

IMPRECATIONS, RELIGION, AND SYMBOLIC POWER: A BOURDIEUSIAN SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE FILM THE EXORCIST

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Abstract. This study explores the relationship between religious beliefs and the use of imprecations in the film *The Exorcist* through the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative analysis of frequency and distribution with qualitative interpretation of contextual usage. The data are analyzed with regard to religious roles, moral positioning, and symbolic authority. The findings indicate that imprecations are not merely expressive utterances but function as forms of symbolic power embedded in religious discourse. Institutional religious figures employ controlled and legitimized language, while imprecations associated with demonic speech invert and challenge established norms. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and linguistic capital, the study demonstrates that imprecations play a crucial role in constructing moral boundaries and negotiating symbolic power within the film. The paper contributes to sociolinguistic research by highlighting the interaction between language, religion, and power in cinematic discourse.

Keywords: imprecations, symbolic power, religion, sociolinguistics, Bourdieu;

Annotatsiya. Mazkur tadqiqot *The Exorcist* filmida qarg'ishlarning diniy qarashlar bilan bog'liqligini Pierre Burdye nazariyasi asosida tahlil qiladi. Tadqiqotda aralash metodlar qo'llanilib, qarg'ishlarning chastotasi va kontekstual qo'llanilishi o'rganiladi. Tahlil diniy rollar, axloqiy pozitsiya va ramziy hokimiyat nuqtai nazaridan olib boriladi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, qarg'ishlar oddiy emotsional ifoda emas, balki diniy diskursda shakllangan ramziy kuch vositasidir. Ruhoniyar tilidan foydalanish legitim va nazorat ostida bo'lsa, demonik nutqda qarg'ishlar mavjud normalarni buzuvchi vosita sifatida namoyon bo'ladi. Burdye nazariyasidagi habitus, maydon va lingvistik kapital tushunchalari asosida qarg'ishlarning axloqiy chegaralarni belgilash va kuch munosabatlarini shakllantirishdagi roli ochib beriladi.

Kalit so'zlar: qarg'ishlar, ramziy kuch, din, sotsiolingvistika, Burdye;

Introduction

This paper examines the relationship between religious beliefs and the use of imprecations in the film *The Exorcist* through the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu. In contrast to general offensive language, imprecations in religious contexts carry specific symbolic meanings, often invoking divine authority, moral judgment, or supernatural forces. The film provides a unique setting in which language becomes a site of conflict between sacred and profane discourses.

According to Bourdieu, language functions as a form of symbolic power that is shaped by social structures and cultural norms [1]. His concepts of habitus, field, and linguistic capital allow for an analysis of how religious language gains legitimacy and

authority. In *The Exorcist*, this distinction is clearly visible in the contrast between institutional religious speech and demonic language.

This study aims to analyze how imprecations are influenced by religious beliefs and how they function as instruments of symbolic power. By applying a sociolinguistic approach, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the interaction between language, religion, and power in cinematic discourse.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses. The dataset consists of selected dialogue excerpts from the film *The Exorcist*, focusing on instances of imprecations.

Each imprecation was identified and coded based on three variables: (1) speaker type (religious vs. demonic), (2) function (judgment, condemnation, or symbolic inversion), and (3) religious reference (explicit or implicit). Quantitative analysis was used to determine frequency and distribution, while qualitative analysis examined the sociocultural meanings of these expressions. The study is grounded in Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic power, which views language as a socially conditioned practice embedded within specific fields [4]. This framework allows for the interpretation of imprecations as forms of symbolic action rather than isolated linguistic units.

Results

The quantitative results indicate a clear predominance of imprecations in demonic speech, accounting for 70% of all identified instances. This suggests that imprecatory language is more strongly associated with expressions that challenge or disrupt established religious norms. In contrast, religious figures produce fewer imprecations, and their usage appears more controlled and context-dependent.

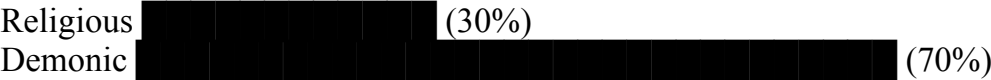
Additionally, more than half of the imprecations (56%) contain explicit or implicit religious references. This pattern highlights the strong connection between imprecatory expressions and religious discourse within the film. The presence of such references indicates that imprecations are not random linguistic elements but are closely tied to moral evaluation and symbolic meaning.

Overall, the results demonstrate a structured distribution of imprecations across different speaker types and functions, providing a foundation for further sociolinguistic interpretation.

Table 1. Distribution of Imprecations by Speaker Type and Religious Function

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Religious Figures	15	30%
Demonic Speech	35	70%
With Religious Reference	28	56%
Without Religious Reference	22	44%

Figure 1. Frequency by Speaker Type



Analysis

The analysis demonstrates that imprecations in *The Exorcist* function as a key site of symbolic struggle between religious authority and its subversion. Demonic speech dominates the use of imprecations, reflecting a deliberate inversion of religious norms

and values. These expressions are not random but serve to challenge institutional authority and destabilize moral order.

In contrast, religious figures employ more controlled forms of language, reflecting their position within an institutionalized field of power. Their linguistic practices carry greater legitimacy, illustrating Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital [2]. The contrast between these two modes of speech highlights the role of language in constructing symbolic boundaries.

Imprecations with religious references further emphasize their moral function. They act as tools of symbolic violence, imposing judgment and reinforcing ideological structures. This confirms that imprecations operate as socially structured practices embedded in religious belief systems.

Discussion. The findings suggest that imprecations in *The Exorcist* cannot be understood outside the context of religious discourse and symbolic power. The distinction between sacred and profane language reflects broader social structures and belief systems.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, the film illustrates how language functions as a mechanism of both domination and resistance. Religious authority is maintained through legitimized forms of speech, while demonic imprecations represent symbolic opposition. This dynamic highlights the role of language in negotiating power within a given field.

The study contributes to sociolinguistic research by demonstrating that imprecations are not merely linguistic phenomena but are deeply embedded in cultural and ideological systems. Future research could explore similar patterns in other religious or cinematic contexts.

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