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Sociolinguistics of Swearing

A corpus-based investigation of male and female use of *damn*, *darn*,
hell and *heck* in soap operas compared to real life



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This essay will investigate male and female usage of four swear words: *hell*, *heck*, *damn* and *darn*. A minor part of the essay focuses on comparing real life speech (by using the Longman Corpus of Spoken American English) with scripted language in soap operas (the SOAP corpus). The main part of the essay focuses on a detailed investigation of the four swear words in the SOAP corpus to see how they are used considering gender.

Preliminary hypotheses were both correct and incorrect. Even though it was true that women use the milder forms of swearing in the company of men, men however use the harsher forms in the company of women. Moreover, *heck* seems to be a very neutral swear word used by men and women equally. *Hell* was most frequently used by men, and *darn* was very frequent among women. Overall, there was very little female to female swearing, and the category with the highest instances of usage of three of the four swear words was in fact male to female.

Keywords: Damn, darn, heck, hell, soap operas, sociolinguistics, swearing

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1. Introduction

An article from *The Telegraph* by Nick Collins in 2012 [online] suggests that characters from teen fiction are considered more popular if they swear. They are generally seen as rich and attractive. There are many more reasons why we swear than being popular, partly because we can never fully trust that the reasons that people might have for swearing is sincere but also since we all have different reasons. However, it can be interesting to know which words we use when we swear in particular surroundings and also how often they actually occur. Even though we might think that we do not swear very frequently Jay (2009: 155–156) shows that we utter approximately 15,000–16,000 words per day, of which 80–90 are swear words, which is a percentage of 0.5–0.7%. There are many different definitions of ‘swearing’, but the bottom line is that everyone uses it in some way. Allan & Burrige (2006: 89) suggest that everyone knows how to insult although some people choose not to, even though they have passive knowledge of it. What we consider an insult is based upon very individual examples, but Allan & Burrige note that it has to do with several different factors:

- “Who we are and whom we are communicating with;
- Whether we are speaking or writing;
- Where we are and when the utterance takes place;
- What we are talking about and
- How we feel about the whole situation. (2006: 75)”

Therefore insulting and cursing is evidently very individual. However, there are some words that are fairly well-known in the category of swearing. Such as *fuck*, *damn*, *hell*, *shit* and many more. For this essay four quite well-known words have been selected to be compared to each other. The reason for using these words is because they are allowed on television and also because they have a milder (or more euphemistic) and a harsher form. These words are:

- (1) Damn ↔ Darn
- (2) Hell ↔ Heck

Preliminary hypotheses are that *damn* and *hell* are more commonly used in genuine spoken language, as well as being used more by men and that *darn* and *heck* are more common in soap-opera contexts compared to the other examples and are used more by

women. As has been argued by many scholars, women use a more refined or milder form of cursing. For example Jay (1992: 60–70) found in one study that eight- to twelve-year-old boys use words such as *fuck*, *shit* and *damn* while the girls the same age tend to use subtler forms such as *God*, *darn it* or *shucks*. Why women feel the need to use the milder forms is probably a concept that can be connected to the image of how a ‘lady’ is supposed to behave according to western society. Even though times are changing to a more equal society there are still a lot of old values remaining.

This essay will examine the difference between soap-opera language and genuine spoken language to briefly get an overlook of how we are expected to swear according to soap operas on television and how we actually swear. Television is being censored for the sake of keeping their viewer numbers as high as possible, to make it appropriate for all ages as Hughes (1991: 199) indicates: “advertisers could pressurize television networks to keep their programmes ‘clean’, withdrawing their revenues if there was no co-operation, (...)”. Consequently, all the television networks now have in-house censors (termed the Standards and Practices Office) whose function it is to eliminate or ration ‘offensive’ material. How censored the language of the soap operas is concerning swearing and how it is distributed between male and female is to be investigated in this thesis.

To research swearing in soap operas the SOAP corpus [[www.http://corpus2.byu.edu/soap/](http://corpus2.byu.edu/soap/)] will be used and 400 samples (100 of each swear word) will be extracted and investigated further. Each sample consists of the sentence in which the swear words is found, and also the response following immediately after by another person, as shown in (1):

(1) Joey: Kelly, that's a *heck* of a risk.

Kelly: Not if I'm careful. And it's worth it, any risk, to have a baby. [SOAP 27 Oct 2012]

After the samples have been collected the sex of both speaker and recipient will be determined and further research will be conducted to see if there are any clear patterns emerging.

Research questions

- What is the difference between swearing in a soap opera on television and swearing in actual spoken language? Is there even a difference?

- How do men and women use *damn/darn* and *hell/heck* in the SOAP corpus? Do women actually use a ‘milder’ form of cursing? If so, in the company of men?

- In what phraseological patterns do these words occur in the corpus?

1.1 Preliminary hypotheses

Preliminary hypotheses:

- (1) *Damn* and *hell* are more frequent in LCSAE than in SOAP (will be counted as words per million).
- (2) *Damn* and *hell* are more frequently used by men in SOAP.
- (3) *Darn* and *heck* are more frequently used by women in SOAP.
- (4) Women use milder forms of swearing in the company of men in SOAP.

2. Theoretical background

Since the SOAP corpus is a very new corpus, there are very few (if any) earlier studies about swearing in soap operas that can be used to compare with this one. Therefore, the background will mostly consist of earlier studies about swearing in real life. Because of the lack of earlier research about swearing in the SOAP corpus this investigation will be of high relevance and might be an inspiration for further research.

2.1 What is swearing and why do we do it?

A definition of ‘swearing’ is important in order for this thesis to be investigated. In order to get a picture of what swearing actually is we look at many different sources, although in the end the description of it is almost always the same or at least very similar. This essay may not provide any new definitions of swearing, but it can definitely gather many of them to make it clear which ones are the most frequent and by that give a clearer image of how swearing is defined.

As stated in the introduction, Allan & Burrige (2006: 75) have found that swearing is influenced by whom we are communicating with, if we are speaking or writing, where we are, what we talk about and which mood we are in. Andersson & Trudgill contributes with a few more rules when they define swearing as when we refer to something that is forbidden in the culture, should not be interpreted literally and can be used to express intense feelings (1990: 53). These rules are not very precise, they are actually left to be interpreted by the individual

which in the end is their sole purpose. When we swear we express intense feelings at someone or something and so quite obviously it is personal and must be formed under those circumstances at which they occur. As Allan and Burridge also put it: “to swear at someone or something is to insult and deprecate the object of abuse, as well as to use other kinds of dysphemism” (2006: 76). We express our disliking or objection of something or someone by using otherwise seen as “tabooed” language.

However, swearing does not only express intense *disliking*, it can also show appreciation. For example consider this sentence: “I love you so fucking much right now!”. This does not exactly sound negative. Of course such sentences can be used with sarcasm, as can words and sentences overall, which makes the negative or positive state a question of context. Another positive possibility of swearing is that it might help prevent the use of physical violence according to Jay (2000: 59): “It would be wrong to assume that verbal aggression is only a negative emotion. (...) One positive aspect of cursing is that it replaces more primitive physical aggression. Most would agree that it is better to yell at people than to hit them on the head”. Most people probably agree with Jay that we rather have someone yell something at us than throw a brick at our heads. In scripted language, such as in the SOAP corpus, Jay’s theory of words versus actions will probably not be accurately portrayed. It can however show the mood of the scene by using more or less harsh words, and whom the recipients of these are.

As stated earlier there are possibly infinite reasons to why we swear. According to Ashley Montagu (1967: 1–2) it has always been a taboo in many societies to use swear words, people in the past used them too shock their recipients and really express how angry they were. For example it was not unusual in many societies that no one could say the names of gods, so to really anger someone they used the gods’ names in a forbidden and outrageous manner. It shows that swearing has always been a way of standing out from the norm and act in a rebellious way. Montagu also points out that we swear differently depending on our surroundings. If in a social situation where we like to keep a low or more quiet profile we are more likely to say for example “Crap!” instead of “Fuck!” since *crap* is generally considered to be a milder swear word than *fuck*. This might be the case with how women swear in company of other women compared to men, in order to seem neat, orderly or more lady-like. The SOAP corpus shows how writers think we speak, and it will be established if the case is that women swear less or use milder forms in the company of men. This essay should be able to give a clearer image of this in the end.

Jay (2000: 137) states that “cursing intensifies emotional expressions in a manner that inoffensive words cannot achieve”. When we feel that we have the need to express our opinions extremely sometimes ordinary words are not enough. We want people to understand exactly how much this means to us and we need to attract their attention to this particular opinion or situation, either in a positive or a negative context. This could be very important in soap operas in order for the actors to accurately portray the emotion their character is said to have. Jay (2009: 154) also comments that “swearing is like using the horn on your car, which can be used to signify a number of emotions (e.g., anger, frustration, joy, surprise)”. Since swear words are not normally used in a neutral everyday situation at work for example it creates a moment of surprise when suddenly used, and sometimes this is exactly what we want when we need to express ourselves in a more intense manner. Allan and Burridge also comment on this when we use different styles in language: “Usually, the speaker’s stylistic choices are tuned to create just the impression s/he wants to create(...)” (2006: 75). In other words, we form our choice of appropriate language after how we want to express ourselves. In a moment of anger we feel the need to express how much we dislike the situation by using what is normally probably considered foul language. We expect the listener/s to comprehend how extreme our anger or dislike is since we use words we normally do not. As Jay claims in his article from 2009: “Taboo words are sanctioned or restricted on both institutional and individual levels under the assumption that some harm will occur if a taboo word is spoken” (2009: 153).

2.2 Why is swearing seen as bad?

Allan and Burridge (2006: 76) states that “the original meaning of the verb *swear* is ‘to take an oath; make a solemn declaration, statement, affirmation, promise or undertaking; often in the eyes of God or in relation to some sacred object so that the swearer is, by implication, put in grave danger if found to be lying’”. If this is the case, then you might start to wonder how swearing became an indecent and tabooed behavior. As stated before, Montagu found that tabooed language has always existed and has often had to do with religion, starting with not being allowed to use the names of gods and later probably developing into not being allowed to swear in for example church or other religious places of equal status. Jay (2009: 153) suggests that tabooed language becomes tabooed language because we avoid using certain words because they might be a bit obscene or embarrassing to use. The ones that used tabooed language anyway were likely already or became of low class or outcasts, or as McEneaney

suggests: “As bad language was deemed to be immoral, the societies set in train the process which made swearing a mark of low class status, or at least of non–middle–classness” (2006: 84). His research showed that in order for the middle class to separate itself from the lower class they sought a role of moral leadership. For the middle class to be able to distinguish itself they started associating foul or bad language with the lower class and made sure that they themselves did not use it, in order to show a higher degree of moral (2006: 84).

2.3 Censoring

McEnery argues that many people have tried to censor language from foul words and attitudes for a very long time, although without success: “In spite of all of the attempts of moral entrepreneurs and government bills, bad language has survived censorship in all of its forms” (2006: 62). When television was invented it brought up many new opportunities for spreading information and news, but also entertainment. Television was according to Hughes “essentially a family medium” (1991: 199) and so they had to refrain from showing immorality and anything considered an abomination to prevent children from being influenced by it. Between the years 1947 and 1964 the number of families owning a television in the United Kingdom increased from 0.2% to 90.8% (McEnery 2006: 121). At the beginning of the 1960’s the broadcasts started to change, wanting to show a more ‘real’ perception of society. Hugh Green, who became the new director of the BBC in 1960 when the ratings had dropped considerably, brought about a historic change: he changed the direction of the network to a more realistic portrayal of British society which showed all sides of life, not only the safe and cosy middle class (McEnery 2006: 122). This can also be seen in soap operas which, as Gunter, Harrison & Wykes (2003: 182) suggest, display realistic surroundings: “By the 1970s, this situation changed with the emergence of research exploring the content of soaps and the way they represented aspects of social reality”. They continue with relating to what social and cultural meaning soaps have and how the genre conveys social reality to viewers (2003: 182).

When forbidden to do or say something, human nature has a tendency to want to do the exact opposite. Parents telling children to keep away from a certain place or thing are actually just presenting them with a challenge; it is in our nature to be curious. Thus when told not to swear some of us do it anyway, some with no remorse and some with the immediate bad conscience. We do however mostly try not to use bad language when at work or in public. According to McEnery censoring of spoken language has always been difficult: “The

“censorship of speech produced in private has proved to be difficult whenever it has been attempted. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that swearing has proved incredibly resilient in its spoken form” (2006: 61).

2.4 Which genres of words mostly occur in swearing?

In his article from 2009 Jay brings up certain genres that swear words tend to end up in: “Although there are hundreds of taboo words and phrases, 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*) and on those that are considered profane or blasphemous (*goddamn, Jesus Christ*). Taboos 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, lard ass*); ancestral allusions (*son of a bitch, bastard*); substandard vulgar terms (*fart face, on the rag*); and offensive slang (*cluster fuck, tit run*)” (2009: 154). These seem to be the ones that are most common and it is also usual that a compound of two or more genres are made, like *goddamn cunt, fucktard* or *fuckface*.

Allan and Burridge strengthens Jay’s argument with the following quote: “People may be likened to, and ascribed behavior pertaining to, animals, SMD body parts and effluvia, sexual perversions, physical and mental abnormalities, character deficiencies, or attacked with –IST dysphemisms” (2006: 89). Andersson’s and Trudgill’s comments on this subject is that a lot of the English swear words come from areas of sex and bodily functions (1990: 74). It is interesting that we mostly use these genres and not words for furniture or food for example. Most of the words are considered taboo, like *cunt* or *nigger*, which might be a reason why it makes them a subject of interest when we want to show anger towards someone. However, like mentioned earlier Jay’s example of *Jesus Christ* is not dirty or foul in the context of genuine religious intent. It is in fact not directly considered dirty at all, and is mostly used as an exclamation, like “Jesus Christ Andrew! You really are a fucking idiot!” where in fact the word that makes the sentence negative is the word *idiot*.

2.5 Gender in soap operas

The way that gender differences are shown in soap opera is of importance for this research since the more detailed investigation will concern quite a large number of comparisons between male and female swearing in conversation. Brown (1994: 31) argues that “bitching, the third function of gossip, is an overt expression of women’s anger at their restricted role and inferior social status”. She also mentions a fourth function, which is said to be chatting, and that it is a way of showing trust between participants. Brown (1994: 37) also comments further on this by suggesting that women have different ways of managing their positions in society, and one of these is to talk and relate to other women via oral networks. On the other hand, she also mentions the problems women can sometimes encounter when wanting to be taken seriously (Brown, 1994: 33): “in certain contexts, women’s speech is simply not taken seriously. In groups including men and women, women’s comments are often ignored, women are interrupted more often than men, and women’s ideas are often attributed to others (cited from DeVault. 1990)”.

Fiske (1987: 186) comments on how the men can be seen in soap operas with “the ‘good’ male in the daytime soaps is caring, nurturing, and verbal (...) of course he is still decisive, he still has masculine power, but that power is given a “feminine” inflection”. He also describes the women in soap operas to be in constant struggle to achieve power, but that they never really seem to acquire it (Fiske 1988: 184). It is arguable if soap operas actually portray real-life values, but on the other hand, as Gunter, Harrison & Wykes (2003: 181) suggest: “Although a fictional genre, the power of soaps derived from their focus on everyday problems involving characters who were portrayed as real people”. Thus, soap operas might be seen as a mirror image of how some people want society to look like. Fiske (1987: 184) also comments on how sexuality is displayed in soap operas, which can describe some of the purpose for the existence of soap operas overall: “soap opera sexuality is concerned with seduction and emotion rather than, as masculine sexuality is, with achievement and climax”. That is to say, soap operas are based on constant and long term pleasures and excitement.

A note which does not directly concern only soap operas but also reality in general, Jay (1992: 123) argues that men and women are more likely to swear when they are in the company of the same sex. This might be logical if we want to display a more decent image of ourselves in order to attract the other sex. Thus, at some times, we hide what might be seen as our bad personality qualities, such as swearing.

2.6 *Damn, darn, hell* and *heck*

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), *hell* in the sense as a swear word, that is to say like “to hell with...” or “the hell with”, was first used in 1602 by B. Johnsson in *Poetaster*: “The hell thou wilt. What, turn law into verse?”. Other than that *hell* is the place where the dead dwell in Christian religious traditions. *Heck* is a “euphemistic alteration of *hell*” according to OED. It was first used in 1865. *Damn* is described to be the clipped form of *damned*, which means condemned or judicially sentenced. *Damned* was first used in 1440 and the first use of *damn* as a profanity is found in 1625. According to the OED *darn* is a kind of arbitrary deformation or misrepresentation of *damn* and was first used in a profane way in 1781 and apparently it is most usual in the US. Considering the definitions the preliminary hypotheses still stand, it seems as if *darn* and *heck* are indeed milder (or deformed) forms of *damn* and *hell*.

3. Material & Method

A minor and very quick search was made to see which of the most common swear words were relevant for this research. The criteria were that they had to be allowed on television and therefore included in SOAP corpus and also that they had a synonym that is a milder or euphemistic form of the word. Two words that emerged fairly quick were *hell* and *damn*, which had their milder forms *heck* and *darn*. After a more detailed research these choices still stood strong compared to others like *fuck* which is not included in SOAP corpus for example. That both have religious background is merely a coincidence.

For this essay, two corpora will be used and the results compared: (1) SOAP corpus (Corpus of American Soap Operas) and (2) LCSAE (Longman Corpus of Spoken American English). According to Karen Stern [pearsonlongman.com] LCSAE is a gathering of conversations from more than 1000 Americans from various age groups, gender, ethnicity and so on. The reason for using LCSAE is that it has a broad view of real-life speech in America, which is needed for this essay in order to compare it to the written version of how we think we speak, which is represented in the SOAP corpus. However, the more detailed research will be made using SOAP. The SOAP corpus is a very new corpus, which makes it desirable to use since there are so many new topics to be investigated that have not been possible until present day. It shows us how we think we speak, which can be very intriguing when it comes to tabooed language since it gives a false picture of how we swear. For example, as mentioned

before, not all swear words are allowed on television, suggesting we should not use them at all. SOAP corpus consists of one hundred million words, and LCSAE consists of 5,1 million words.

Another reason for choosing *damn/darn* and *hell/heck* is quite simple: because they are very frequent. According to a list of the ten most frequent swear words on television in 2010 that was made by 11points.com in November 2010, *hell* is on second place (after the quite obvious number 1: *fuck*) and *damn* comes in fourth place. Jay also did a study of the ten most common swear words on the east coast of America, and both *hell* and *damn* are included (1999: 264). *Heck* is considered a milder synonym to *hell* just as *darn* is to *damn*, and because of that they will be compared in real life speech (LCSAE) and in soap-opera language (SOAP corpus) to see if it really is the case that the milder forms are used on television and the rougher forms in real life. This is however only a minor part of the study since the major part will consist of an investigation of the SOAP corpus in more detail to see how the four swear words are used by men and women, and if there are any patterns of how they use it in conversations with other men and women as well as with the opposite sex.

Of course these two corpora cannot cover the whole English language, but they can give a small insight to what we are dealing with. Another problem that has occurred is that the corpora are different in size, but that can easily be counteracted by counting per million words. A third problem is how to compare female and male language. Since LCSAE is fairly hard to access the SOAP corpus will be the only corpus used for this. The SOAP corpus is not the perfect choice though; because it is scripted it features prescriptive rather than descriptive language. This refers to how the writers of the soap operas think people speak, and may not be an accurate representation of how we actually speak. This however does not have to be a problem, it can be interesting to see how we or the writers *think* women and men speak. As mentioned before in section 2.5, soap operas are the mirrored image of how some might want society to look like. The stereotypes that exist of how we think women and men speak might be shown to either agree or disagree with what we formerly thought. In the introduction it was made clear that 8–12-year-old girls have a milder language when cursing compared to boys. In the SOAP corpus which is written-to-be-spoken, and in a sense edited, it might be that there are more examples of men using rougher language than women, or that, because it is edited, men and women have the same type of language.

In order to investigate how swearing is used in the SOAP corpus 400 (100 of each swear word) samples were randomly extracted from the site online and inserted into Excel. They

were then categorized into the following categories: Sample, Sex of speaker, Response and Sex of recipient. For the instances where no recipient can be determined due to factors such as change of scene or uncertain/undetermined recipient (characters such as e.g. ‘minister’) the title ‘Other’ will be given. In some cases there are ways of determining the sex of recipient in other ways even though there is no response, if so these examples will be counted as well. For example the speaker mentions a name in their line, or it is possible to determine sex of recipient thanks to the previous lines or speakers.

One important note is that only the base forms for *damn* and *darn* were used, meaning that *damned* and *darned* have not been taken into consideration in the more detailed search in the SOAP corpus. This should not affect the results in any negative way, but rather limit it in a way more convenient way for comparisons. As will be seen in the results section, the *-ed* versions of the words in the SOAP corpus make up less than 8% (*damned* 5.1%, *darned* 7.8%) of the complete number of instances of the word.

Another important note is that only samples where it was clear who was speaking has been chosen. In some instances it was not possible to determine the speaker, therefore these instances were ignored and another sample was taken in its place. It can also be discussed whether *hell* is always a swear word, since it sometimes has only religious meaning with no intention of harm. However, not once did *hell* occur in a non-aggressive or religious way in the samples that were chosen for this research. It does not mean that it does not exist, only that it is not very common in soap operas. An uttering such as “go to hell” is still considered offensive and will be counted. However, having “one hell of a time” is probably not offensive but will still be counted because even though it is quite positive, *hell* as used in that sense is still a swear word.

It can also be of importance to mention *dang*, which could also be a milder form of *damn*. However, due to its low frequency in the SOAP corpus (100 instances), it will not be investigated in this thesis. Instead only *darn* will represent the milder form of *damn*, due to its higher frequency (718 instances). Another important note is that there are 400 tokens but that they are not evenly distributed over men and women. This part of the study is meant to investigate how certain swear words are used between genders in the SOAP corpus, and not how it they are used in female and male surroundings separately. That does not mean that the difference in numbers does not matter; to the contrary it shows that men might swear more than women.

4. Results

The hypotheses will be presented in numerical order to be investigated and discussed.

4.1 Hypothesis (1) *Damn* and *hell* are more frequent in LCSAE than in SOAP (will be counted as words per million):

Total instances in the corpora is presented in the following Table 4.1.1:

Table 1: total number of instances for *damn*, *darn*, *hell* and *heck* in SOAP and LCSAE.

	SOAP		LCSAE	
	N	Pmv	N	Pmv
Damn	28583	286	637	127.5
damned	1527	15	28	5.5
Damn(ed)	30110	301	665	133
Darn	718	7	115	23
darned	61	0.6	18	3.5
Darn(ed)	779	8	133	27
Hell	53650	537	719	144
heck	2043	20	150	30

This shows that hypothesis (1) is actually only half correct; the number of *hell(s)* in SOAP is higher than the number of *hell(s)* in LCSAE. Furthermore, *heck* and *darn* were also for frequent in LCSAE, although not by much. To see which of the variations that were most popular in each of the corpora, calculations were made and the result is as follows:

Table 2: percentage of variation of *damn*, *darn*, *hell* and *heck* in SOAP and LCSAE.

	SOAP		LCSAE	
	Damn 97.5%	Darn 2.5%	Damn 83.5%	Darn 16.5%
Hell/heck	Hell 96.5%	Heck 3.5%	Hell 82.5%	Heck 17.5%

This clearly shows that the harsher versions of the swear words are far more frequent in both corpora, but also that it is a little more evenly distributed in LCSAE. One reason for why *hell*, *heck* and *darn* are not so common in LCSAE could be that we in real life use words that are not allowed in soap operas, for example *fuck*. Therefore soap operas have to compensate for these words by using others in their place, such as *hell* for example. As stated in the

theoretical background (see section 2.1), we use harsher words or words considered “taboo language” to shock the recipient; hence the harsher the word, the clearer our anger might be portrayed. It must also be noted that the results for *hell* can be a little arguable, since there is use for it other than as a swear word. As mentioned in material and method (see section 3) it can be used in religious context. However, as was also mentioned earlier, there were no instances of *hell* being used in a religious sense among the tokens from the SOAP corpus that were included in this research.

4.2 Hypothesis (2) *Hell* and *damn* are more frequently used by men in SOAP.

Table 3 below shows that there were more male than female tokens collected from the SOAP corpus. This suggests that men swear more than women overall.

Table 3: Total samples from SOAP, divided into male and female.

Overall	400
Male	229
Female	171

The following numbers show how male and female speakers and recipients are distributed over the 400 tokens that were collected:

Table 4: sex of speaker and recipient of 400 (100 per word) samples in SOAP:

	HELL	HECK	DAMN	DARN
M speaker	75	51	67	36
F speaker	25	49	33	64
M recipient	50	43	44	50
F recipient	44	52	46	46
O recipient	6	5	10	4

Hell/Heck	M speak.		F speak.		M rec.		F rec.		O rec.	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hell	75	59.5	25	34	50	54	44	46	6	54.5
Heck	51	40.5	49	66	43	46	52	54	5	45.5
All	126	100	74	100	93	100	96	100	11	100

Damn/Darn	M speak.		F speak.		M rec.		F rec.		O rec.	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hell	67	65	33	34	44	47	46	50	10	71
Heck	36	35	64	66	50	53	46	50	4	29
All	103	100	74	100	94	100	92	100	14	100

The numbers above are gathered in Figure 1 below to make the differences easier to see:

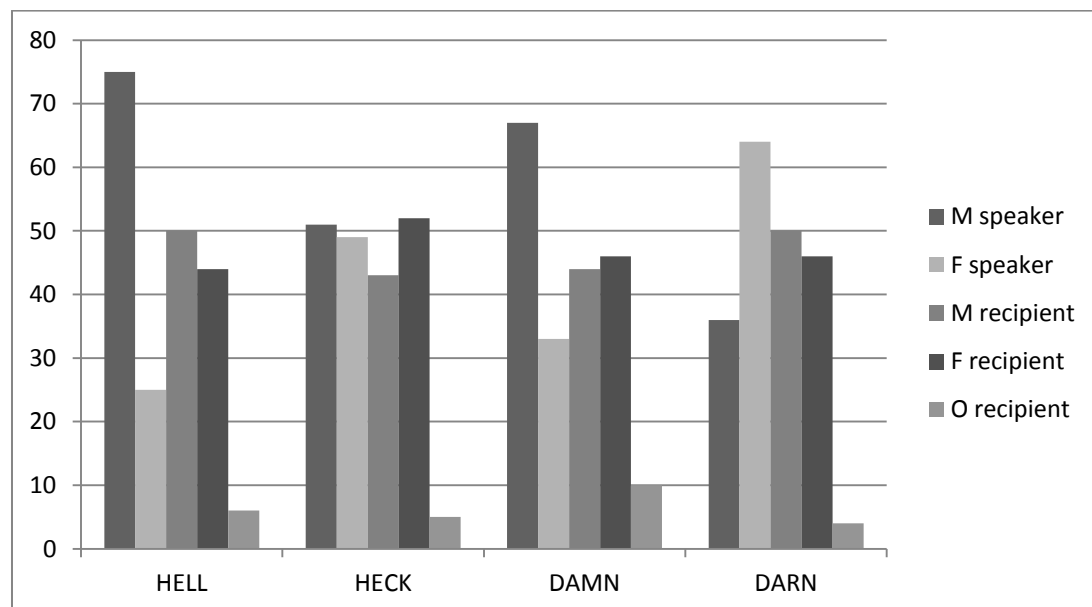


Figure 1: sex of speaker and recipient of 400 (100 per word) samples in SOAP.

The results show a very clear difference in female and male use of the word *hell*. Out of the 100 samples, two thirds were men speaking and the rest were women. *Damn* also shows a very clear difference even though the numbers are slightly lower. Hypothesis (2) was clearly correct.

4.3 Hypothesis (3) *Heck* and *darn* are more frequently used by women in SOAP.

For this hypothesis only one of two expectations was correct. *Darn* has a much higher number of female speakers than male ones throughout. *Heck* however is very evenly distributed over gender, although men still have a slightly higher number. Since the use of *heck* is remarkably even across genders, a more detailed investigation of the mood in the conversations was carried out. It might be possible to understand why both genders use the swear word if we see patterns in the mood of the conversations it is used in. If the mood is mostly neutral that might show why *heck* is also quite neutral. The mood of the conversations will be established by looking at the context and the reply, to see if there is shouting, hostility or anger etc.

Table 5: Mood in *heck* conversations

Positive:	23
Neutral/uncertain:	49
Negative:	28

It was true that a neutral mood was the most frequent, but this might be due to the difficulty in distinguishing what the mood was. The positive cases were quite clear and easily distinguished while the line between neutral and negative was more complex. For example, questions were hard to determine. However, if there were no obvious signs of anger or anxiety as in (2):

(2) Tom: Hey, where the *heck* do you think you're going?

Brad: Why are you so angry? [SOAP 25 Oct 2012]

(2) was counted as negative, because Brad actually questions Tom's anger. If there was no obvious sign of negativity, like the word *angry* is in (2), the sentence was counted as neutral. There were a few borderline cases, as in (3):

(3) Ashley: I'm happy you're back. Where the *heck* were you, and why didn't you keep in touch with us? (...) [SOAP 25 Oct 2012]

(3) was counted as negative, since even though Ashley says she is happy due someone being back, the rest is still uttered in an anxious manner. A representation of a positive mood can be seen in example (4) below:

(4) Whip: Bridget -- she's a *heck* of a young lady. [SOAP 25 oct 2012]

As mentioned earlier (see section 2.1) swearing does certainly not have to be negative. The research did not however give any clear patterns. The only suggestion to be made is that *heck* actually is evenly distributed between genders. Even in the category of recipient the gender distribution is even since men make out 43 of it and women 52 (+ 5 other).

4.4 Hypothesis (4) Women use milder forms of swearing in company of men in SOAP.

The following numbers show how male and female speakers are distributed in conversation in the 400 samples that were collected, and they are gathered in Figure 2 further down:

Table 6: number of males and females in conversation divided into sex of speaker and recipient

	HELL	HECK	DAMN	DARN
M to M conversation	30	13	22	7
F to F conversation	2	17	9	18
M to F conversation	42	35	38	28
F to M conversation	20	30	21	43
F/M to O	6	5	10	4

Hell/Heck	M to M conv.		F to F conv.		M to F conv.		F to M conv.		F/M to O conv.	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hell	30	70	2	10.5	42	54.5	20	40	6	54.5
Heck	13	30	17	89.5	35	45.5	30	60	5	45.5
All	43	100	19	100	77	100	50	100	11	100

Damn/Darn	M to M conv.		F to F conv.		M to F conv.		F to M conv.		F/M to O conv.	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Damn	22	76	9	33	38	57.5	21	33	10	71
Darn	7	24	18	67	28	42.5	43	67	4	29
All	29	100	27	100	66	100	64	100	14	100

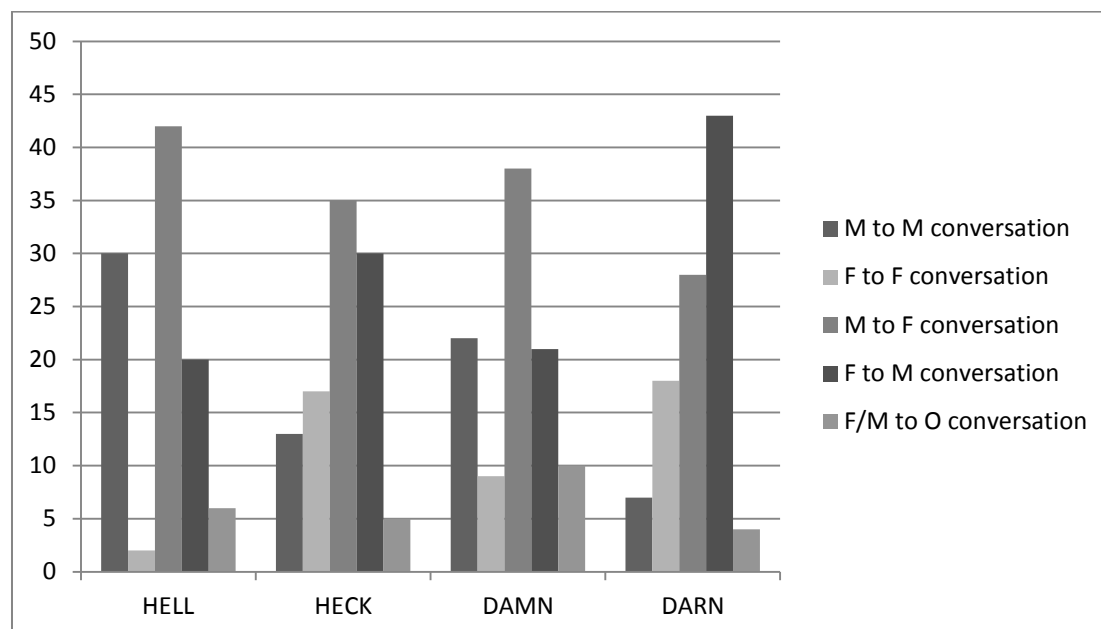


Figure 2: number of males and females in conversation divided into sex of speaker and recipient.

The results show that there is quite little swearing involved in female-to-female conversation compared to for example male-to-female which have the highest occurrences in three out of four of the swear words. If one compares *damn* and *darn* in female-to-male conversation it is quite clear that women use *darn* more frequently than *damn* in male

company. We see the same pattern in the comparison between *hell* and *heck*, where *hell* has 20 instances and *heck* 30. This then shows that women actually tend to use a milder form of swearing in the company of men, and so hypothesis (4) was correct. This can be connected to what was said in the introduction where Jay (1992: 60–70) states that 8–12-year-old girls use milder forms of swearing already as children.

When it comes to the male-to-female conversation males use the milder forms slightly less than the others in the company of women. Even if the numbers are not considerably different the ones for *hell* and *damn* are still higher. A closer look could give us more clarity. Since *hell* is the most frequent in male-to-female conversation, it was chosen as the subject of further investigation. The following table shows recipients in M to F conversation concerning *hell*:

Table 7: recipients of *hell* in male to female conversation

Total M to F conversation of <i>hell</i>	42
Talking about the female	6
Talking about other people	12
Talking about an object/point in time	4
Interjection/Question	16
Talking about himself	4

This research is based on individual observation; for example there were quite a few borderline cases between the categories. One of the instances was (5) below:

(5) Billy: What in the *hell* is wrong with you? [SOAP 24 Oct 2012]

This is both an ‘Interjection/Question’ and ‘Talking about the female’ because it is directed towards the female in an angry manner. For the sake of this research it is counted as ‘Talking about the female’ since even though it is a question the sentence is meant in direct offence towards the woman. In comparison the sentence (6):

(6) Billy: What the *hell* did you do now, Chloe? [SOAP 24 Oct 2012]

(6) is counted as an ‘Interjection/Question’. Here, the receiver of the anger is still the woman, but the real object of the man’s anger is the woman’s actions, not the woman. Another example of this occurrence was (7):

(7) J.R.: Oh, well, you know, that sounds like a great plan. Why the *hell* are you doing that, Kendall? (female) [SOAP 24 Oct 2012]

In this example the male questions the female's actions, not the female. The feelings can still be considered to be directed towards the female in both (6) and (7), but for this research it is important to divide it in cases of direct offensiveness between male and female, and indirect cases when talking about actions or objects. There was however a case which was very ambiguous:

(8) Bo: Get your hands off of her! Who the *hell* do you think you are, you son of a bitch!

Marlena: I don't know them, I don't remember them, (...) [SOAP 24 Oct 2012]

In (8) it was not clear from the context to whom the sentence was directed, and suspicions were that there is actually another man involved in the scene since Bo says "you son of a bitch!" and Marlena's reply does not seem to correspond with the context at all. This was still counted as 'Talking about other people' even though it is recognized as a borderline case.

The largest category was 'Interjection/Question' which might not be very surprising when one counts the uses for these 42 instances in Table 8 below:

Table 8: usage of *hell* in M to F conversation

Total M to F conversation of <i>hell</i>	42
a hell of a ___	7
How/who/what the hell	21
(sure) as hell	2
(go to)/(in) hell	7
Hell,	4

The highest number falls into the category of 'How/who/what the hell', which is mostly 'Interjection/Question', as in this example (9):

(9) Antonio: What the *hell's* that supposed to mean? [SOAP 24 Oct 2012]

When looking at all of the examples, new categories emerge, as presented in the table below:

Table 9: usage of *hell* in overall conversation

HELL	Male		Female		Overall	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
a hell of a ____	11	84.6	2	15.4	13	13
why/where/how/how/what the hell	42	79.2	11	20.8	53	53
(sure) as hell	4	100	0	0	4	4
(went to)/(go to)/(in) hell	4	66.7	2	33.3	6	6
Hell,	6	85.7	1	14.3	7	7
The hell (you can)/(it does)/(away)	2	50	2	50	4	4
Like hell	2	66.7	1	33.3	3	3
the hell out of	1	25	3	75	4	4
Shut the hell up	1	50	1	50	2	2
Other	2	50	2	50	4	4
All	100	100	100	100	100	100

When it comes to how women use *darn* in conversations with men the table looks as follows:

Table 10: recipients of *darn* in female to male conversation.

Total F to M conversation of <i>darn</i>	43
Talking about the male	1
Talking about other people	3
Talking about an object/point in time	4
Interjection/Question	19
Talking about herself	3
To intensify emotion/attributes	13

There was a new category added to Table 6 called ‘To intensify emotion/attributes’. The case with *darn* is that it is often used as an intensifier in cases where it is not used for ‘Interjection/Question’, which was the category with the highest number. An example of the intensifying category could be (10) below:

(10) Maggie: Well, I'm sorry, but, you know, you make it really *darn* hard to get to know you [SOAP 26 Oct 2012]

Instead of only using “really hard to...” she intensifies with *darn*. Following table shows the categories of usage that female to male conversation of *darn* could be divided into:

Table 11: Usage of *darn* in female to male conversation

Total F to M conversation of <i>darn</i>	43
Darn	8
(oh) darn	7
Darn (it)	6
Darn (object/person)	7
(pretty, so, really, etc.) darn (much, good, special, hard, hot, etc.)	15

Example (11) was a complicated case which once again demands a bit of personal opinion just like some of the earlier samples:

(11) Julie: (...)Thinking Unfortunately, where she is, there's not a *darn* thing she can do about it. [SOAP 26 Oct 2012]

It is hard to determine its place in the recipient categories. It could be either ‘Talking about an object’, ‘Talking about other people’ or ‘To intensify emotion/attributes’. She could be intensifying the “thing” or she could be talking about this “thing”, but if looking at what *darn* actually describes (the ‘thing’) it makes its place in the category ‘Talking about an object’. As for usage it was sorted as ‘darn (object/person)’, since *darn* belongs to the “thing” in this case. The overall phraseology of *darn* is as follows in Table 12 below:

Table 12: usage of *darn* in overall conversation

DARN	Male		Female		Overall	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Darn	7	38.9	11	61.1	18	18
(Ah, Oh) darn	7	41.2	10	58.8	17	17
Darn it	1	9.1	10	90.9	11	11
Darn (object)/(person)	3	21.4	11	78.6	14	14
(pretty, so, really, etc.) darn (good, much, special, etc.)	13	43.3	17	56.7	30	30
darn right	3	100	0	0	3	3
darn (well, cute, good, lucky)	2	28.6	5	71.4	7	7
All	100	100	100	100	100	100

It is not very surprising that Table 12 follows in the same manner as Table 11 with the highest number for the category ‘(pretty, so, really, etc.) *darn* (much, good, special, hard, hot, etc.)’. As quoted from Jay (see section 2.1) we sometimes need swear words to intensify our

expressions in a manner that ordinary words cannot. This might be why the intensify category is the most popular of phraseological pattern of *darn*.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim was to briefly see how people swear in real life compared to soap operas, and also to investigate more in detail how people are scripted to curse in soap operas, especially when gender is concerned. There were four hypotheses that served as a basis for the investigation:

- (1) *Damn* and *hell* are more frequent in LCSAE than in SOAP
- (2) *Damn* and *hell* are more frequently used by men in SOAP
- (3) *Darn* and *heck* are more frequently used by women in SOAP
- (4) Women use milder forms of swearing in the company of men in SOAP

Hypothesis (1) was only half correct, as *hell* was actually more frequent in the SOAP corpus than in LCSAE. This could suggest that soap operas do not portray swearing as it really is, or that *hell* is used more in soap operas because people might consider it more appropriate to use on television than *damn*. It could be that instead of saying that *damn* and *hell* are harsh swear words and that *heck* and *darn* are mild, one could say on a scale of three that *damn* is worst or the harshest, *hell* is somewhere in the middle and *heck* and *darn* are more euphemistic and mild.

Hypothesis (2) was correct, men use *hell* and *damn* more than women in SOAP. One has to take into consideration that overall there were more male than female quotes in the 400 samples collected, however that simply means that there are more men swearing in the soap operas, at least in these samples. Furthermore, the differences were not large enough for it to be a real problem.

Hypothesis (3) was partly correct. The results showed that women do in fact use *darn* a lot more than men do. *Heck*, on the contrary, is very evenly distributed across genders. Even after looking for the mood of the conversations, any clear patterns did not emerge. The only pattern that could be found is that *heck* continues being very neutral in both gender and mood.

In hypothesis (4) results showed that the only swear word where F to M conversation has the highest number is *darn*. *Heck* is also fairly close with M to F: 35 and F to M: 30. For the harsher variations men had a clear front position, in both *hell* and *damn* the M to F conversation is leading by almost 20. Another observation made was that there was quite little

F to F conversation, especially concerning *hell* where there was actually only 2 instances. Although, if only looking at the F to M conversations, one can see that the bars are higher for *heck* and *darn*, which suggests that women actually use the milder or more euphemistic forms more while in the company of men. Men, however, actually use the harsher forms more than the milder ones in the company of women. This realization brought on a more detailed search to see who the recipient really was in M to F conversation. *Hell* was chosen as the subject since it had the highest number of occurrences. The results showed that ‘Interjection/Question’ has the highest number of occurrences (see Table 7, section 4.4), suggesting that most of the times there might not even be a recipient. Since ‘Interjection/Question’ was the most frequently occurring in the recipient category it is not very surprising that ‘How/who/what the hell’ was the most frequent in the usage table (see Table 8, section 4.4). Women’s *darn* also had ‘Interaction/Question’ occurring most frequently when it came to recipient, but for this swear word there was a need of a new category: ‘to intensify emotion/attributed’, which came second (see Table 10, section 4.4).

Overall most of the hypotheses were correctly predicted. However, *heck* was evenly distributed over gender, and had no clear patterns that could be found even when mood was concerned. There was little swearing involved in F to F conversation. As mentioned in the section about gender in soap operas (see section 2.5) Jay argued that men and women swear more when they are in the company of others of the same sex, rather than the opposite. However, this was not the case at all in the soap operas that were investigated for this essay. Looking at Table 1 (section 4.1) once again we see that M to F conversation is higher than M to M conversation for all of the four words, and the same goes for F to M conversation compared to F to F conversation.

The low number in F to F conversation might be explained by what was said earlier (see section 2.5) when Brown mentions four functions of gossip, the fourth being ‘chatting’. Chatting is said to be a way of showing trust among participants, and if that is the case it may be the reason why women do not swear at each other as much as they swear at men. Brown (1994: 33) also suggested that in the company of men women tend to have a hard time being taken seriously (see section 2.5). Since swearing expresses feelings that we otherwise cannot convey with ordinary words, as mentioned by Jay (see section 2.1), maybe women swear more at men because they have no other way of getting their feelings across properly. This hypothesis does not however explain why men do not swear more in the company of other men compared to in the company of women.

There was a quite high frequency of M to F swearing, meaning that men have no problem with using even the harsher swear words in the presence of women. Although, because of this finding a more detailed investigation was carried out in order to see whom the real recipient was in the M to F conversation of *hell*. The results showed that it was in fact only in 6 out of 42 cases that the male was swearing directly at the female (see Table 7, section 4.4).

Further studies are required to compare the results from the SOAP corpus with for example LCSAE to see the differences between scripted and real speech. However, we are still able to draw conclusions and have discussions about real speech from the results that come from the research of the SOAP corpus. There were also quite clear differences between the corpora in hypothesis (1), which then might suggest that the rest would probably follow in the same manner. This might be a subject of further research, if one has full access to LCSAE and more time on one's hands. This time, for the sake of time and convenience, only SOAP was selected for the detailed investigation.

Another disadvantage was that sometimes the person to speak directly after the 'speaker' was not the real recipient, but where possible these cases were sorted correctly by looking at context. Further research could be made comparing the SOAP corpus to LCSAE to see if the patterns in this investigation continues in real speech. Furthermore, this is merely a study of four swear words, there are many more interesting words to be investigated and compared.

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