Carry out sociolinguistic analysis of the use of swearwords *fuck* using the Spoken BNC2014 in BNClab

Swear words, also known as expletives, profanity, or vulgar language, are words or phrases that are considered socially inappropriate or offensive. They can be used to express strong emotions, such as anger or frustration, or to shock or offend others. Even though swear words are generally taboo in most social settings, they are a common feature of spoken language and can be found in almost every language and culture (McEnery 2006, p.2). Interestingly, swearing shows strong evidence of sociolinguistic features, since they are not typically taught in schools or formal settings for second language acquisition. Suganob-Nicolau points out that children tend to acquire swear words at a young age, through interactions with peers, parents, or media, and continue to use them at various frequencies throughout their lives. (2016, p.118). Therefore, swearing is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that is worth studying due to its role in regulating social behaviour.

Research has shown that sociolinguistic analysis by using corpus linguistics can reveal the role of swear words in society by examining how they are used in different social contexts and how they vary across different linguistic communities. Corpus linguistics researchers have become more interested in studying swearing in recent years. Notably, McEnery (2006) conducted one of the first comprehensive studies of the use of swear words in informal spoken English, using data from the British National Corpus (BNC) collected in the early 1990s. Corpus linguistics provides a means to investigate and confirm or refute assumptions related to the language usage patterns of specific social groups. By using BNC and Corpus of London Teenager Language, Stenström et al. found that adults swear more frequently than teenagers, even though the teenagers themselves identify swearing as the most prominent feature of their language use (2002, p. 18, 105). Therefore, it is evident that the social and cultural factors that influence the use of swearwords can be identified through spoken and written language data.

The present investigation delves into the sociolinguistic features of the swearword *fuck* within spoken English in the British National Corpus 2014 (BNC2014) obtained through the BNClab. The objective of this research is to offer a deeper understanding of social norms and how they utilise swearwords, specifically *fuck*, to express and form their identity. Furthermore, this research endeavours to uncover functional patterns, including idiomatic, grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic levels in the use of the profanity "fuck" in spoken language. For this research, the data collected from BNClab will be analysed utilising concepts and methodologies from multiple linguistic disciplines. In the second section, an examination of previous research

on the topics of sociolinguistics and corpus linguistics in relation to swearwords will be conducted. The third section will describe the methodology used in this study, including the data collection and analysis procedures. The fourth section will present the results of the study, and the final section will provide a discussion of the results and their implications.

Previous studies

Numerous studies have been conducted on the topic of swearing or profanity in recent years. McEnery introduced six main categories of such words: swear words, animal terms of abuse, sexist terms of abuse, intellect-based terms of abuse, racist terms of abuse, and homophobic terms of abuse, which provides a framework for understanding the various types of offensive language that may be used in English (2006, p.25). The use of bad language can be seen as unprofessional or inappropriate in certain settings, and it can offend or alienate some people. The decision to use bad language is a personal one and should be made with consideration for the context and audience. Bad language, or swear words, can be a marker of distinction in certain social groups (McEnery 2006, p.24). For example, some people may use swear words in an effort to fit in with a particular crowd or to appear tough or rebellious. In other cases, people may use swear words as a way to express strong emotions or to emphasise a point. Furthermore, there is a social hierarchy of offensive language, with some words being more acceptable than others in certain contexts. Beers Fägersten pointed out that the words *damn* and *hell* are the least offensive of the nine words in his research and are, therefore, more socially accepted and less likely to cause offence. In contrast, the words *bitch* and *fuck* were found to be considered particularly offensive in the study (2007, p.19). The use of swear words in spoken English has likely changed over time. According to Love, the use of swear words was found to be significantly lower in the spoken BNC2014 compared to previous studies but still within a similar range (2021, p.18). For instance, the swear word *fuck* was the most popular, surpassing *bloody* in terms of frequency.

The way in which an individual speaks can give insight into their social identity and can influence the perception of them by others. The famous experiment by Labov on the non-rhotic "r" sound in New York demonstrated the correlation between language and social identity and established the foundation for sociolinguistics (Labov, 1997). The use of swear words can vary greatly depending on a range of factors, including the socio-context in which they are used, the relationship between the speakers and the cultural and linguistic norms of the community. According to Aitchison, people likely stop using slang and swearing as they get older, as they learn to adapt their language to different situations, even though some older individuals may

start using swear words in an attempt to seem friendly (Aitchison, 2006, p.23). Teenagers are often perceived with extensive use of swearing. However, Holmes stated that their use of swear words might change in the course of time when they get older or socialise with people who have young families. (Holmes, 1992, p.183, cited in McEnery & Xiao, 2004, p.241). There is evidence that suggests that gender plays a role in the use of swear words and strong language. According to McEnery, males tend to have a larger vocabulary of swear words, while the use of strong language decreases with age and socio-economic status (2006, p.30). Some research has indicated that swear words can serve a number of social functions, such as expressing strong emotions or reactions not only from the speaker but also from the listener. Women, who are not typically associated with the use of swear words, are generally more sensitive to the offensive or inappropriate nature of such language (Beers Fägersten, 2007, p.32). Therefore, understanding the sociolinguistic aspects of swearing can provide insights into the way language is used to convey meaning and establish social relationships.

One of the key areas of focus in corpus linguistics is the investigation of social factors that can influence language use, such as age and gender. By examining how language varies across different age groups or genders, researchers can gain insights into the social and cultural norms that shape language usage. In fact, several studies have used the BNC, especially the spoken corpora BNC1994 and BNC2014, to analyse and compare the social factors of the use of swearing in everyday British English speech (McEnery, 2006, Love, 2020, Awan & Hussain, 2017). By examining the distribution of certain words or expressions across sociolinguistic categories such as gender, age, and socio-economic status, corpus linguists can provide a better understanding of the way language is used to convey meaning and express identity within different social groups. For instance, by analysing the frequencies and patterns of the swearwords such as *mick*, *guido* and *paki*, Awan and Hussain found out that the use of nationality-based swearwords might reveal a psychological superiority complex and conflicts between the countries (2017, p.57). McEnery stated that the use of swear words is considered a marker of distinction in English and can be used to differentiate people based on age, gender, and social class (2006, p.24,50). By considering these social factors, corpus linguists can better understand the way language is used to convey meaning and express identity within different social groups.

Methodology

The study was conducted using the spoken BNC2014 data provided by BNClab, an open-source online corpus platform developed at Lancaster University, which comprises a large

sample of spoken British English from both BNC1994 and BNC2014. Overall, BNC is a valuable resource for linguistic research, containing a diverse collection of spoken and written language from various social and geographical settings in the U.K. from the later part of the 20th century (British National Corpus 2014, n.d.). BNC2014 is the second corpus after BNC1994, with five million words of informal conversation recording from the 2000s (Brezina et al., 2018). It is a collection of transcripts of recorded conversations between friends and family members in informal settings, recorded by the speakers using their smartphones between 2012 and 2016. (British National Corpus 2014, n.d.). This corpus is considered to potentially reflect word usage, which is suitable for analysis and comparison with previous research on related topics, taking into account the demographic information of the speakers.

This paper employs both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to investigate the sociolinguistic perspective of the use of the swearword *fuck* by finding out the frequencies and interpreting the data. After accessing Spoken BNC2014 via BNClab, a dataset which focuses exclusively on the use of the word *fuck* as a swear word will be established by using the searching tool and offline concordance tables. All the swearword *fuck* and its variants will be identified throughout the spoken corpus BNC2014. One of the questions in this research is how to define the search queries since there are numerous variants of these swear words. Love (2021) provided a comprehensive list of variations of certain swear words that could appear in the BNClab subsets:

> Fucking OR fuck OR fucked OR fucker OR fucks OR mother- fuckers OR fuckers OR motherfucker OR mother-fucker OR fluctu-fucking-ation OR fuckhead OR mother-fucking OR motherfuckers OR fuckity OR fuckered OR fuckwit OR fuck- wits OR fucked-up OR fucktard
>
> (Love, 2021, 758)

From the aforementioned list, I selected a subset of five distinct variations for this analysis as follows: *fuck, fucking, fucks, fucked* and *fucker*. Then, sociolinguistic analysis on different levels, including grammatical structures, semantic meanings, and pragmatic uses, was carried out in an attempt to identify the common and uncommon occurrence of the swearword *fuck* in daily use and reveal social factors that could influence language use.

Furthermore, categorising swear words is important in understanding their specific meanings, patterns, and implications, as well as how they are perceived by different social groups. Swear words, despite often being associated with aggression or strong emotions, can have various meanings and connotations depending on the context in which they are used.

McEnery introduced a categorisation scheme for swearwords, which is based on their morphosyntax and part of speech categories (2005, p.27), as seen in Table 1. In other words, the same swear word can have different meanings or uses depending on its context and function in a sentence. His classification has given a deep insight into how swear words are employed in various contexts. Later on, his classification was modified and reduced from sixteen to nine categories, as seen in Table 2 (McEnery & Xiao, 2004, p.257).

Table 1 Category scheme for swear words (McEnery, 2005, p.27)

Table 2.1 The categorisation of bad language

Code	*Description*
PredNeg	Predicative negative adjective: 'the film is **shit**'
AdvB	Adverbial booster: '**Fucking** marvellous' '**Fucking** awful'
Curse	Cursing expletive: '**Fuck** You!/Me!/Him!/It!'
Dest	Destinational usage: **'Fuck off!'** '**He fucked** off'
EmphAdv	Emphatic adverb/adjective: 'He **fucking** did it' 'in the **fucking** car'
Figurtv	Figurative extension of literal meaning: 'to **fuck** about'
Gen	General expletive '(Oh) **Fuck!**'
Idiom	Idiomatic 'set phrase': '**fuck** all' 'give a **fuck**'
Literal	Literal usage denoting taboo referent: 'We **fucked**'
Image	Imagery based on literal meaning: 'kick **shit** out **of**'
PremNeg	Premodifying intensifying negative adjective: 'the **fucking** idiot'
Pron	'Pronominal' form with undefined referent: 'got **shit** to do'
Personal	Personal insult referring to defined entity: 'You fuck!'/'That **fuck**'
Reclaimed	'Reclaimed' usage—no negative intent, e.g. **Niggers/Niggaz** as used by African American rappers
Oath	Religious oath used for emphasis: 'by God'
Unc	Unclassifiable due to insufficient context

Table 2 Category scheme for swear words Fuck (McEnery & Xiao, 2004, p.257)

Code	*Description*	*Examples*
G	General expletive	(Oh) fuck!
P	Personal insult referring to defined entity	You fuck!/that fuck
C	Cursing expletive	Fuck you!/me!/him!/it!
D	Destinational usage	Fuck off!/he fucked off
L	Literal usage denoting taboo referent	He fucked her
E	Emphatic intensifier	Fucking marvellous!/in the fucking car
O	'Pronominal' form	Like fuck/fat as fuck
I	Idiomatic 'set phrase'	Fuck all/give a fuck/thank fuck
X	Metalinguistic or unclassifiable due to insufficient context	The use of the word "fuck"/you never fucking

Result

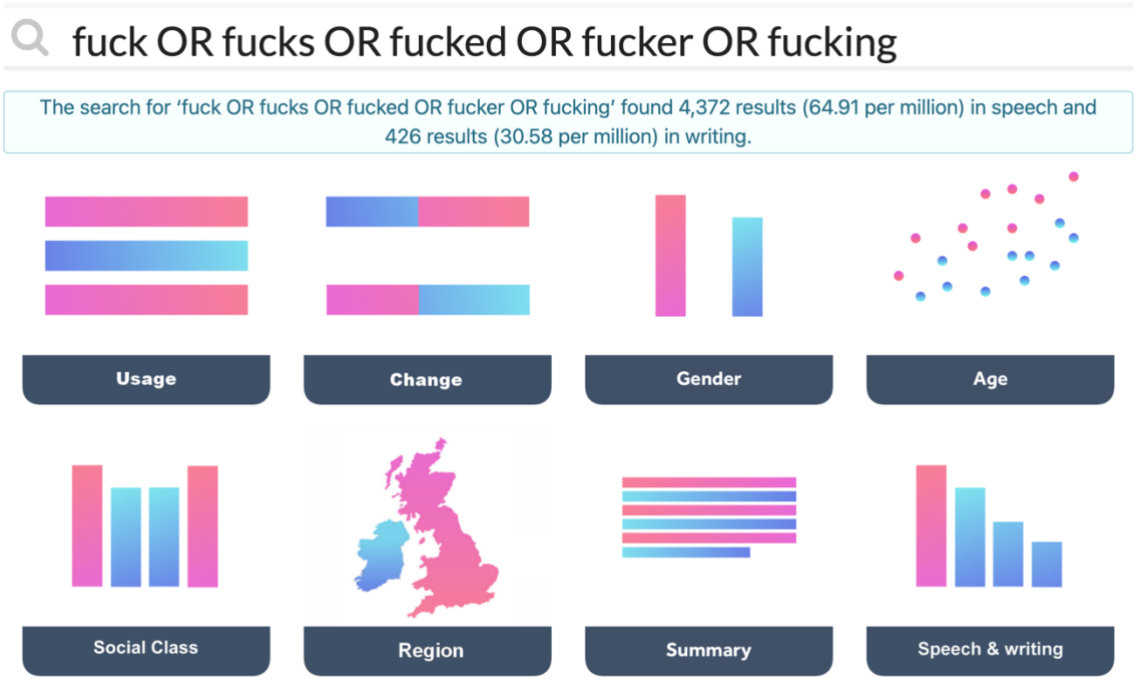

Figure 1. Occurrences of fuck *and its variants based on chosen syntax in BNClab*

Overall, the word *fuck* and its morphological variants were found to occur 4,372 times within spoken samples of the BNC1994 and BNC2014 corpora, as illustrated in Figure 1. It is important to note that by utilising the search bar, I was able to obtain the total occurrences of the swear word *fuck* in both spoken and written samples of the BNC[1], as well as the number of concordance lines that BNClab can extract from the corpora. Table 3 presents the total occurrences from BNC and also the number of concordance lines of BNC and BNC2014 that

[1] From now on, BNC means the two corpora BNC1994 and BNC2014

can be accessed through BNClab[2] and Table 4 displays the occurrences of *fuck* and its morphological variants taken from the offline concordance table of BNC2014 access via BNClab. It is crucial to bear in mind the substantial difference between the total number and the extracted number of concordance lines obtained via BNClab[3].

Tableau 3 Occurrence of fuck and its morphological variants in BNC1994, BNC2014 and result of BNC2014 extracted from BNClab

Syntax	**Occurrences from BNC**	**BNC concordance lines via BNClab and its percentage**		**BNC2014 concordance lines via BNClab and its percentage**	
fuck	1238	768	62.04%	608	49.11%
fucked	177	177	100%	159	89.83%
fucks	25	25	100%	21	84%
fucking	3055	786	25.73%	638	20.88%
fucker	24	24	100%	14	58.33%
Total	4519	1780	39%	1440	32%
Multiple-term seach: fuck OR fucked OR fucks OR fucking OR fucker	4372	827	19%	702	16%

[2] Since this paper focuses on the use of the swear word *fuck* in BNC2014, I will not present a comparison of the language used between BNC1994 and BNC2014.
[3] This issue will be discussed in the Discussion section

Tableau 4 Occurrences of fuck and its variants from offline concordance table by using multiple-term search

Variants	Occurrences	Percentage in comparison to occurrences from BNC
fuck	241	19,47%
fucks	4	16,00%
fucked	45	25,42%
fucking	410	13,42%
fucker	2	8,33%
Total	702	16,06%

The findings revealed that the swearword *fuck* is used most frequently in the form *fucking* rather than *fuck,* with 638 concordance lines from BNC2014 found, followed by 608 from *fuck*. Among the morphological variants, *fucker* has the lowest frequency, with only 14 occurrences. This can be explained by the rank of offensiveness since *fucker* is likely to convey a stronger vulgar meaning towards the listener (McEnery, 2005, p.31). The frequency of *fucks* was also found to be low, with only 21 occurrences, which can be explained by its exclusive idiomatic usage, such as in *nobody fucks with us* or *it fucks up* rather than the literal meaning (McEnery & Xiao 2004, p.257).

Comparing the extracted concordance lines via BNClab, it is important to note the significant different in proportion depending on lexical term. Whereas *fucked, fucks, and fucker* were extracted 100% from the BNC2014, the percentage dropped when there are too many concordance lines found. For instance, there are significant decline in case of *fucking* with only 25.73%. In the case of multiple-term search, the percentage dropped drastically to 19%. This likely led to an inconsistent ratio between those terms in the offline concordance table. It is also significance to point out the considerable disparity between the total occurrences that can be obtained from the BNC through individual lexical term search and through the utilisation of the syntax: fuck OR fucked OR fucks OR fucking OR fucker, for which a definitive rationale is yet to be identified[4].

[4] This issue has been reported to Ms. Bottini to transfer to developer team of BNClab. More information will be found in the Discussion section.

Gender of speaker

Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of swear word frequency as a function of speaker age in the BNClab. The result reveals that male speakers tend to use the word *fuck* more frequently than female speakers. The result revealed that the swear word *fuck* is likely to be used twice as much by males as it is by females, with a rate of 9.22 per 10,000 words for males and 4.83 per 10,000 words for females. The findings aligned with McEnery's scale of offensiveness, which is a measure of how offensive a word is considered by society. This suggests that the use of *fuck* among males may be influenced by their preference for stronger and more offensive language (McEnery 2005).

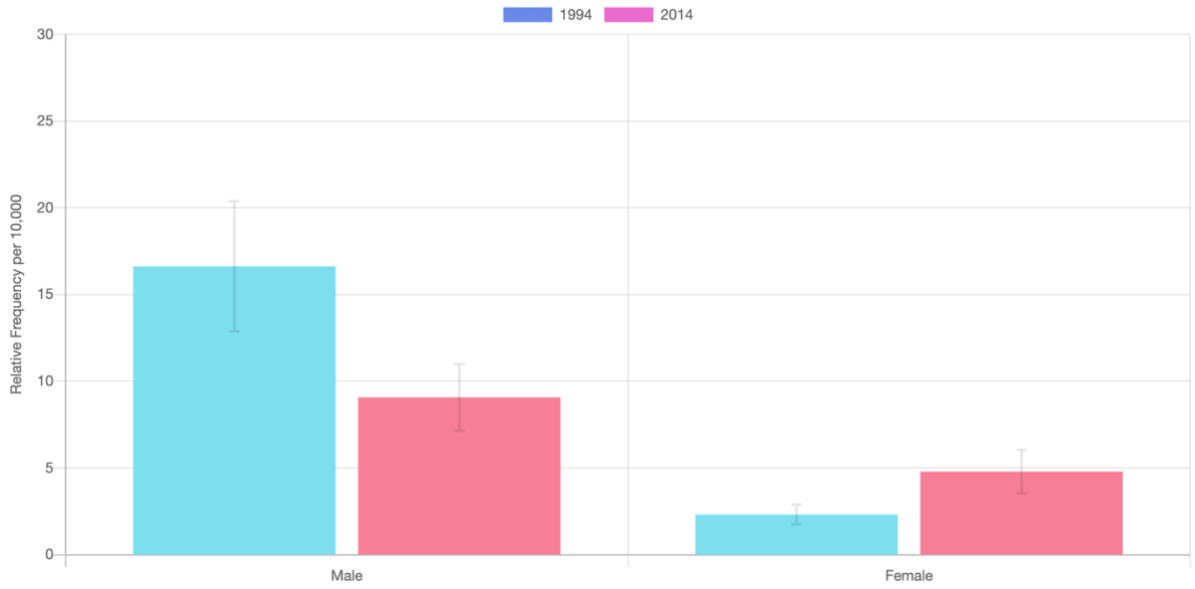

Figure 2 Distribution of the usage of fuck *by gender from BNClab subsets*

Age of speaker

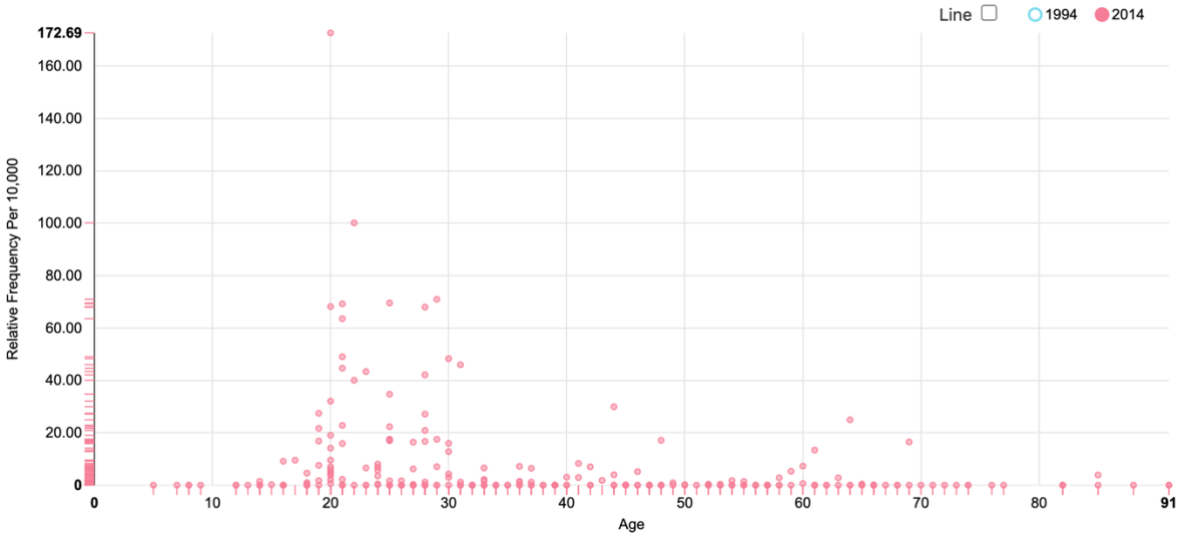

Figure 3. Distribution of the usage of fuck *by age group in the BNClab subset*

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the frequency of the use of the word *fuck* in spoken BNC2014 based on the age of the speakers. In general, the frequency of use tends to decrease with age. A notable pattern emerges in which the frequency increases during late childhood and adolescence, reaches a peak between the ages of 20-30, and then steadily decreases afterwards. There are numerous reasons that can explain this phenomenon. As people get older, they become more self-conscious and aware of social norms and how their language is perceived by others. They may also develop a greater sense of self-control and choose to use more socially acceptable language. According to McEnery & Xiao, the decrease in the frequency of the use of the word *fuck* among individuals after the age of 30 may be related to their family situation. People with children or teenagers living at home are likely to use this word less often than those without, and those who are not living with their parents may use it more frequently (2004, p.241).

Social class of speaker

Figure 4 presents the distribution of the swear word *fuck* usage frequency based on socio-economic status. The findings revealed that the use of *fuck* among students is much higher than that of the working class and middle class. Among the four social classes, retired groups have the lowest frequency of using *fuck*. One reason for the observed difference in swearing frequency between student and retired groups may be the age gap between the two groups. Student groups tend to be composed of young people aged 20-30, while retired groups consist

of individuals over 60 years old. This age gap may contribute to the difference in swearing behaviours between the social classes (Love, 2021, p.755). The result also showed a disruption to the assumption that swearing is associated with a lower educational level, as BNClab reveals that students are the most frequent user of *fuck*. This is in line with the finding from McEnery & Xiao that frequencies of *fuck* can be found across different levels of education. Even though people who left school at 15/16 are the most frequent users of *fuck*, people who left school at 14 or under show an unexpectedly low frequency of uses of *fuck* (2004, p.246).

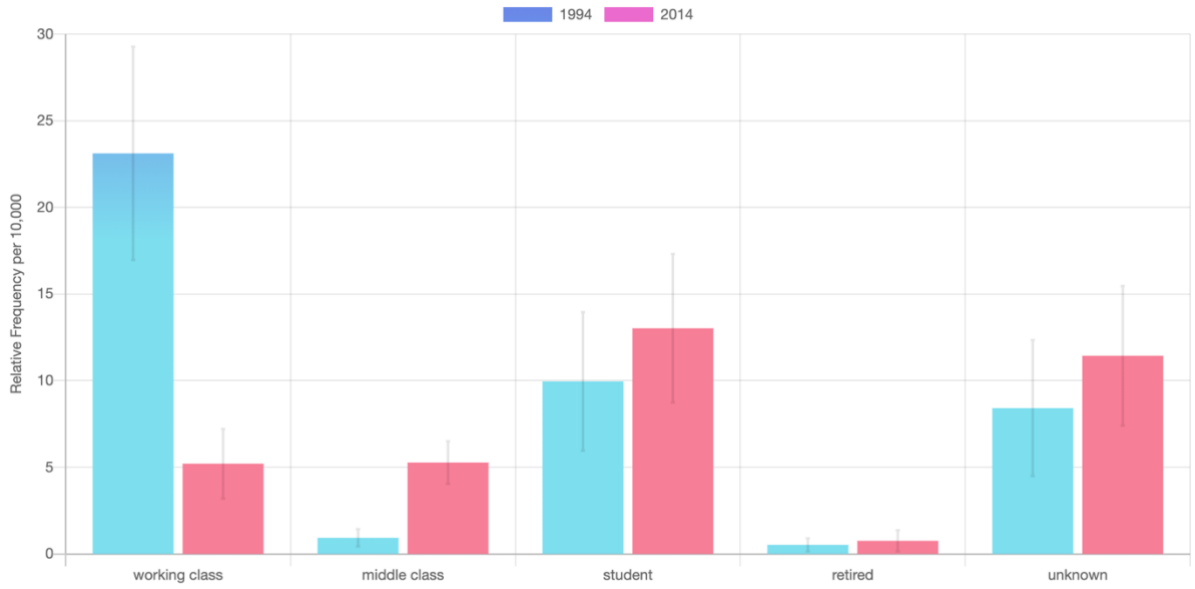

Figure 4. Socio-economic status distribution of using fuck in the 1994 and 2014 BNClab subsets.

Idiomatic patterns and phrases

Table 5 Idiomatic patterns that occur the most in the 2014 BNClab subset

Patterns	BNClab	Offline concordance table
Wh- the fuck	195	51
Fucking hell	213	50
Fuck off	181	32
Oh fuck	81	16
Fuck's sake	67	30

Tableau 6 Some idiomatic patterns that occur the least in the BNClab subset

Patterns	BNClab	Offline concordance table
fuck you	45	9
fuck me	22	5
motherfucker	9	0
fuck all	27	13
fucking christ	5	0

Table 5 displays the idiomatic patterns involving the use of the word *fuck* that were most commonly recorded in the 2014 BNClab. *Fuck* is the most frequently used in idiomatic patterns such as *Wh- the fuck, fucking hell, fuck off, oh fuck and fuck's sake*. Most of the common patterns show that *fuck* is not always used to denote a literal meaning but for emphasis and expletive. It is interesting to note that *oh fuck* - a general expletive expression - is not the most common pattern used among native speakers. The findings show that *Wh- the fuck* is the second the most common idiomatic patterns, with 195 occurrences can be found in the corpus and the most common in the offline table with 51 occurrences. The findings of this study align with previous studies, indicating that the term *fucking* may have a correlation with religion, as a total of 213 instances of the phrase *fucking hell* and 67 instances of *fuck's sake* were found.

Table 6 presents some of the least common idiomatic patterns from the BNC2014 corpus. One issue that can be observed from this table is small sample bias, as some idiomatic features can be found in BNC2014 by searching on BNClab but do not exist in the offline concordance table. This is due to the fact that the data from the concordance table is smaller than BNC2014, consisting of only 16% of the data, as shown in Table 4 above.

Grammatical structures

Table 7 shows the occurrences of grammatical structures of *fuck* and its morphological variants by using search bar in BNClab. In the case of *fuck*, the finding shows that *fuck* is associated most frequently with a verb rather than a noun, which suggests that it can be used as also as a noun. In the case of *fucking*, there is a high frequency in association with a noun, verbs, and adjectives but not adverbs, suggesting that it occupies the position of an adjective or adverb. In other words, the swear word *fuck* has become more flexible grammatically and has shifted from being exclusively a verb with literal meanings to different other parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, and adverbs. On the contrary, *fucked*, *fucks* and *fucker* are less likely to be used.

Table 7. Frequency of grammatical scheme of fuck and its variants

	Noun	**Verb**	**Adjective**	**Adverb**
Fuck	24	146	4	10
Fucking	513	385	459	19
Fucked	5	5	0	5
Fucks	5	0	0	0
Fucker	1	0	0	0

Semantic meanings

Based on the data presented in Table 8, it is evident that there are notable differences in the total frequency across the seven functional categories examined in this study. Overall, the swear word *fuck* and its variations are used in different semantic meanings, but they are primarily used as an intensifier to add emphasis (E), followed by idiomatic use (I). It is important to point out that *fucking* was found exclusively associated with the emphatic meaning category. It can be used with verbs, nouns, and adjectives to emphasise the intensity in both negative and positive way like *fucking awesome* or *fucking terrible*. Interestingly, it is possible to combine with the swear word *fuck,* like in the following example: *yeah fucking fuck that*. Only 18 entries were found where *fuck* is use with cursing (C) meaning such as *fuck you.* This implies that the swear words is used more often with figurative meaning such as *fuck up, give a fuck, fuck all* and not always mean to harm or offense people.

Table 8 Fuck and its morphological variants in the BNClab subset

Category	**G**	**L**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**O**	**I**	**X**	**Total**
Occurrences	44	5	18	41	451	15	109	19	702
Percentage	6	1	3	6	64	2	16	3	100

Contextual use

The focus of this section is on the speaker's intention, implication and emotion in relation to the use of the wear word *fuck*. One of the primary functions of swearwords is the expression of emotion, particularly strong emotions such as anger and rage. Andersson & Trudgill (1990, p.61) develop several categories of swearword use based on their pragmatic function, including:

- *Expletive*: refers to the use of swear words that are uttered without the intention of causing harm to others and are often used to express strong emotions or feelings. E.g.*Fuck!, Oh fuck!*
- *Abusive*: is characterised by the intention to harm the hearer, often through the use of insults or derogatory terms. E.g. *Go fuck yourself! fuck you! You motherfucker!*
- *Humorous*: language involves the use of swear words among members of a close community without any intention of causing harm or negative emotions. It is often used among members of certain close communities.
- *Auxiliary*: is characterised by the use of swear words to add emphasis to a statement without being directed at someone else or expressing negative emotion. Eg. *It's fucking awesome, he fucking told her.*

After having reviewed the data, a significant number of expressions that related to religious purposes was found. Therefore, I would like to list them in the religious category, even though some of them can be listed as expletive or auxiliary. Thus, five following distinctive categories of contextual use of *fuck* were identified based on speaker intention and emotional range: expletive, abusive, humorous, auxiliary and religious.

As seen in Table 9, the auxiliary swearing category was the most common appeared among the other categories, followed by the abusive and expletive categories which aligns with the assumption of the use of swear words. Additionally, the findings reveal the frequency of swear words that relates to religions such as *for fuck's sake, fucking hell, fuck know.* It is worth noting that the religious swearing words could potentially be grouped within the category of expletive swearing, making them the second frequent use of the swear word *fuck.* Furthermore, the humorous swearing category was also found to be the least frequent. These findings suggest that swear words are used in a variety of setting and for various purposes beyond simply causing offense.

Table 9 Pragmatic categorisation of swear word 'fuck' in the spoken 2014 BNClab

	Auxiliary	**Expletive**	**Abusive**	**Humorous**	**Religious**	**Total**
Occurrence	363	93	114	44	88	702
Percentage	52	13	16	6	13	100

Discussion

One of the issues when using BNClab is the inconsistency in returning results, which requires a lot of double-checking in order to obtain correct data. The evidence is shown in Figure 8. This would likely cause problematic for the analysis of corpus data because it increases the chances of errors and inaccuracies in the results. If the results do not match, it can cause confusion and make it difficult to draw accurate conclusions from the data. Inaccurate data can lead to inaccurate analysis and false conclusions which can affect the reliability and validity of the study. Additionally, having to research multiple times due to technical issues with the system can cause frustration and can negatively affect the efficiency of the research.

The degree of representativeness in BNClab is also one of the issues worth mentioning. The number of concordance lines that can be used offline is not the entire set of concordances from the Spoken Corpus BNC2014 and theses entries were not selected randomly but in a fixed order. In term of sociolinguistic analysis, the lack of random selection in the BNClab subset can lead to selection bias and confounding variables or inaccurate results. Therefore, the results obtained from the dataset doubly accurately represent the population of British speakers.

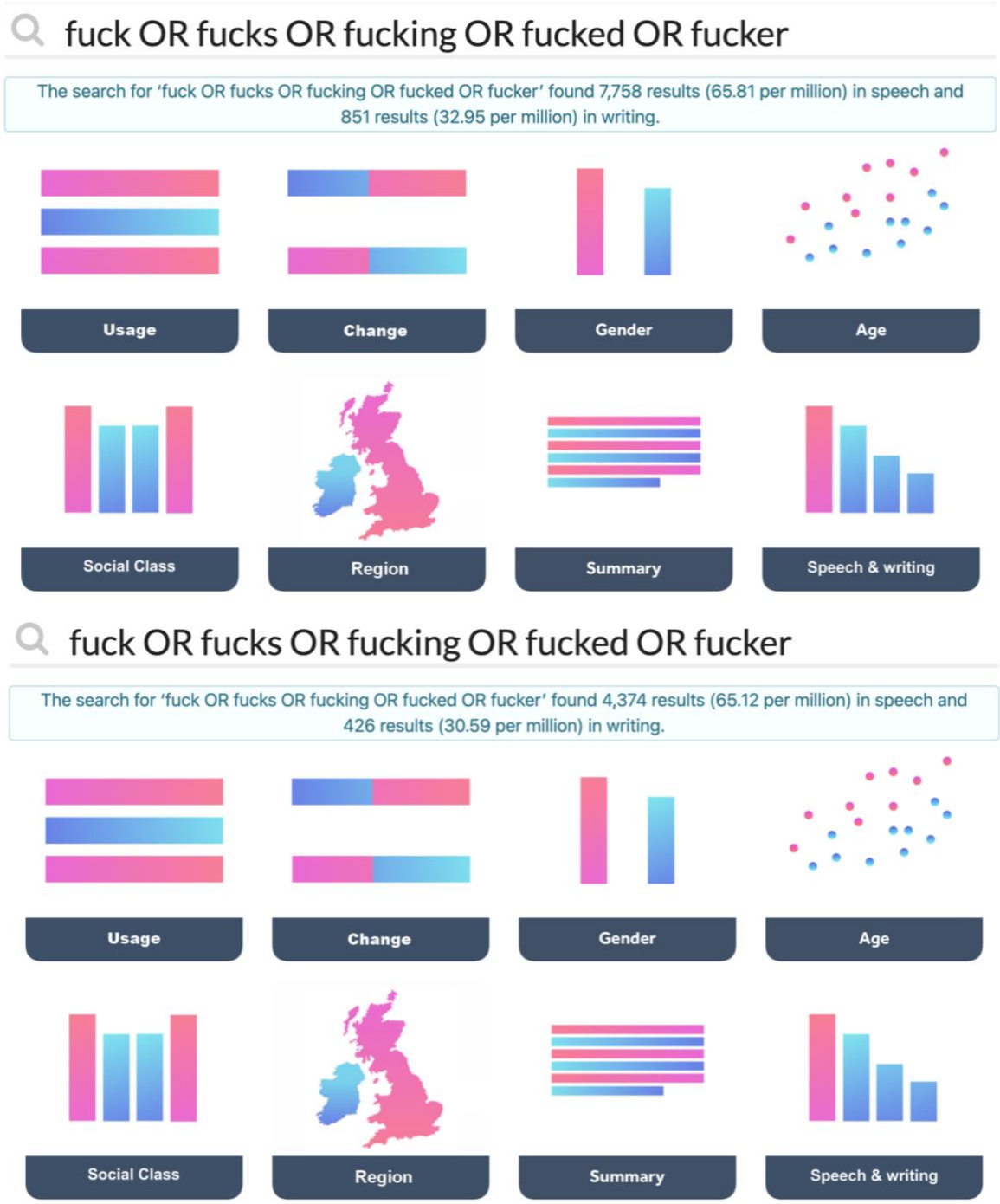

Figure 1 Evidence of inconsistency of BNClab

Additionally, the accuracy of the results can be affected by the discrepancy in the total number of concordances lines based on search methods. When searching for single terms, the sum of all the results is likely to be different in comparing to searching all those terms at one time (multiple term searching). This likely lead to inconsistent results that are difficult to compare and interpret. Without consistency in the total number of concordance lines, the results may not accurately reflect the language patterns in the population, making it difficult to draw accurate conclusions about language usage.

Concerning pragmatic features analysis, it has been argued that corpus linguistics lacks the capability to fully capture the social and contextual aspects of language use (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992). When carrying a pragmatics analysis, it is important to consider the relationships between speakers, the location, the time and the context in which the conversation is taking place (Yule, 1996, p.3). This means that corpus linguistics can be limited by a lack of context, which is necessary to fully comprehend the meaning of a sentence. Consequently, it is difficult to understand the intended meaning and purpose behind certain language use. For instance, even increasing the number of words in context, it is still somehow difficult to identify the relation between the speakers. While corpus-based analyses can provide information on the frequency of language structures, they are unable to account for the nuanced and context-specific ways in which these structures are employed.

Conclusion

This paper uses the data from the 2014 BNClab to examine the patterns of usage of the swearword *fuck* and its variants in spoken British English. The purpose of this study was not to provide a prescriptive guide to how people use swearwords in conversation but to reflect on sociolinguistic features, such as socio-economic classes, genders and ages behind the use of swearword *fuck*.

The results revealed that males tend to use the swear word fuck more frequently than females and the students' group more than the working and middle-class group. The frequency of swearing increases during late childhood and adolescence, peaks between the ages of 20-30, and then decreases afterwards. The findings showed that fuck has different functions rather than a literal meaning. Idiomatic patterns such as *Wh- the fuck, fucking hell, fuck off, oh fuck*, and *fuck's sake* were found most frequently in 2014 BNClab. Concerning the grammatical patterns, the findings show that *fuck* is most frequently preceded by a verb, whereas there is a high frequency of *fucking* associated with nouns, verbs, and adjectives, but not adverbs. Concerning pragmatic patterns, the auxiliary swearing category was the most prevalent among the other categories, followed by the abusive and expletive categories, which aligns with the general understanding of the use of swear words.

Through this study, it is evident that many sociolinguistic factors are crucial and decisive in the language use of an individual, especially the use of swear words. Furthermore, many grammatical, semantic and pragmatic functions of the swearword *fuck* were identified in spoken 2014 BNClab, which suggests that swearing is considered a valuable aspect of an individual's language, enabling them to convey greater expressivity and diversity within their speech. The

corpus-based analysis also presents some difficulties, particularly trouble capturing the social and contextual aspects of language through written records, as well as limitations in studying non-standard spoken forms of language. While this study focuses specifically on the swearword *fuck*, the methodology employed could also be used to investigate other swear words. It would be necessary to determine the broader and particular contextual patterns such as those that occur in workplace or military contexts.

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