | 2014–2020 Netflix | Personal insult | Insult (PNV) |
| 86. This guy fucks!        | Russ Hanneman, Silicon Valley | 2014–2019 HBO | Imagery | N/A |
| 87. Black Jesus!           | Ruby, Black-ish           | 2014–2021 ABC | Religious oath | N/A |
| 88. Females are strong as hell! | Bystander, Kimmie Schmidt | 2015–2019 Netflix | Idiomatic set phrase | N/A |
| 89. Fuck off!              | Logan Roy/Various, Succession | 2018–2019 HBO | Destinalional Dismissal | |

Excluded catchphrases (not corresponding to McEnery’s categories for bad language)

| 90. We’ve got a really big show! | Ed Sullivan, The Ed Sullivan Show | 1948–1971 CBS | N/ | N/ |
| 91. Say good night, Gracie!     | George Burns, The Burns & Allen Show | 1950–1958 CBS | N/ | N/ |
| 92. This is the city ..!        | Sgt. Joe Friday, Dragnet         | 1951–1959 NBC | N/ | N/ |
| 93. Lucy, you got some splaining to do! | Ricky, I Love Lucy | 1951–1957 CBS | N/ | N/ |
| 94. Good night, and good luck!  | Edward R. Murrow, See It Now    | 1951–1958 CBS | N/ | N/ |
| 95. Look! Up in the sky! It’s a bird! It’s a plane! It’s Superman! | Various, Adventures of Superman | 1952–1958 Syndication | N/ | N/ |
| 96. How sweet it is!            | Jackie Gleason, The Jackie Gleason Show | 1952–1957 CBS | N/ | N/ |
| 97. Baby, you’re the greatest!  | Ralph Kramden, The Honeymooners | 1955–1956 CBS | N/ | N/ |
| 98. Smile, you’re on Candid Camera! | Various, Candid Camera | 1960–1975 ABC | N/ | N/ |

(continued)
(continued)

Excluded catchphrases (not corresponding to McEnery’s categories for bad language)

| Catchphrase | Character | Series | Channel | Year | Time Period |
|-------------|-----------|--------|---------|------|-------------|
| 99. What’s up, doc! | Bugs Bunny, The Bugs Bunny Show | 1960–1 | ABC | N/ | N/ |
| 100. The thrill of victory, and the agony of defeat! | Jim McKay, Wide World of Sports | 1961–9 | ABC | N/ | N/ |
| 101. And that’s the way it is! | Walter Cronkite, CBS Evening News | 1962–81 | CBS | N/ | N/ |
| 102. Here’s Johnny! | Ed McMahon, The Tonight Show | 1962–92 | NBC | N/ | N/ |
| 103. You rang! | Lurch, The Addams Family | 1964–92 | A | A |
| 104. Danger, Will Robinson! | Robot, Lost in Space | 1965–8 | CBS | N/ | N/ |
| 105. I know nothing! | Sgt. Schultz, Hogan’s Heroes | 1965–71 | CBS | N/ | N/ |
| 106. Would you believe! | Maxwell Smart, Get Smart | 1965–70 | A | A |
| 107. This tape will self-destruct in five seconds! | Male voice, Mission: Impossible | 1966–73 | CBS | N/ | N/ |
| 108. Space, the final frontier… | Captain Kirk, Star Trek | 1966–9 | Syndication | N/ | N/ |
| 109. Live long and prosper! | Spock, Star Trek | 1966–9 | NBC | N/ | N/ |
| 110. To the Batmobile! | Batman, Batman | 1966–8 | A | A |
| 111. Mom always liked you best! | Tommy Smothers, The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour | 1967–69 | CBS | N/ | N/ |
| 112. Book ‘em, Danno! | Steve McGarrett, Hawaii Five-O | 1968–80 | CBS | N/ | N/ |
| 113. Won’t you be my neighbor? | Mr. Rogers, Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood | 1968–01 | PBS | N/ | N/ |
| 114. What you see is what you get! | Geraldine, The Flip Wilson Show | 1970–74 | NBC | N/ | N/ |
| 115. Never assume ..! | Felix Unger, The Odd Couple | 1970–75 | ABC | N/ | N/ |
| 116. Just one more thing ... | Columbo, Columbo | 1971–78 | NBC | N/ | N/ |
| 117. Good night, John Boy! | Various, The Waltons | 1972–81 | CBS | N/ | N/ |
| 118. Elizabeth, I’m coming! | Fred Sanford, Sanford and Son | 1972–77 | NBC | N/ | N/ |
| 119. Come on down! | Johnny Olson, The Price is Right | 1972– | CBS | N/ | N/ |

(continued)
Excluded catchphrases (not corresponding to McEnery’s categories for bad language)

| No. | Catchphrase | Show | Year(s) | Network | Gender | Actor(s) |
|-----|-------------|------|---------|---------|--------|----------|
| 120 | Who loves ya, baby? | Kojak, Kojak | 1973–1978 | CBS | N/A | A A |
| 121 | Never mind! | Gilda Radner, Saturday Night Live | 1975–1978 | NBC | N/A | A A |
| 122 | We are two wild and crazy guys! | Steve Martin and Dan Aykroyd, Saturday Night Live | 1977–1978 | NBC | N/A | A A |
| 123 | De plane! De plane! | Tattoo, Fantasy Island | 1977–1984 | ABC | N/A | A A |
| 124 | Don’t make me angry... | David Banner, The Incredible Hulk | 1977–1982 | CBS | N/A | A A |
| 125 | Thank you veddy much! | Latka, Taxi | 1978–1983 | ABC | N/A | A A |
| 126 | Nanu, nanu! | Mork, Mork and Mindy | 1978–1982 | ABC | N/A | A A |
| 127 | Let’s be careful out there! | Sgt. Esterhaus, Hill Street Blues | 1981–1987 | NBC | N/A | A A |
| 128 | I’m Larry, this is my brother Darryl... | Larry, Newhart | 1982–1990 | CBS | N/A | A A |
| 129 | Norm! | Various, Cheers | 1982–1993 | NBC | N/A | A A |
| 130 | I love it when a plan comes together. | Hannibal, The A-Team | 1983–1987 | NBC | N/A | A A |
| 131 | You look mahvelous! | Billy Crystal, Saturday Night Live | 1984–1985 | NBC | N/A | A A |
| 132 | Yeah, that’s the ticket! | Jon Lovitz, Saturday Night Live | 1985–1990 | NBC | N/A | A A |
| 133 | The balcony is closed. | Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert, Siskel & Ebert | 1986–2010 | Syndication | N/A | A A |
| 134 | Two thumbs up. | Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert, Siskel & Ebert | 1986–2010 | Syndication | N/A | A A |
| 135 | No problem! | Alf, Alf | 1986–1990 | NBC | N/A | A A |
| 136 | Well, isn’t that special. | Dana Carvey, Saturday Night Live | 1986–1990 | NBC | N/A | A A |
| 137 | Resistance is futile. | Captain Picard as Borg, Star Trek: The Next Generation | 1987–1994 | Syndication | N/A | A A |
| 138 | You got it, dude! | Michelle, Full House | 1987–1995 | ABC | N/A | A A |
| 139 | Make it so. | Captain Picard, Star Trek: The Next Generation | 1987–1994 | Syndication | N/A | A A |
| 140 | Yada, yada, yada... | Various, Seinfeld | 1989–1998 | NBC | N/A | A A |

(continued)
Excluded catchphrases (not corresponding to McEnery’s categories for bad language)

| No. | Phrase | Speaker | Show | Start Year | End Year | Channel | Keyword | Appearance |
|-----|--------|---------|------|------------|----------|---------|---------|------------|
| 141 | We’re not worthy! | Michael Myers and Dana Carvey | Saturday Night Live | 1989 | 1994 | NBC | N/A | A A |
| 142 | Did I do that? | Urkel | Family Matters | 1989 | 1998 | ABC | N/A | A A |
| 143 | I’m the baby, gotta love me! | Baby Sinclair | Dinosaurs | 1991 | 1994 | ABC | N/A | A A |
| 144 | The truth is out there. | Fox Mulder | The X-Files | 1993 | 2002 | Fox | N/A | A A |
| 145 | I’m listening. | Frasier | Frasier | 1993 | 2004 | NBC | N/A | A A |
| 146 | It’s a good thing. | Martha Stewart | Martha Stewart Living | 1993 | 2004 | Syndication | N/A | A A |
| 147 | I am Cornholio! | Beavis and Butthead | Beavis and Butthead | 1993 | 1997 | MTV | N/A | A A |
| 148 | Heh heh... | Beavis and Butthead | Beavis and Butthead | 1993 | 2011 | MTV | N/A | A A |
| 149 | How you doin’? | Joey Tribbiani | Friends | 1994 | 2004 | NBC | N/A | A A |
| 150 | Here it is, your moment of Zen. | Jon Stewart | The Daily Show | 1999 | 2015 | Comedy Central | N/A | A A |
| 151 | The tribe has spoken. | Jeff Probst | Survivor | 2000 | 2004 | CBS | N/A | A A |
| 152 | Is that your final answer? | Regis Philbin | Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? | 2000 | 2002 | ABC | N/A | A A |
| 153 | Will you accept this rose? | Various | The Bachelor | 2002 | 2002 | ABC | N/A | A A |
| 154 | That’s hot. | Paris Hilton | The Simple Life | 2003 | 2007 | Fox | N/A | A A |
| 155 | Tell me what you don’t like about yourself. | Dr. McNamara and Dr. Troy | Nip/Tuck | 2003 | 2010 | FX | N/A | A A |
| 156 | Denny Crane. | Denny Crane | Boston Legal | 2004 | 2008 | ABC | N/A | A A |
| 157 | Everybody lies. | Dr. House | House | 2004 | 2012 | Fox | N/A | A A |
| 158 | Make it work. | Tim Gunn | Project Runway | 2004 | 2017 | Bravo | N/A | A A |
| 159 | That’s what she said. | Michael Scott | The Office | 2005 | 2013 | NBC | N/A | A A |
| 160 | Suit up! | Barney | How I Met Your Mother | 2005 | 2014 | CBS | N/A | A A |
| 161 | Wait for it... | Barney | How I Met Your Mother | 2005 | 2014 | CBS | N/A | A A |
Excluded catchphrases (not corresponding to McEnery’s categories for bad language)

| Number | Catchphrase | Character(s) | Series | Network | Year(s) | McEnery | Hall | AAE |
|--------|-------------|--------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|------|-----|
| 162    | I want to go to there. | Liz Lemon, 30 Rock | 2006–2013 | NBC | N/ N/ | A A |
| 163    | Clear eyes, full hearts, can’t lose! | Coach Taylor, Friday Night Lights | 2006–2011 | NBC | N/ N/ | A A |
| 164    | We’ve got a situation... | Mike Sorrentino, Jersey Shore | 2009–2012 | MTV | N/ N/ | A A |
| 165    | Treat yo’self! | Donna and Tom, Parks & Rec | 2009–2015 | NBC | N/ N/ | A A |
| 166    | Winter is coming. | Various, Game of Thrones | 2011–2019 | HBO | N/ N/ | A A |
| 167    | Title of your sex tape! | Jake, Brooklyn 99 | 2012–2022 | Fox | N/ N/ | A A |
| 168    | I’m a doctor. I save lives. | Bow, Black-ish | 2014–2021 | ABC | N/ N/ | A A |