



# Once in a Season – The Pragmatic Function of *Fuck* in “BoJack Horseman” TV Show

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## Abstract

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This article investigates the use and pragmatic functions of the swear word *fuck* in the “BoJack Horseman” produced by Netflix and bridges the gap in the linguistic research on this particular TV show. Incorporating corpus linguistics tools, the BoJack Horseman Corpus was compiled and the lemma *fuck* has been investigated and analysed from the multimodal perspective. It occurs six times, just once per every season of the show, every time when the interlocutor expresses strong emotions, usually towards the eponymous character. The use of a swear word provides a vent for anger, disappointment, or surprise and creates an extralinguistic narrative frame, due to its economic use by the writers of the show.

## Keywords

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Fuck; Swearing; Swear Words; Foul Language; Corpus Studies; Pragmatic Analysis; TV Shows; BoJack Horseman; Telecinematic Discourse; Netflix



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# Один раз за сезон: прагматическая функция слова “Fuck” в телешоу «Конь Боджек»

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## Аннотация

В данной статье исследуется использование и прагматические функции бранного слова fuck в сериале «Конь Боджек» производства Netflix и восполняется пробел в лингвистических исследованиях этого конкретного телешоу. Корпусный материал сериала был составлен с использованием инструментов корпусной лингвистики; лемма fuck исследована и проанализирована с мультимодальной точки зрения. Она встречается шесть раз, всего по одному разу в каждом сезоне сериала, каждый раз, когда собеседник выражает сильные эмоции, обычно по отношению к одноименному персонажу. Использование бранного слова дает выход гневу, разочарованию или удивлению и создает экстралингвистическую рамку повествования благодаря его экономичному использованию сценаристами сериала.

## Ключевые слова

Fuck; ругательства; бранные слова; нецензурная лексика; корпусные исследования; прагматический анализ; телевизионные шоу; Конь Боджек; телекинематографический дискурс; Netflix



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## Introduction

Swearing is a phenomenon present in every language, culture, and society. It is one of the most efficient ways to convey powerful emotions and enhance the impact of the message in difficult situations. It is mostly considered inappropriate, but its reception may vary depending on the situation and register, so it should be interpreted imprecisely (Andersson & Trudgill, 1990). The vast body of linguistic research suggests that investigating swearing and its linguistic aspect has recently flourished and appears to be on the rise (Beers Fägersten & Stapleton, 2017; Dynel, 2012; Hughes, 2006; K. L. Jay & Jay, 2015; T. Jay, 2009; T. Jay & Janschewitz, 2008; Montagu, 2001; Vingerhoets et al., 2013; Wajnryb, 2005). The discussion of profanity and taboo words is interesting due to the recent theoretical developments which reveal that fact everyone swears, at least occasionally. Hughes (2006) stated that people swear by, people swear to (do something), people swear at (somebody or something) and sometimes people swear simply out of irritation to achieve the cathartic and liberating effect. Popular culture is a kind of reflection of human behaviour and habits presented in the crooked mirror, so swearwords are also present in it: popular music, entertainment, advertising, and television. Researchers point out that swearwords in telecinematic discourse are common, due to their contribution “to the creation of realism” (Bednarek, 2020, p. 6). Swearing in TV series serves functions such as characterisation or expressing emotions. It also creates humour and responses in viewers (Bednarek, 2020). Netflix’s Original comedy-drama “BoJack Horseman” is loaded with various, very often creative swear/taboo words, but this paper focuses on the use and functions of just one, specific profanity – fuck – and the frame that screenwriters have built around it. “BoJack Horseman” created by Raphael Bob-Waksberg premiered in 2014 and since then, 77 episodes in 6 seasons were aired. Despite it being an animation about a peculiar human-horse BoJack and his friends living in Holywoo, created by cartoonist Lisa Hanawalt, beyond a shadow of a doubt it is not intended for children. Sex scenes and jokes frequently occur, the characters are presented drinking, smoking, and doing drugs, and the show gets darker and sadder as it continues, including some severe moments of intensive scenes: BoJack, the eponymous character, attempts to have sex with a seventeen-year-old girl, BoJack’s mother develops PTSD and gets lobotomised, or a young girl dies of a heroin overdose (“BoJack Horseman Parents Guide (2014-2020)”). It is not just a funny TV series about the filming industry, it is massive food for thought, covering subjects from gun legislation, ageism, the #MeToo movement, sexual orientation, and mental health to women’s rights. The sociolect of the characters is flooded with taboo and swearwords, but depending on one’s sensitivity, the level of profanity might be described as mild. However, the one swearword, fuck, is exceptional in its occurrence, as well as usage and it carries extra meaning. The objective of this article is to bring attention to the fuck word, occurring just once in every one of six seasons, and its prag-



matic function. Every appearance of this profanity is like a wink at the attentive watcher and constitutes an extra interpretative frame.

## Literature review

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Swearing (or cursing) is an interesting area of linguistic studies, especially due to its variability and subjectivity (Beers Fägersten, 2012). Nearly every researcher contributing to this field creates its own definitions and classifications, but they all agree that swearing is universal and very common. Swear word (or spelled swearword, also known as vulgar words, offensive/emotional speech, expletives, taboo words, used interchangeably) is defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary as “a profane or obscene oath or the word” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2022). A more precise definition is provided by Oxford Dictionary: “a rude or offensive word, used, for example, to express anger” (The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2022). Around the world, the majority of swear words are related to one of three taboo categories: i.e.,

- sexual – relating to sexual acts or genitalia (*fuck, cunt, dick*);
- scatological – relating to bodily functions and body parts (*shit, ass, crap*);
- profanity – relating to religious issues (*damn, bloody, sake*).

Swearing as the mental process is defined in The Cambridge encyclopedia of the English language as “an outlet for frustration and pent-up emotion and a means of releasing nervous energy after a sudden shock” (Crystal, 2018). Swearing is mostly regarded as offensive and violating social norms. However, every person has their own sensitivity to foul language and for some individuals, certain words are highly offensive, while for other just mildly. Offensiveness and appropriateness of swearing highly vary depending on the context, and speaker-listener relationship (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). Commonly swearing is considered to be a negative act, connected with impoliteness and rudeness, but apart from negative meaning, it can also carry a positive one. People curse for various reasons – they might aim at attacking someone (e.g. *You fucking idiot!*), seizing power in strategic rudeness and aggression (e.g. a school bully might be verbally aggressive to intimidate other students) or venting anger and negative feelings to obtain the cathartic effect, especially publicly (e.g. *Fuck!!*). However, speakers also might use vulgar words in a polite way, to build harmony or even compliment something (e.g. *It is a pretty fucking decent meal!*). As Pinker (2007) suggests, there are at least five different ways of swearing: descriptive, idiomatic, abusive, emphatic, and cathartic. As presented above, *fucking* conveys various messages, depending on the context. The use of swearwords in order to gain power was extensively investigated by Beebe (1995), while neurological, psychological, and sociocultural factors of acts of swearing were broadly discussed by Timothy Jay in his various publications (K. L. Jay & Jay, 2015; Jay, 2000, 2009; Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). Jay also points out the existence of non-



propositional swearing, which is impossible to be intentional, planned, and controllable.

It involves automatic emotional responses, occurring most frequently in response to sudden bursts of emotion (e. g., surprise) or as a result of brain damage. We do not consider nonpropositional swearing polite or impolite, except to an uninformed listener who may be offended at the content of the utterance. The offense on the part of the speaker is unintentional (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008, p.).

In 2005, Ruth Wajnryb in her book “Expletive deleted: a good look at bad language” pointed out that linguists, despite having extreme opinions, lack academic investigative interest in the topic of foul language (Wajnryb, 2005). It is not entirely true, since even in 2000, Jay published his book “Why we curse: a neuro-psycho-social theory of speech” which is a comprehensive study of acts of swearing, as well as Andersson and Trudgill’s “Bad Language” from 1990. Up to publishing Wajnryb’s book in 2005, there was a body of literature devoted to bad language (Andersson & Trudgill, 1990; Beebe, 1995; Montagu, 2001; Reygadas, 2002; Wierzbicka, 1996, 1997, 2002). However, 17 years later, this research area has flourished and has been widely discussed in many papers and books and the use of swear words has been analysed from various crossroads of linguistics, as well as, from different approaches: pragmatics, semantics, corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, cognitive linguistics, speech ethnography or psycholinguistics. When it comes to corpus linguistic studies on swearing, Love (2021) diachronically investigated language change in swearing in informal speech using Spoken British National Corpus 1994 and the Spoken British National Corpus 2014. It is also worth mentioning the studies of Schweinberger (2018), who investigated swearing in Irish English, Bednarek (2020), who focused on the corpus-driven studies on the use of swear words in telecinematic discourse. Marta Dynel (2012) investigated swear words in YouTube commentaries in the light of (im)politeness studies. There have also been numerous studies to explore gender representations and effect on swearing (Güvendir, 2015; Methven, 2020; Mulac et al., 2013), as well as swear words in telecinematic discourse (Bednarek, 2008, 2008, 2010, 2019a, 2019b; Davies, 2021; Kaye & Sapolsky, 2009; Sapolsky et al., 2010). The author has chosen “BoJack Horseman” to investigate due to the existing gap in linguistic research in this particular TV show. Previous studies on it explore themes of the animetaphor in animations (Schmuck, 2018), trauma (Borin, 2019), postmodernism (Sánchez Saura, 2019), “BoJack Horseman” as a comedy of remarriage (Terrone, 2022), and comparison of “BoJack Horseman” to the show-within-a-show, “Horsin’ Around” (Chater, 2015).

### **“BoJack Horseman” TV Show and its Characters**

The show’s genre can be classified as adult animation black comedy drama with surreal humour. It was created by Raphael Bob-Waksberg and it stars the voices of Will Arnett, Paul F. Tompkins, Amy Sedaris, Alison Brie, and Aaron Paul. The theme music was composed by Patrick Carney, featuring Ralph Carney.



The reception of “BoJack Horseman” has been positive with numerous awards, including: Annie Awards 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016, winning Annies as Best General Audience Animated Television/Broadcast Production (2020, 2019) and Outstanding Achievement for Writing in an Animated Television/Broadcast Production (Will Arnett in 2019), 3 nominations to Emmy Award, as Outstanding Animated Program (2020, 2019) and Outstanding Character Voice-Over Performance (Kristen Schaal in 2017), as well as being Nominee to Saturn Award of Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, USA 2021, 2018, 2017 and many, many more (BoJack Horseman (2014–2020) Awards).

The show’s eponymous character BoJack Horseman (voiced by Will Arnett) is a depressed man with a horse’s head and humanoid body who gained fame as a TV star in a fictional 1990s “Horsin’ Around” sitcom. 20 years later, he is still referred to as “the horse from ‘Horsin’ Around’” and deals with loneliness, failures in love life, childhood trauma, and substance abuse throughout the series. He has trouble leaving the past behind, is stuck in his memories, and constantly re-watches the old episodes of “Horsin’ Around”. BoJack’s personality and history are in short words summed up in the lyrics of the ending credits song:

Back in the 90s, I was in a very famous TV show / I’m BoJack the Horse, BoJack the Horse / Don’t act like you don’t know / And I’m trying to hold on to my past / It’s been so long I don’t think I’m gonna last / I guess I’ll just try and make you understand / That I’m more horse than a man / Or I’m more man than a horse (Grouplove, 2017).

The two last lines probably allude not only to BoJack’s appearance, but also to his personality and behaviour, especially the language which is far from polite. In Season 3, a journalist interviewing BoJack asks him in a tricky reference to this song “Are you more man than a horse, or are you more horse than a man?”, but apparently BoJack himself is not sure, because he answers “What the hell does that mean?” (BoJack Horseman S03E01 ). BoJack’s personality and behaviour are probably due to his neglectful, passive-aggressive, and abusive mother, Beatrice Horseman. The corrupted relationship between BoJack and Beatrice is recurring throughout Season 1 and Season 2 in flashbacks’ to BoJack’s childhood.

BoJack’s main entourage consists of three characters, mainly spending time together and developing relationships with one another: Mr. Peanutbutter (voiced by Paul F. Tompkins), Diane Nguyen (Alison Brie), and Todd Chavez (Aaron Paul). Sometimes a friend, sometimes a rival – Mr. Peanutbutter is a yellow, bundle-of-fun Labrador dog and he is another 1990s sitcom star, but unlike BoJack, he takes pride and joy in his past. He is constantly energetic and funny, and despite BoJack’s negative attitude towards him, he never ceases to care about BoJack. Diane Nguyen is a human being, Vietnamese-American writer who serves as a ghostwriter for BoJack’s memoir. She dates and later marries Mr. Peanutbutter, but they get divorced in Season 5. She suffers from mental health problems, which worsen due to her, sometimes destructive relationship with BoJack, which alters from professional one to friendship. The fourth among the most significant characters of



the show is one more human being, a male in his twenties, Todd Chavez. At the beginning of the show, he lives in BoJack's house in L.A., he serves the role of BoJack's roommate, sometimes annoying, sometimes helpful and throughout the show, he crushes the places of other characters. A bit scruffy, always wearing a beanie and flip-flops, a bit giddy, naïve and jolly, he lives in Mr. Peanutbutter and Diane's house, then in Princess Carolyn's apartment, finally he becomes a businessman and earns a fortune, living in a luxurious apartment of his own. Todd is one of the closest friends of BoJack and their relationship is of great value and importance, thus it takes time for BoJack to understand it. Other characters, with less screentime, but of great importance to BoJack's history and whole storyline, include: Herb Kazzaz, BoJack's former best friend and mentor, the creator of "Horsin' Around", Charlotte, the former BoJack and Herb's friend, and Hollyhock, BoJack's younger half-sister.

## Method

A combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used in the data analysis. The author employed a corpus linguistics methodology that prescribes the use of corpus tools which were employed to extract swearwords used in the dialogues. Several existing studies in the broader literature have examined swear words using corpus-driven approach (Beers Fägersten, 2012; Fägersten & Bednarek, 2022; Gauthier & Guille, 2017; Kirk, 2000; Love, 2021; Lutzky & Kehoe, 2016; McEnery & Xiao, 2004; Rathje, 2017; Schweinberger, 2018). In this approach, the corpus provides an empirical basis, from which the data is extracted and it is possible to investigate linguistic phenomena and that is why it was decided as the best method to adopt for this investigation. For the sake of this and future studies, the author watched 77 episodes of "BoJack Horseman" and then, transcribed the dialogues from 77 episodes of the TV show and converted them into .txt files. Following, employing AntConc software, the BoJack Horseman Corpus (BHC) was compiled. AntConc is a freeware corpus analysis toolkit, created and being developed by Laurence Anthony. The research material, the lemma fuck\* was extracted from the corpus and analysed multimodally, in relation to what was presented on the screen, which is presented and discussed in sections 4.1 – 4.7. Moreover, in section 4.8., it was considered that quantitative measures would usefully supplement and extend the use of other profanities appearing in the show, comparing it with the use of lemma fuck to present the unique employment of this particular swear word.

The lemma fuck\* is used once per every season of the show, five times in its full form fuck and once in the grammatical form fucking. Due to the TV show's length, it is not easy to spot it and instantly recognise the narrative built upon it by its writers, but having watched the entire series, it becomes more visible. Such a rare usage creates an additional emphasis on the particular scenes, providing an extra impact on them.



## Analysis and discussion

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### **Example 1 – S01E08 – “The Telescope”**

The swear word *fuck* is used for the first time in “The Telescope”, the eighth episode of the first season of the show. BoJack Horseman finds out that his old friend, Herb Kazzaz is dying due to cancer. BoJack feels guilty because in the past he betrayed Herb by not standing up for him when Herb was fired from “Horsin’ Around”. BoJack and Herb, accompanied by Diane spend a fun day together in Herb’s house, talking, laughing, and reminiscing the past, and leaving, BoJack feels that he rectified a misdeed. However, a few hours after the meeting, BoJack feels that he should have used the last opportunity to apologise to Herb for letting him down in the past. BoJack decides to come back to Herb’s room and frankly talk to him and to ask for his forgiveness. BoJack enters the room, where Herb is lying in a bed on a drip, and says that he is sorry. However, Herb admits that he is not going to give him closure and accept the apology. He says that BoJack despite being his friend, did not get in touch with him for the past twenty years and now, he has to live with it for the rest of his life.

00:21:50,981 --> 00:21:53,025

But what I needed then was a friend,

00:21:53,108 --> 00:21:55,194

and you abandoned me.

00:21:55,277 --> 00:21:58,531

And I will never forgive you for that.

00:21:58,614 --> 00:22:02,201

Now, get the fuck out of my house (BoJack Horseman, S01E08, 2014).

This is the first time the word *fuck* is used in the TV show. The word is used by Herb, in the last sentence at the end of his monologue. The phrase *get the fuck out* is a collocation sequence of verb + adverb, in which the swear word *fuck* functions as an insertion of emotive intensifier. This process is known as syntactic interposing (McMillan, 1980). It is an intense situation for the eponymous character, he knows that this is the last possible opportunity to receive his friend’s forgiveness and despite seeking for it, he is denied it. Herb is aware that this is probably the last time he sees BoJack before his own death and as a speaker and a user of this expletive, he can express his emotions and his disappointment he suppressed for the past twenty years. The use of this swear words in this particular situation serves multiple functions: it states Herb’s power over BoJack, it provides a cathartic effect for years of pent-up emotions coming out, and intensifies the message. It is the first sign of aggression – it starts as verbal, but soon it turns out to be physical, since BoJack does not leave and tries to joke – a discussion turns into a fight. Diane and a nurse separate the fighting characters and Herb, having said that BoJack is “a selfish goddamn coward who takes whatever he wants and doesn’t give a shit about who he hurts”, leaves (“BoJack Horseman” S01E08, 2014).

**Example 2 – S02E11 – “Escape from L.A.”**

The word *fuck* for the second time appears in the eleventh episode of the second season of the show. BoJack takes a road trip in order to visit his old friend, Charlotte Carson in New Mexico. Charlotte used to live in Los Angeles and shared salad days with BoJack and Herb when they just started their careers as stand-up comedians in their twenties. She was a bartender in the club they performed and she dated Herb, however, she and BoJack also developed some feelings toward each other. Finally, she moved, which was a shock to BoJack. He had missed her throughout the years and having seen her picture in Herb's house, having a drug-induced dreams about her, and finally seeing her in person at Herb's funeral, BoJack decides to find and visit her. BoJack finds out that Charlotte is married with children, Penny and Trip and happily lives in New Mexico. She invites BoJack to spend some time with the family and he stays in a boat he buys, parked outside their house. Penny, Charlotte's daughter, has a problem finding a date for the high school prom and does not want to go alone. BoJack offers his companionship and they all agree that the former TV star is going to generate excitement and jealousy among other students. BoJack buys alcohol for Penny and her friends, and Penny, carried away by a moment under a starry sky, kisses BoJack and offers to have sex with him. BoJack refuses because of her being just the seventeen-years-old daughter of his friend and it makes Penny cry. She enters home and BoJack meets Charlotte sitting by the fire and reading outside alone. They are also carried away by a moment under a starry sky and reminiscing – after sharing some deep thoughts about BoJack carelessness in hurting people, they cuddle and finally kiss. BoJack admits his lifelong love towards Charlotte and offers to escape together. Charlotte rejects him and asks him to leave the next thing in the morning. BoJack is clearly disappointed and sad, but when comes to his boat, he sees Penny standing in front of the entrance. She says that she knows what she wants and BoJack answers “go to bed, Penny”, simultaneously leaving his door open. In the next scene, Charlotte walks next to the boat and she hears some whispers, which makes her go inside. As she opens the door, she sees BoJack and Penny removing their clothes on the bed. She bids Penny to go to her room and she says to BoJack:

00:23:21,350 --> 00:23:25,690

If you are not out of my driveway in 30 minutes, I will call the police.

00:23:25,780 --> 00:23:29,860

And if you ever try to contact me or my family again,

00:23:29,950 --> 00:23:32,280

I will fucking kill you (“BoJack Horseman” S02E11, 2015).

These are the last words spoken in this location: then, the intro music plays and BoJack is presented sitting on a boat, which is hauled back to L.A. In this case, the word *fuck* is used in a form of adverbial *fucking*. Similarly to the first use of this profanity in S01E08, it is used by a character being very close to BoJack, from his youth and with whom he lost contact for several years. Another similarity is the way the profanity is used – again, it is used as an interposing, but this time it is an inter-



pose between an auxiliary and verb sequence. What is more, again it is used in a final sentence of a monologue and demands BoJack to leave. Charlotte is under very strong emotions due to seeing her juvenile daughter with an old man in a sexual situation and uses it as a threat. Again, BoJack is presented as a person with awful character, destroying his life and his relationships with others.

### **Example 3 – S03E10 – “It’s You”**

The next use of profanity *fuck* is in the tenth episode of the third season – “It’s you”. The storyline focuses on BoJack being the nominee for Oscar and his regained popularity due to it. BoJack seems to forget his old, real friends and surrounds himself with flatterers. He gives Todd, Caroline, and Diane the brush off and he spends time with his new fans. BoJack hosts a huge party in his house but it turns out that he was mistakenly announced as a nominee. BoJack is devastated, so is the place, and all the guests leave. BoJack is all alone and miserable in his house, full of trash and party leftovers when Todd enters. Despite earlier spurn and being abandoned by others, BoJack is now happy to have Todd back. BoJack admits that Todd is his best friend and he wants to spend some quality time together. Todd clearly feels uncomfortable in the situation when he was rejected by BoJack earlier and now the eponymous character needs him back. The characters start arguing – BoJack reproaches that Todd lived in his house for free, and Todd answers that BoJack let him do it because something weird must have happened between BoJack and Todd’s girlfriend, Emily. Then, BoJack asks if Todd knew that BoJack had sex with Emily, and Todd is furious and hurt because he clearly was not aware of that.

00:25:18,100 --> 00:25:20,269  
It’s not the alcohol, or the drugs,  
00:25:20,352 --> 00:25:23,272  
or any of the shitty things that happened to you in your career,  
00:25:23,355 --> 00:25:24,523  
or when you were a kid.  
00:25:24,606 --> 00:25:26,066  
It’s you.  
00:25:26,942 --> 00:25:29,903  
All right? It’s you.  
00:25:32,740 --> 00:25:36,535  
Fuck, man. What else is there to say? (“BoJack Horseman” S03E10, 2013).

This time, the profanity *fuck* is used as a separate phrase, at the beginning of the sentence. Again, it is used by a friend from the close proximity of BoJack and it comes out in the last sentence of the monologue in which the bad actions of BoJack are summed up, but contrary to the previous uses, it is not a demand of leaving and sign of verbal aggression towards the character. It is rather used as a sigh, a vent of strong emotions. Todd does not show his power over BoJack, as Herb did, he is defeated, disappointed, and discouraged. He cares about BoJack and he is his best friend, he wants him to change but he is disillusioned. He constantly



observes BoJack's mindset and behaviour and by using this swear word, he shows that he has lost hope that BoJack can be a better person.

#### **Example 4 – S04E05 – “Thoughts and Prayers”**

The next use of *fuck* word is unique among other uses – it is the first and only time when BoJack himself, the eponymous character uses it. Hollyhock, his half-sister sired by BoJack's father, wants to meet BoJack's mother and they visit her in an elder care facility. Beatrice Horseman struggles with fast-forwarding dementia and doctors admit that she will not live for more than ten years. This season is full of flashbacks from BoJack and his mother's past, presenting the reasons for BoJack's resentment towards his mother. BoJack accuses his mother of his childhood trauma affecting his current personality and mindset. Due to dementia, Beatrice does not recognise BoJack, even when he turns on an episode of “Horsin' Around”. BoJack talks with Hollyhock, about how he would like to treat his mother and how he would like to speak to her if she recognised him.

00:19:15,821 --> 00:19:19,784  
I'll come out and say hello. And  
she'll say, “BoJack? Is that you?”  
00:19:19,867 --> 00:19:21,369  
When her eyes spark with recognition,  
00:19:21,444 --> 00:19:23,764  
I'm gonna sit down next to her,  
I'm gonna squeeze her hand  
00:19:23,788 --> 00:19:25,915  
and get real close and say...  
00:19:25,998 --> 00:19:28,292  
- “Fuck you, Mom.” (BoJack Horseman S04E05, 2017).

Again, the f-word is at the end of a monologue, but this use of the swear word *fuck* is not an interpose, it is fully spoken and it is used as a verb phrase. Dictionary.org explains this phrase as “a curse meaning go to hell” (Dictionary.org, 2022). What is interesting, this is the only instance BoJack himself uses this particular swearword and he does not articulate it in a real-world situation – it is only imaginary, what he would do if he had a chance. His pragmatic reasons for this use clearly follow in the next line of dialogue:

00:19:28,376 --> 00:19:30,711  
I can finally tell her off!  
I'm gonna say, “Look at you”,  
00:19:30,795 --> 00:19:33,130  
you old piece of shit,  
rotting in a nursing home!”  
00:19:33,214 --> 00:19:35,758  
- Now I have the power! (BoJack Horseman S04E05, 2017).

This display of verbal aggression vents his resentment towards the neglectful mother and as BoJack admits himself, he has finally an opportunity to show his power over the woman that he blames for ruining his life. He is not a scared boy



anymore, he is a grown man, who is still haunted by his past. However, it is an imaginary situation what he would do – but when he gets his chance and Beatrice finally recognises BoJack for real, he does not say any of the words he had intended to have said. Beatrice, alone with BoJack in a shabby room in a care facility, asks where she is and BoJack lies that they are in her lake house, surrounded by the loved ones and eating ice cream.

#### **Example 5 – S05E11 – “The Showstopper”**

The fifth use of the swear word *fuck* takes place in the eleventh episode of the fifth season of “BoJack Horseman”, “The Showstopper”. This episode presents BoJack’s struggle with addiction to drugs during his comeback to the filming industry. He stars the eponymous character of a new TV show “Philbert” about two detectives trying to solve the case of a mysterious murder. The co-star of the show is Gina Cazador, starring the officer Sassy Malone – Philbert’s partner and lover. BoJack develops drugs addiction and he faces difficulties distinguishing between real life and the show – the show is filmed on the set inspired by BoJack’s house and looking exactly the same, BoJack dates and has sex with Gina, who is a mirror of a situation in the show, BoJack all the time wears Philbert’s outfit and also Mr. Peanutbutter, his friend in real world is an actor in the show. BoJack takes more and more painkillers and soon he is not sure which situations involve BoJack and Gina and which ones fictitious Philbert and Sassy. The scenes with transitions BoJack/Philbert overlap and BoJack, being high on pills, develops delusions and loses track of reality. Finally, during filming one of the scenes to the show, BoJack/Philbert nearly strangles Gina to death, because previously she tried to throw out his pills. BoJack is strangling her for real and when the cast becomes aware of it, they separate him from her. Gina’s neck is bruised and her eyes are bloodshot and she, heavily breathing and frightened, says:

00:24:11,659 --> 00:24:14,078

What the fuck is wrong with you? (“BoJack Horseman” S05E11, 2018)

*Fuck* is used as a full word and functions as a syntactic interposing between wh-form and a predicate in question as an exclamation. Insertion of the expletive follows the wh- word immediately, as noted by McMillan (1980). By contrast to the previous uses of *fuck* in the show, the line is separate, not being a part of a longer monologue. The word is used, again, towards BoJack, by a person closely connected to him (his current lover) and proving disappointment in his behaviour. The function of the swear word is to express shock and anger (the speaker has nearly died), as well as to attack the interlocutor and offend him, suggesting that something is indeed wrong with him.

#### **Example 6 – S06E08 – “A Quick One, While He’s Away”**

The final and the last use of the swear word *fuck* in “The BoJack Horseman” TV show is in the eighth episode of the final, sixth season, “A Quick One, While He’s Away”. The episode centres on Gina, the former BoJack’s co-star and lover, who



developed her career and now works on a new film as a leading actress. She is described by the co-workers as difficult and hating surprises or changes, especially on set. Gina and a co-star film a dance scene and when he unexpectedly touches her neck and sways her, she becomes scared and anxious, which leads to her falling to the ground. Gina is angry and while a director is trying to calm her down, her co-star asks:

00:19:59,114 --> 00:20:01,575

I had you.

What the fuck is wrong with you? ("BoJack Horseman" S06E08, 2019).

It is the exact quote of what Gina previously angrily shouted to BoJack (see Example 5) and this time, it is aimed at her by someone else. The situation shares some similarities – a man and a woman are closely together, touching a neck. But this time, it is Gina who acts unexpectedly, due to her trauma and previously being assaulted by BoJack. The speaker of the *fuck* word, the unnamed actor, uses this word to vent his anger and surprise due to the anxiety of his co-actress. It functions as a swear word propositionally used to purposely attack someone, as in a face threat (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008).

### **Other examples – subversions of *fuck***

The writers in some instances sometimes refer to the swear word *fuck* by giving its replacements, which aim is to create a jocular effect, as in the conversation in Diane's Vietnamese-American family.

00:10:53,859 --> 00:10:55,944

All the jobs are going to immigrants these days.

00:10:56,028 --> 00:10:57,946

What do you... We're immigrants.

00:10:58,030 --> 00:10:59,948

- How do you figure?

- We're Vietnamese?

00:11:00,032 --> 00:11:02,409

Step off! We're American as pho ("BoJack Horseman" S01E05, 2014).

*Pho* is used instead of *fuck*, due to its similar sound and to create a pun involving the name of a Vietnamese dish. Its function is to state and emphasise the fact that the family is American. In another case, Diane uses the swear word *motherfucker*, deriving from *fuck*, when she finds out that she is pregnant, but the word she screams is literally divided into two separate parts in two episodes – *motherf-* is heard as the final word at the end of S03E05, and *-ucker* as the first word at the beginning of S03E06. Technically, the word is not used, due to its cuts. However, the function of this swear word is simply cathartic and it might be unpropositional. Diane shouts it, without aiming at any particular person, she simply wants to vent her anger due to discovering the unexpected pregnancy. The next subversion of the swear word *fuck* is present in S04E04, during Diane and Mr. Peanutbutter's sexual intercourse. They use the word *frack*, instead of *fuck*,



which is an additional pun relating to the title (“Commence Francking”) and the plot of the show, in which the couple argues about fracking campaign. Contrary to the majority of other uses, this word is used positively, to express a pleasure and happiness.

### ***Comparison with other swear words in the show***

“BoJack Horseman” dialogues are loaded with various profanities and swear words. Employing the corpus tools allows a quantitative analysis of other swear words used. The quantitative method is one of more practical ways of presenting the number of the swear words used in the show.

<b>Lemma</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
shit	312
damn	123
ass	115
hell	80
suck	77
bitch	44
dick	43
jesus	41
crap	23
jeez	19
cock	12
piss	9
sake	5
slut	4
gosh	3
slur	3
cunt	1
bloody	1

**Tab. 1. The frequency of swear words used in “BoJack Horseman” seasons 1-6**

24 most popular swear words were chosen according to “An encyclopedia of swearing: the social history of oaths, profanity, foul language, and ethnic slurs in the English-speaking world” (Hughes, 2006) and their lemmas were searched in the corpus. However, not all the swear words from the list were found in the corpus in the total number of 915. The results obtained from the preliminary analysis, 18 swear words, are presented in Table 1. The words appeared in the dialogues



of the characters in various forms, but their lemmas, the forms of the words appearing in a dictionary entries, are set out. The lemma *fuck*, as noted previously, occurs only six times in the whole show, only once in a season. As we can see, lemma *shit* occurs 312 times, in forms such as: *shit* (freq. = 209), *shitty* (freq. = 49), *bullshit* (freq. = 28), *dumbshit* (freq. = 5), *shitshow* (freq. = 5), *dipshit* (freq. = 3), *shits* (freq. = 3), *shithead* (freq. = 1) and others. When it comes to lemma *damn*, the writers employed it in the forms of *damn* (freq. = 69), *goddamn* (freq. = 53) and *goddamnit* (freq. = 1). Lemmas such as *whore*, *nigga*, *fag*, *bugger*, *blowjob* and *retard* were also searched in the BoJack Horseman Corpus, but there were no hits. These are the swear words being strongly offensive, especially to the particular groups, so an implication of the lack of such swear words is the possibility that the show writers employed the swear words in order to obtain a humorous effect, but with a respect to the society and not aiming at insulting any particular group, which is the assumption that might be addressed in future studies.

## Conclusion

The study has been conducted incorporating corpus linguistics tools. The research material has been retrieved from the BoJack Horseman Corpus, compiled by the author in the AntConc software. The aim of this research project has therefore been to establish the trend in using the lemma *fuck* in “BoJack Horseman”. It has been used in “BoJack Horseman” six times, just once per one episode in every of six seasons of the show.

- (1) Get the *fuck* out of my house.
- (2) I will *fucking* kill you.
- (3) *Fuck*, man. What else is there to say?
- (4) *Fuck* off, mum.
- (5, 6) What the *fuck* is wrong with you?

Once it is used in the adverbial form *fucking* (2), in the remaining five instances it is used in its full grammatical form *fuck*. In four out of six cases, it is used as a syntactical interposing in a collocation sequence of verb + adverb (1), an auxiliary and verb (2), and *wh*-form and a predicate in question (5, 6). In (3) it stands as a separate exclamation and in (4) as a phrasal verb. In every case, the user of this sexual profanity is expressing their strong emotions and the use of a swear word functions as a vent for anger, disappointment, or surprise. The writers of the show are very economical when it comes to this particular swear word and they convey extra meaning with it, especially when compared the number of six uses of *fuck* with 909 uses of other swear words, such as *shit*, *damn*, *ass*, *hell*, *suck*, *bitch* and others. *Fuck* is used in speech acts, in which a listener performs an action disappointing or surprising to the speaker of the *f*-word. This project provided an important opportunity to advance the understanding of the swear words used in the telecinematic discourse. Future studies could fruitfully explore this issue



further by in-depth analysis of other swear words in the “BoJack Horseman” TV show, apart from the one analysed in this research.

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