“It’s about thirty minutes away; I’ll be there in ten”

The style of *Pulp Fiction* – a sociopragmatic analysis

By

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1. Introduction and aim

In 1994 *Pulp Fiction* was the movie to be reckoned with. It was directed by the then rather unknown Quentin Tarantino. The movie is nonlinear and has a very rich dialogue that includes a large number of references to pop culture. *Pulp Fiction* was nominated for seven Oscars and won one for Best Original Screenplay. The movie also won the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival and it was a huge success; critics and audience loved it. For one of the actors, John Travolta, it was a re-entry ticket to the bigger parts in Hollywood. Travolta, Samuel L Jackson and Uma Thurman all received Academy Award nominations for their performances.

The title *Pulp Fiction* refers to paper back books known for a violent content along with a hard-hitting dialogue, which is a good description of the movie. Pop culture is an interesting field to study since it is a prolific part of western culture. *Pulp Fiction* had such a huge impact and it is a fitting subject to explore. The fact that the movie was known for its dialogue rather than the plot is also interesting and this has furthermore incited this study.


The aim of the essay is to investigate the style of the dialogue in the movie *Pulp Fiction* and also to see if and how it changes depending on the context of the movie. The intention is to do this within a sociopragmatic theoretical framework.

- What kind of stereotypes are there among the characters?
- What is the style of the dialogue in the movie *Pulp Fiction*?
- Language register – what kind of vocabulary are the characters using?
- What are the taboo words in the dialogue?
- What kinds of stereotypes are used in the language?
- How does the dialogue change depending on the context in the movie?
2. Material and method
The material for the essay consists of the manuscript of the movie *Pulp Fiction* and the DVD with the movie itself. At some places in the movie there is a discrepancy between the manuscript and the movie and I have chosen to use the dialogue in the movie on these occasions, simply because this is the version most people have had any contact with. Along with the manuscript and the movie, slang dictionaries, *The Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford Reference Online, Encyclopædia Britannica Online* and an article from the *New York Times*, the following books have been used; *Forbidden Words – Taboo and the Censoring of Language* by Keith Allan and Kate Burridge (2006), *An Introduction to Language* by Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007), *Style in fiction* by Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short (1981), *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* by Suzanne Romaine (2001), *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose* by Mick Short (1996), *Meaning in interaction* by Jenny Thomas (1995) and *Understanding Pragmatics* by Jef Verschueren (1999).

Allan and Burridge as well as Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams are used for a clear definition of the concept of taboo words. Leech and Short discusses style in fiction and provides a definition of style: “it refers to the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose and so on”\(^1\). And also: “the style proclaims the man”\(^2\). These quotes are good illustrations of the aim of the essay. Leech and Short further develop their thoughts with an example from Shaw’s *Pygmalion* where Eliza’s: “not bloody likely has style, ‘no’ has not”\(^3\). On the following page the authors write that the choice of expression defines style. Later on in the book they also discuss how the reader of a text can investigate the style of it by identifying: “a pattern of choices, something that belongs to the text as a whole”\(^4\). The authors also attend to the matters of the ironic voice, irony and moral seriousness, understatements, figures of speech, tropes, context and disparities of register and tone. All these are important for the essay and will therefore be developed below.\(^5\) Leech and Short’s definition of style works as a good starting point for the essay. Romaine’s thoughts on style are also interesting; she implies that the style depends on the social context.\(^6\) Short’s book contains material on style and drama, which is essential to the essay. Short also

\(^1\) Leech & Short, p 10
\(^2\) ibid, p 11
\(^3\) ibid, p 18
\(^4\) ibid, p 42
\(^5\) ibid, p 57 and forward
\(^6\) Romaine, p 193
explores, among other things, the meaning of speech acts, politeness and more. Thomas is mainly concerned with pragmatics, indirectness and politeness. The main things of interest for the study are her thoughts on the construction of meaning and direct/indirectness, which will be investigated in the third and fourth chapter of the essay. Verschueren is used for a comment on selling. For general information concerning *Pulp Fiction* and the director Quentin Tarantino I have used the *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* and the *Oxford Reference Online*. These have also been used to complete the information on taboo words. Other sources used on taboo words and slang are the slang dictionaries and the article from the New York Times.

3. Sociopragmatic analysis

The following section will start with the stereotypes among the characters along with a short social description of them. The purpose is to guide the reader to the characters before the analysis of the style follows with examples from the dialogue. This part is followed by the analysis of the register and how the context affects the dialogue.

3.1 Stereotypes among the characters, extra linguistic features

In general the characters are rather stereotypical; they are all endowed with features that will guide the viewer in the “right” direction. Below follows a short passage with the obvious signs attached to each character.

*Pumpkin*; a chain smoking English man with tacky clothes and a language filled with prejudicial views of the world. The impression we get of him is that of a low educated, selfish, violent character.

*Honey Bunny/Yolanda*; she is a woman with a white trash-look in her late twenties who gives an odd impression at first and who later on in the movie seems almost hysterical when under stress she starts rambling. Her clothes and acting create the impression of an unstable character. “Everything she does contradicts something she did”[7].

*Jules Winnfield* and *Vincent Vega*; they both wear cheap black suits and black ties, which function as a way to present them as gangsters. Their body language and Vincent’s habit of

never or rarely smiling, creates an image of two rough characters. Jules seems to be more intelligent than Vincent, who makes a very immature and impulsive impression. Vincent seems like the kind of person who could shoot someone over a parking space.

*Butch Coolidge*; he is a boxer/prize fighter and his rough appearance works as a way to reinforce this. Facial expressions, unshaved face and in general a tough look works in his favour. He appears to be street smart, like a person who can handle difficult situations.

*Lance*; he is a drug dealer with a hippie style. His language is that of a regular salesman, with the difference that he is selling heroin. He is wearing a bath robe and looks like a very laid back person. He has been a drug dealer his entire adult life and has never had a day job.

*Marsellus Wallace*; he is presented as a mix between a gangster and a god. He is always wearing very fine clothes, his voice is very dark and this combined with his vocabulary creates an image of a tough person. It takes a while before he is presented in full figure. Before that he is portrayed from the back or from an angle that contributes to the portrait of a huge man. This is underlined by the fact that the other characters refer to *Marsellus Wallace* as “big man”.

*Mia Wallace*; she is the wife of Marsellus Wallace and she is the stereotype of the trophy wife, i.e. a very good looking woman, married to an older man. She functions as a status symbol for Marsellus Wallace and her appearance is that of a beautiful woman.

*Zed* and *Maynard*; they are both presented in a hillbilly style which is reinforced by their clothes and greasy looks, but mostly by their accent which is a southern one. *Hillbilly* is defined by *Amerikanskt slanglexikon* as a southern rural person which fits perfectly with these two characters. Zed is a concentrated version of Maynard, the two are actually brothers. “Where Maynard is a vicious pit-bull, Zed is deadly cobra”.

*Captain Koons*; the whole scene with the captain is a stereotype of the veteran from the war who tells the truth to the young man/boy about his father. His uniform and language

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8 Tarantino, p 40
10 Tarantino, p 124
accentuates this. The two men together in the prison camp reinforce the stereotype of the “brothers in arms”.

*Jimmie*; the househusband in his late twenties wearing a dressing gown is more afraid of his wife than the police or the armed gangsters in front of him. His clothes and his vocabulary illustrate this very well. When he is walking around in his robe he is like a caricature of a housewife.

*The Wolf*; his reaction to the situation with a dead body is that of coolness, he does not worry about these things. His body language and natural way of controlling the situation leads us to believe that he is used to this kind of situation. He wears a clean cut tuxedo and has a neat haircut. He, like Butch, is street smart, but he is more intelligent.

### 3.2 Language register – vocabulary used by the characters

The dialogue is smart and quick; it is filled with ironic, sarcastic remarks which give it an interesting twist. It is also somewhat absurd at different times during the movie, which has to do with the absurd scenes that take place at various occasions. The dialogue is so central to the movie that it actually is more important than the plot. The plot is not complicated at all, but the dialogue compensates for this.

According to Leech and Short, disparities of register and tone could point to an ironic interpretation. This is very often the case in the dialogue of *Pulp Fiction*. The register of the dialogue can be divided into four different categories: parables, irony, taboo words and stereotypes. Below follow these categories with examples.

#### 3.2.1 Parables

The parables function as a way to enrich the language and give it a certain character. The parables are so common that they, together with the irony, constitute a very important part of the register.

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11 Leech & Short, p 106
The first example deals with reference to pop culture when Jules first tries to calm a very tense situation down and when he explains to Vincent why he does not eat pork and what would change his mind on this matter:

**Quote 1.**

“Nobody’s gonna hurt anybody. We’re gonna be like three Fonzies. And what’s Fonzie like? C’mon on Yolanda, what’s Fonzie like?
He’s cool?
Correct-amundo. And that’s what we’re gonna be, we’re gonna be cool”\(^{12}\)

“...but do you consider a dog to be a filthy animal?
I wouldn’t go so far as to call a dog filthy, but they’re definitely dirty. But a dog’s got personality. And personality goes a long way.
So by that rationale, if a pig had a better personality, he’d cease to be a filthy animal?
We’d have to be talkin’ ‘bout one charming motherfucking pig. He’d have to be ten times more charming than that Arnold on ‘Green Acres’, you know what I’m saying?”\(^{13}\)

The second example regards the discussion between Jules and Vincent where they argue if foot massage is considered to mean something more than the massage itself. Vincent argues that it has an erotic connection and they both use terms from sport:

**Quote 2.**

“Have you ever given a foot massage?
Don’t be tellin’ me about foot massages. I’m the foot fuckin’ master.

... ...
...no, but you’re in the same fucking ballpark.
...ain’t even the same fuckin’ thing.
Not the same thing, the same ballpark.
It ain’t no ballpark either...ain’t the same ballpark, ain’t the same league, ain’t even the same fuckin’ sport. Foot massages don’t mean shit.”\(^{14}\)

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\(^{12}\) Tarantino, p 182 - 183

\(^{13}\) ibid, p 172
The third example of parables is the use of the word *ass* in the sense of person. Instead of meaning *bottom*, the word stands for someone’s person, or well being as can be seen in the examples below where Marsellus Wallace describes the ageing process, he checks that Butch agrees on being bribed and later he expresses the wish to kill the boxer Butch Coolidge, when he has broken his promise. This is not unique for the movie, but the use of it is so frequent that it is worth mentioning:

**Quote 3.**

“This business is filled to the brim with unrealistic motherfuckers. Motherfuckers who thought their ass would age like wine, if you mean it turns to vinegar, it does. If you mean it gets better with age, it don’t.”\(^{15}\)

“You my nigger?
It certainly appears so.”\(^{16}\)

“I’m prepared to scour the earth for this motherfucker. If Butch goes to Indo-China, I want a nigger hidin’ in a bowl of rice, ready to pop a cap in his ass”\(^{17}\)

The fourth example is when Butch and Marsellus Wallace end up in a pawn shop run by the two psychopaths Zed and Maynard, who rape Marsellus. After a struggle Butch releases him and time has come for the revenge:

**Quote 4.**

“You okay?
Naw, man I’m pretty fucking far from okay!
What now?
What now? Well, let me tell you what now. I’m gonna call a coupla hard pipe-hitting’ niggers, who’ll go to work on the homes here with a pair of pliers and a blowtorch.
You hear me talking, hillbilly boy?! I ain’t through with you by a damn sight. I’m gonna git medieval on your ass.”\(^{18}\)

\(^{14}\) Tarantino, p 20
\(^{15}\) ibid, p 34
\(^{16}\) *Pulp Fiction* DVD. This utterance does not appear in the manuscript.
\(^{17}\) Tarantino, p 91
3.2.2 Irony

Besides the parables, the irony is the most important part of the register. Below follow examples of this. During the movie, irony with rhyming sentences is used at three occasions. The rhyming gives the dialogue a certain twist and although it only appears three times it is quite unique and therefore worth mentioning. Examples of this can be seen in quote 9.

The first one is from a conversation where Jules tells Vincent about Mia’s pilot episode. Vincent does not understand what a pilot is:

Quote 5.

“She usta be an actress.
Oh, really, she do anything I’d’ve seen?
I think her biggest deal was she starred in a pilot.
Pilot? What’s a pilot?
Well, you know the shows on TV?
I don’t watch TV.
Yes, but you’re aware that there’s an invention called television, and on this invention they show shows, right?”

The second example is about the character Antwan, also known as ‘Tony Rocky Horror’. First are Jules and second Mia’s reactions when they hear that Antwan was thrown off a balcony by Marsellus Wallace, after massaging Mia’s feet. Jules also describes the consequences for Antwan due to the four-story fall:

Quote 6.

“You don’t think he overreacted?”

“Marsellus throwing Tony out of a four-story window for giving me foot massage seemed reasonable?”

“He’s kinda developed a speech impediment”

18 Tarantino, p 130 - 131
19 ibid, p 17 - 18
20 ibid, p 20
21 ibid, p 62
The third example is when Jules and Vincent have entered the room with the three persons about to be murdered. Jules does most of the talking and completely controls the situation, just by his looks. After a while the language changes:

**Quote 7.**

_How you boys doin’?_

...

_Looks like me and Vince caught you boys at breakfast. Sorry ‘bout that. What ‘cha havin’?_

_Hamburgers._

_Hamburgers! The cornerstone of any nutritious breakfast._

...

_Me, I can’t usually eat ‘em ‘cause my girlfriend’s a vegetarian, but I sure love the taste of a good burger._

...

Jules shoots one of the boys in the chest.

_Oh, I’m sorry. Did that break your concentration? I didn’t mean to do that. Please continue. I believe you were saying something about ‘best intentions’. What’samatter? Oh, you were through anyway. Well allow me to retort._

_What?_

_What country you from!_

_What?_

_‘What’ ain’t no country I ever heard of. Do they speak English in ‘What’?_

_What?_

_English-motherfucker-can-you-speak-it?_

...

_Say ‘what’ again! C’mon, say ‘What’ again! I dare ya, I double dare ya motherfucker. Say ‘What’ one more goddamn time!_23

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22 Tarantino, p 19
23 ibid, p 24 - 30
The fourth example is when Vincent and his drug dealer Lance have to give Mia Wallace an injection of adrenaline because she overdosed on heroin. The scene is frantic and nobody knows what to do, which is illustrated when Vincent and Lance argues over what to do and how to do this. The two final lines are Mia responding to a cue and Jody’s, Lance’s wife, absurd comment.

**Quote 8.**

“*Quit fuckin’ around man and give her the shot!*

*While I’m doing this, take her shirt off and find her heart.*

*Does it have to be exact?*

*Yeah, it has to be exact! I’m giving her an injection in the heart so I guess it gotta be fuckin’ exact.*

*Well I don’t know exactly where her heart is. I think it’s here.*

…

*It’s ready, I’ll tell you what to do.*

*No, no, no, no. You’re gonna give her the shot.*

*I’ve never done this before.*

*I’ve never done this before either, and I ain’t startin’ now. You brought ‘er here, that means you give her the shot. The day I bring an OD’ing bitch to your place, then I gotta give her the shot.*

…

*If you want the needle to pierce through to her heart, you gotta stab her hard.*

*Then once you do, push down the plunger.*

*What happens after that?*

*I’m kind of curious myself.*

*This ain’t no fucking joke, man!*

…

*If you’re alright, then say something.*

*Something.*

*Ha ha. That was fuckin’ trippy. Ha ha ha.*"^^24

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^^ Tarantino, p 78 - 81
The rhyming examples are first when Jules is threatening a man who has tried to fool Marsellus Wallace, and the second is English Dave’s reaction when he hears that Vincent will take Mia Wallace out to dinner:

**Quote 9.**

“My name is Pitt and your ass ain’t talking its way out of this shit”\(^{25}\)

“Hey, my name’s Paul, and this shit is between y’all”\(^{26}\)

The following example contains an ironic twist. This is when the boxer Butch Coolidge has returned to the motel room where he is hiding with his girlfriend after the fight he was supposed to lose, but won instead:

**Quote 10.**

“Hard day at the office?
Pretty hard, I got into a fight.”\(^{27}\)

The following example takes place at Jimmie’s house where Jules and Vincent end up after Vincent accidentally shot a person in their car. They now need assistance to clean the car and get rid of the body. The odd thing is that Jimmie, who is a friend of Jules, is more afraid of his wife coming home, than the armed gangsters in front of him.

**Quote 11.**

“Goddamn Jimmie, this is some serious gourmet shit. Me an’ Vincent woulda been satisfied with freeze-dried Tasters Choice and he springs this gourmet shit on us. What flavour is this?
Knock it off Julie.
What?
I don’t need you to tell me how fucking good my coffee is.
…”

\(^{25}\) Tarantino, p 29  
\(^{26}\) ibid, p 37  
\(^{27}\) ibid, p 96 - 99
But you know what’s on my mind right now? It ain’t the coffee in my kitchen, it’s the dead nigger in my garage.

Oh, Jimmie don’t even worry about it –

- I don’t think about anything. I want to ask you a question. When you came pulling in here, did you notice a sign in front of my house that said, ‘Dead Nigger Storage?’

Jimmie, you know I didn’t see no shit…

Did you notice a sign in the front of my house that said, ‘Dead Nigger Storage?’

No, I didn’t.

You know why you didn’t see that sign?

Why?

‘Cause it ain’t there, ‘cause storin’ dead niggers ain’t my fucking business, that’s why!

Jimmie we ain’t gonna store the motherfucker…

No, no, no, no, no, no, no. Don’t you fucking realize man that if Bonnie comes home and finds a dead body in her house, I’m gonna get divorced. No marriage counsellor, no trial separation – I’m going to get fuckin’ divorced OK?”

The last example is the last scene of the movie where Vincent and Jules eat breakfast in a coffee shop that gets robbed by Pumpkin and Honey Bunny. Jules is threatened by Pumpkin who wants the briefcase that Jules is carrying, a briefcase that belongs to Marsellus Wallace. After a while Jules reverses the situation:

**Quote 12.**

“What’s in that?

My boss’s dirty laundry.

Your boss makes you do his laundry?

When he wants it clean.

Sounds like a shit job.

Funny, I’ve been thinking the same thing.

Open it up.

‘Fraid I can’t do that.

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28 Tarantino, p 146 - 148
I didn’t hear you.
Yes you did.
…
I don’t mean to shatter your ego, but this ain’t the first time I’ve had a gun pointed at me.
You don’t take your fucking hand off that case, it’ll be the last.
It’s all yours Ringo.”

Jules turns the situation by taking the gun from Pumpkin and pulling out his own gun.

“I want you to go in that bag and find my wallet.
Which one is it?
It’s the one that says ‘Bad Motherfucker’.”

3.2.3 Taboo words
According to Allan and Burridge, along with Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams, the origin of the word taboo can be traced to Polynesia and the island of Tonga. The word was first noted in 1771 by Captain James Cook. The term taboo can be connected with a number of things, but to put it simple; it is something that is forbidden. Today we would probably say that it is a social ban on words or actions. As said by Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams, the largest part of the words considered taboo in many cultures are related “to sex, sex organs and natural bodily functions”. Allan and Burridge also discuss this in their book. To this we have to add blasphemies that refer to religion and race/ethnic taboos that are considered offensive. There are of course many other taboos, but these are the categories that will be discussed in this study.

Accordingly, the taboo words that are being used in the dialogue are divided into four categories; sexual, blasphemies, bodily functions and race/ethnic taboos. The sexual category contains: fuck, motherfucker, bitch, son of a bitch, prick, dick and pussy. The blasphemies are; damn, goddamn, hell, Jesus, Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ Almighty, the three latter uttered in
a blasphemous way. The bodily functions examples are asshole, shit and piss. The race/ethnic taboo words are; nigger, Negro and boy – uttered with racist implications against black people, gook, greasy yella hands and slopes – for Vietnamese people and wetback for illegal immigrants from Mexico.35

The taboo words are used in different ways. The most common ethnic taboo word in Pulp Fiction is nigger, used both for black and white people, which of course might seem odd. Between black people it could function as a word with no negative connotation36, for example when Jules, who is black, describes another black character called Antwan and what happened to him:

**Quote 13.**

“I wouldn’t go so far as calling the brother fat, the nigger’s got a little weight problem, that’s all, he’s Samoan, what do you expect?”37

“Well, Marsellus fucked his ass up good. And word around the campfire is, it is on account of Marsellus Wallace’s wife.

…threw his ass over the balcony. Nigger fell four stories”38

But nigger also functions as a negative derogatory word. This is the case when Lance, white, in quote 19 explains to Vincent, white, why his drugs are better than the usual ones on the market and anyone who does not understand this is stupid, “Am I a nigger? Are we in Inglewood?”39

Another variant of the usage is when white people, or black and white together, are called niggers. The first example is when Marsellus Wallace tries to calm down Jules and tell him to talk to the two white persons that are with him. The second one is when English Dave, black, is surprised by the looks of Jules, black, and Vincent, white:

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36 Allan & Burridge, p 84
37 Tarantino, p 18
38 ibid, p 18 - 19
39 ibid, p 40
Quote 14.

“Go back in there, chill them niggers out and wait for the cavalry which should be coming directly.”\(^{40}\)

“Goddamn nigger what’s up with them clothes?”\(^{41}\)

Besides these variants other ethnic taboos are used a few times, but not by far as often as nigger and not at all with these varieties.

Another typical thing is the use of swearwords, usually to boost something. The word used most of the time is fuck, which is used relatively frequently. Either in the sense of the sexual function, boosting a statement, or in the sense of someone being fooled or trying to fool someone. The quote below is first when Jules asks for the reason why Marsellus Wallace threw Antwan off a balcony, second when Vincent has shot a person in their car and third when Jules asks a person why he tried to fool Marsellus Wallace:

Quote 15.

“So, what’d he do, fuck her?”\(^{42}\)

“Cops tend to notice shit like you’re driving a car drenched in fuckin’ blood”\(^{43}\)

“Does Marsellus Wallace looks like a bitch? Why were you trying to fuck him then?”\(^{44}\)

A variety of fuck is the word motherfucker who could be used, as nigger, both in a positive and a negative way. This is shown below first when Jules describes his rage and then when Pumpkin talks about Vietnamese liquor store owners:

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\(^{40}\) Tarantino, p 151
\(^{41}\) ibid, p 36
\(^{42}\) ibid, p 19
\(^{43}\) ibid, p 143
\(^{44}\) ibid, p 29
Quote 16.

“I’m a mushroom cloud-layin’-motherfucker ... I’m ‘Superfly TNT’, I’m the Guns of the Navarone”

“...one of these gook motherfuckers gonna make us kill ‘em.”

An interesting detail is the word *bitch* that is always used in a negative way. Romaine describes the fact that derogatory words for women are by far more frequent than negative words for men. This detail is reflected in the use of the word *bitch*. The word *bitch* is reserved for women and it is always negative in this movie unlike, for example, *nigger* that can be uttered in a positive way.

Ethnic taboos are common in the following quote where Captain Koons tells the young Butch Coolidge about his father and the watch his father had for luck that he now is about to give to Butch. Captain Koons and Butch’s father were imprisoned in Hanoi during the Vietnam War and the watch was then forced to be hid in an uncomfortable place:

Quote 17.

“Now he knew if the gooks ever saw the watch they’d confiscate it, take it away. The way your daddy looked at it, this watch was your birthright. He’d be damned if any slopes were gonna put their greasy yella hands on his boy’s birthright. So he hid it in the one place he knew he could hide somethin’. His ass. Five long years he wore this watch up his ass. Then he died of dysentery, he gave me the watch, I hid this uncomfortable hunk of metal up my ass two years. Then, after seven years, I was sent home to my family. And now, little man, I give the watch to you.”

3.2.4 Stereotypes in the language

Foreign owners of liquor stores are described in the following quote when Pumpkin describes his point of view on Jewish or Vietnamese, both utterances is a very stereotypic description of Jews and Asian Americans:

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45 Tarantino, p 159
46 ibid, p 10
47 Romaine, p 109 - 110
48 Tarantino, p 86
Quote 18.

“And if it’s not the gooks, it’s these old fucking Jews that owned the store for fifteen fucking generations. Too many foreigners who own liquor stores, they don’t even speak English; they don’t understand ‘open the register’.”

Black people are often referred to as niggers. One variant of stereotype is the following from quote 13: “I wouldn’t go so far as calling the brother fat, the nigger’s got a little weight problem, that’s all, he’s Samoan, what do you expect?” This implies that all people from Samoa are overweight. Other ethnic stereotypes are the taboo words on Vietnamese and Mexicans.

The character Butch Coolidge is a boxer and two stereotypes on this are punchy and palooka. The first one refers to a neurological disorder which affects certain boxers and the second one mean that someone is stupid. Both these stereotypes are uttered by Vincent about Butch.

The drug dealer Lance uses the urban district Inglewood to refer to bad drugs and black people who can not tell the difference between good and bad narcotics in implying that Inglewood is a bad neighbourhood and that black people are stupid:

Quote 19.

“Vincenzo, step into my office. Now this is Panda from Mexico, very good stuff. This is Bava, different, but equally good. And this is Choco from the Harz Mountains of Germany. Now the first two are the same, 300 a gram – those are friend prices – but this one, this one’s a little more expensive. This is 500 a gram. But when you shoot it, you’ll know where that extra money went. Nothing wrong with the first two. It’s real, real, real good shit. But this one’s a fuckin’ madman. Remember, I just got back from Amsterdam. Am I a nigger? Are we in Inglewood? No. You’re in my home. White people who know the difference between good shit and bad shit, this is the house they come to. My shit, I’ll take the Pepsi Challenge with that Amsterdam shit any ‘ol day of the fuckin’ week.

49 Tarantino, p 10
50 ibid, p 18
That’s a bold statement.

This ain’t Amsterdam Vince. This is a sellers market. Coke is as fuckin’ dead as, dead. Heroin’s comin’ back in a big fuckin’ way.”\textsuperscript{51}

When visiting a restaurant which is a stereotype of the 50’s, Mia Wallace explains to Vincent why he will like the restaurant, implying that he is a stereotype in himself. The same goes for the use of cowboy and cowgirl. When Mia Wallace describes her pilot episode that she acted in we get quite a few stereotypes. The group she was in was called \textit{Fox Force Five}. The concept with five persons who each has a specialty seems a bit familiar. The fact that the Japanese girl is a martial arts master and the French one is specialised in sex also contributes to the stereotypical view, along with the fact that the women had to be “foxy chicks”.

\textbf{Quote 20.}

\begin{quote}
"An Elvis man should love it."\textsuperscript{52}

\ldots

What are you doing?
Rollin’ a smoke.
Here?
It’s just tobacco.
Oh. Well in that case, will you roll me one, cowboy?
You can have this one, cowgirl.\textsuperscript{53}

\ldots

Fox as in we were a bunch of foxy chicks… The Japanese fox was a Kung Fu master…the French fox’s specialty was sex.”\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

When Mr Wolf tries to find out how Jimmie’s wife would react to the fact that there are a few gangsters in her kitchen with a dead body, he reveals a sexist view. Why would a woman be hysterical, or the hysterical type?

\textbf{Quote 21.}

\begin{quote}
"Is she the hysterical type?"\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{51} Tarantino, p 40 - 41
\textsuperscript{52} ibid, p 51
\textsuperscript{53} ibid, p 54
\textsuperscript{54} ibid, p 56
\textsuperscript{55}
Marsellus Wallace calling out to Zed, who is a hillbilly, a white trash man, in quote 4 “You hear me talking, hillbilly boy?!” this is another example of the hillbilly as a stereotype for southern habitants in the USA.

Dogs are considered dirty in many cultures and Jules agrees with this stereotype by his saying in quote 22. He also develops his plan for the retirement. This is where Jules explains to Vincent that he will quit the criminal life and “walk the earth”. This whole idea of the lonesome hero who travels from town to town and gets drawn into different adventures resembles the blueprint for a whole genre of action/western movies or TV series.

**Quote 22.**

> Naw, I don’t eat pork…They’re filthy animals. I don’t eat filthy animals…I wouldn’t go so far as to call a dog filthy, but they’re definitely dirty”\(^{56}\)

> “Then basically I’m gonna walk the earth…You know like Caine in ‘Kung Fu’. Just walk from town to town, meet people, get in adventures.”\(^{57}\)

### 3.3 Pragmatic aspects of the dialogue

How does the dialogue change depending of the context in the movie? This is the last of the questions presented in the introduction and this is what will be developed in this part. When the characters speak to each other they are usually polite with an ironic touch and a bit of sarcasm and their language is spiced up with parables. As we will see, conflict and stress changes this to a more aggressive tone. Thomas (1995) discusses directness and indirectness in her book. How indirect a person should be depends on factors such as *power, social distance, size of imposition* and *rights and obligations*\(^{58}\).

In the first scene with Pumpkin and Honey Bunny the language changes from their small talk, to them making plans to rob the place, which are discussed in a more serious tone to a very aggressive tone when the robbery starts. Here the scene is cut, but we will return to this one in the last scene of the movie.

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55 Tarantino, p 151  
56 ibid, p 171  
57 ibid, p 173  
58 Thomas, p 124 - 131
In the second scene where Jules and Vincent are in their car on the way to kill the boys who had fooled Marsellus Wallace the tone is very relaxed and casual. They discuss Vincent’s stay in Amsterdam and what is different between Europe and USA. Their tone changes in the next scene when they pick up their guns, it is tenser and they talk about “the deal”. There are no jokes and their body language is that of tension. Thomas writes that our register varies according to the social context and this is illustrated in the way Jules and Vincent changes their vocabulary. The style changes again when they are walking towards the apartment. Again they seem relaxed and they discuss Mia’s pilot and the issue of foot massage. When they decide that it is time Jules says: “let’s get into character”, which functions as a signal – get focused. Still they continue the discussion on foot massage for a short while before entering. This goes along with Thomas theories on how the social context affects the language and how politeness can be used.

In the apartment Jules does most of the talking and he completely controls the situation. He keeps a polite language, but the body language is that of control, he even smiles a bit, asks about the breakfast, and also takes a bite of a hamburger. He is very polite; still you get the feeling that he is in total control, the language changes to aggressive when he is interrupted and the body language also. When Brett tries to talk his way out of the situation, Jules makes Brett sit down just by raising his hand; he then suddenly shoots one of the boys, the language is still polite and the voice is low, but the context makes it even more threatening. After this Jules is very aggressive and so is the language, in the end of the scene he is calmer again and recites a passage from the Bible before he kills Brett. The language is a mixture of politeness, correct language, aggressive and bad language. According to Thomas “a particular form of language is used strategically in order to achieve the speaker’s goal”. In the scene described above Jules is able to use polite language and still achieve his goals, because the persons he is talking to are so afraid of him. When he wants to scare them even more he screams at them and uses an offensive language, which boosts the victim’s fear of him.

In the scene where Marsellus Wallace and Butch meet for the bribe, Wallace’s language is cool and relaxed. He tells Butch that he is soon about to be over and done with his career, which is pretty frank, he is almost scornful with Butch and patronizes him. Marsellus Wallace

59 Thomas, p 154
60 ibid, p 155
61 ibid, p 156
says “you my nigger?”, when he wants to confirm that Butch is ok with being bribed, “it certainly appears so” is Butch’s answer. Butch is polite and does not talk back. Butch’s body language is that of respect, or even fear, of Mr Wallace. Wallace uses direct language most of the time, which fits with Thomas description of the role of power in indirectness. Wallace has power over Butch and does not need to be indirect; he can say whatever he wants.

After this Jules and Vincent arrive at the same place and first the language is relaxed, then English Dave teases Vincent a bit about the fact that Vincent is taking Mia Wallace out to dinner, Vincent is mad and talks back. Later he insults Butch with punchy and palooka, Vince get a tense face when being teased. Wallace calls Vince “my nigger”, they seem very relaxed together. Here nigger is something good, compare this to when Wallace says “you my nigger” to Butch in the sense of owning/controlling him. English Dave is indirect when he is talking to Vincent about the dinner and Vincent is very direct when he insults Butch. Both these situations again concerns power. Vincent, and Butch, knows that Marsellus Wallace likes him and therefore he can insult Butch. English Dave is aware of Vincent’s violent character and that is probably why he is indirect in his teasing.

After this we are at Lance’s house where Vincent and Lance talks about drugs in a very casual way, the whole dialogue is very laid back, it is like they are old friends. This relaxed tone will change dramatically when later on Mia Wallace overdose on Vincent’s narcotics. Lance wants to get a good price for his narcotics and this could be seen in his description of the drugs, but also in how he argues that the smart buyers come to him to get the best merchandise. Verschueren argues that when it comes to selling “one side expecting service, the other side providing it (and using whatever strategies are needed to be perceived as providing good service)”62. This fits well with Lance’s arguments, he wants Vincent to buy the most expensive sort and he also says that he is selling from his personal stockpile; he is by this providing very good service:

**Quote 23.**

“Give me three hundred worth of the madman. If it’s as good as you say, I’ll be back for a thousand.

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62 Verschueren, p 159 – 160. The language of salesmen can of course be developed with more theoretical background, but since this is such a small part of the study, Verschueren is the only reference.
I just hope I still have it. I’m givin’ ya some out of my own private stash. That’s what a nice guy I am.”

But before this happens, Vincent and Mia Wallace eat dinner together and here the language is casual, a bit ironic, regular small talk. They both use swearwords and Vincent asks about the foot massage given by Antwan/Tony Rocky Horror. Before he asks he says: “I don’t wanna offend you” and there is a discussion whether he should say something or not. Vince finally tells her after Mia Wallace gets a determined face and tells him to ask the question. Then Mia more or less orders Vincent to dance with her in a dancing competition at the restaurant. Mia gives a determined impression. Vince seems almost insecure, like a little boy for a moment. When he wants to ask the question he uses indirect language, which probably is due to all the four factors described above. These could also explain why Mia can order him in a very direct way to dance with her in the dancing competition:

Quote 24.

“I wanna dance.

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. I do believe Marsellus, my husband, your boss told you to take me out and do whatever I wanted. Now, I want to dance. I want to win. I want that trophy.”

After the dinner we get to the scene where Mia Wallace overdoses. There is panic and the language completely changes. Vincent calls Lance and they scream at each other over the phone. Lance does not want Vincent to come and the language is angry and aggressive. Vincent threatens that he will tell Marsellus Wallace if Lance does not help him. In the house there is frantic confusion and the language from before has lost all its coolness. Basically all the lines in this scene are direct. Thomas explains that “all indirectness is costly and risky” due to the fact that it takes longer time to produce and process indirect language. Since the situation is very serious with grave consequences, there is no room for indirectness. Vincent’s

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63 Tarantino, p 41
64 ibid, p 60
65 ibid, p 64 - 65
66 Thomas, p 120
threat is what Thomas calls a “declarative warning”\textsuperscript{67}. If he does not cooperate, this will be the outcome.

After the overdose Mia and Vincent return to Wallace’s house. Vincent is scared and asks Mia in a polite way, with very indirect language, to keep quiet about the overdose. Again this depends on all four factors, Vincent has everything to lose and he is asking for a lot.

Then it is time for the scene where Captain Koons tells Butch about his father and the watch. Koons uses indirect language in some cases, for example when he is talking about Butch’s dead father, but direct when he talks about the watch up the ass. He is then direct when talking about the dead grand father. He is very direct with the ass hiding for such a young boy. Thomas theory on social distance is that this “together determine the overall degree of respectfulness within a given speech situation.”\textsuperscript{68} Captain Koons has a lot of respect for Butch’s dead father and talks about him with indirectness, while the grandfather and the uncomfortable hiding of the watch does not get the same respect.

After Butch’s boxing match we see Marsellus Wallace in the dressing room. He gives orders in a very tough way with direct language with a few parables. Wallace’s power over the others is unquestionable, which would explain his direct way of talking. No matter what, everyone will obey.

When Butch has fled the fight we meet him in a scene in a motel room. There is sweet talk with Fabienne, his girlfriend, which changes to a serious tone when they talk about the danger they are in. It then changes back to sweet talk again when they discuss where they will go with the money Butch made from the fight. They joke and give a relaxed impression. But in the morning this will change. First it is the same style as the night before, but when Butch finds out that Fabienne forgot the watch, he changes fast to a very aggressive tone and he screams, swears and throws the TV into the wall. Then when he is more serious, he lowers his voice, which makes it even more threatening, just like Jules in the scene with the boys. After this he calms down and tries to comfort Fabienne and uses a completely different language. In the car on the way to the apartment he is again very upset and the language changes again. This has to do with the costs of indirectness. Butch values the watch highly and to make

\textsuperscript{67} Thomas, p 104  
\textsuperscript{68} ibid, p 128
Fabienne understands how important it is, he can not afford to use indirectness, because of the risk of being misunderstood. He even says that he “didn’t illustrate how personal the watch was to me”\textsuperscript{69}. This is an indication that when he used indirect language, he failed to make himself completely understood. In Thomas’ words his indirect language was “costly and risky”\textsuperscript{70}.

Butch and Marsellus Wallace end up in a pawn shop run by Maynard. The language is very aggressive, both from Maynard and Butch. When Maynard takes out his shotgun he gives orders to Butch and Wallace and uses a direct language, he then changes to indirect language when he is talking to his brother Zed: “the spider just caught coupla flies”\textsuperscript{71}. When Zed arrives he uses bully and derogatory language, even against Maynard. When the situation is reversed Wallace is very frank about what will happen to Zed, but indirect when he explains to Butch that they are not enemies anymore. Again this illustrates why indirect language is negative in a conflict, things may get even worse. When Maynard calls Zed the size of imposition is small, he knows that Zed are interested in the “flies”, therefore his saying resembles a proposition; get over here. Marsellus Wallace is higher in power than Zed and does not need to be indirect. When he is talking to Butch he is probably thankful for being rescued and his request that Butch will stay away from Los Angeles is uttered in a more indirect way, the size of imposition is large.

After this the movie makes a jump back to the scene where the boys are shot. Vincent talks to the one who is not shot, Marvin. He uses a low voice, but threatening. Jules and Vincent has a discussion about if it was a miracle or not that they were not shot by the fourth man. They use a few theological terms which creates an absurd situation:

\begin{quote}
“\textit{The miracle we witnessed.}
\textit{The miracle you witnessed. I witnessed a freak occurrence.}
\textit{Do you know what a miracle is?}
\textit{An act of God.}

…
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{69} Tarantino, p 110
\textsuperscript{70} Thomas, p 120
\textsuperscript{71} Tarantino, p 123
Whether or not what we experienced was an according-to-Hoyle miracle is insignificant. What is significant is I felt God’s touch. God got involved.”

Here the language plays an important role in creating an image. Jules is upset when Vincent does not acknowledge that it was a miracle. This indicates that the term itself is very important to him. In the car Jules is upset again when Vincent blasphemes, again words are very important. When Marvin is shot, the tone changes and they scream at each other and the language is that of more or less panic. Jules calls his friend Jimmie and when he talks to him he is indirect about what happened and when he is asking for help getting the car off the road. This passage illustrates well how the language changes from indirect to direct when stress is added. Jules size of imposition when asking Jimmie for help is very large, he actually wants to come to his house with a dead body in his car. Therefore he uses indirect language when asking for help.

At Jimmie’s house Jules screams at Vincent about a stained towel, but then changes his tone and asks him more nicely to be careful. Jimmie uses informal language and low tone with a lot of irony, for example: “a sign that said ‘Dead Nigger Storage”’. Jimmie then gets angrier and uses a very direct language. When Jules talks to Marsellus Wallace he is stressed and uses some indirect language when he asks for: “cavalry who should be coming directly”. Jimmie’s language can be direct because of what Thomas calls rights and obligations. Jules has no right to be there at all, and he has to be careful, the opposite goes for Jimmie. This is also shown in the quote above when Jules asks for the cavalry.

When The Wolf gets the call from Marsellus Wallace he uses very formal language. He is very focused on the job and gives a cool impression. When he meets Jimmie he is very polite and uses a formal language. When The Wolf talks to Jules and Vincent he is direct with a curt language and he is very clear about what has to be done. Vincent even objects to the curt tone. When Mr Wolf is talking to Monster Joe, who will dispose of the dead body, he also has a nice tone. Wolf is curt but polite; his body language is that of control, we get the feeling that he is the problem solver. Jules and Vincent are arguing and using rather aggressive language at each other when they have to solve the situation with the car. Mr Wolf is aware of the size of imposition, they need Jimmie’s and Monster Joe’s help and he has to be indirect with them.

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72 Tarantino, p 172 - 173
73 Thomas, p 131
Regarding Jules and Vincent, he can say anything to them due to the fact that he has power over them and “your employer can influence your career in a positive way or a negative way”\(^\text{74}\).

The last scene is at the coffee shop from scene one, where the robbery will take place. Vincent and Jules discuss Mr Wolf, expresses admiration of his coolness and his way of handling the situation. They have a relaxed tone and talk about trivia like bacon and dogs. The tone changes when Jules brings up what he thinks is a miracle, Vincent does not like this approach and is a bit upset which gives him a more tense tone. Vincent is patronizing against Jules for his plans to “walk the earth”. He then goes to the bathroom and the robbery from scene one starts. Pumpkin and Honey Bunny screams at the customers, being very aggressive and threatening with a very direct language – do this, put your wallets here and so on. Pumpkin stares at Jules, who stares back. Their conversation is ironic with low, but very threatening, tone and direct language; Pumpkin says exactly what he is going to do if Jules does not obey him. When Jules take control he screams at Honey Bunny/Yolanda and the situation is a bit confused. After this he calms down and talks with a low voice, still calm but very much in control. Honey Bunny/Yolanda is confused and her language is an important part in this; she is rambling and acting very irrational. All the coolness and aggressiveness is long gone. Vincent interrupts and the screaming begins again. The situation is that of confusion, but then Jules is in control again. Jules thinks out loud about philosophy, his passage from the Bible, and whether he is the shepherd or not is a bit confusing and again the language used is a part of this. He uses a low voice and shows total control. The final lines are again cool and a bit ironic.

This last scene could function as a way to illustrate the shift from indirect to direct language when the characters are under stress. As Thomas stated, indirect language is “costly and risky”\(^\text{75}\) and therefore the characters use direct language in a strained situation. This also works as a contrast to the style kept in the more relaxed scenes. Honey Bunny/Yolanda’s confused language boosts the feeling that it is dangerous with this kind of language in this tense situation. Vincent’s direct language when he patronizes Jules has to do with the social distance between them. According to Thomas social distance “determine the overall degree of

\(^{74}\) Thomas, p 124 - 125

\(^{75}\) ibid, p 120
respectfulness within a given speech situation”\textsuperscript{76}. In this case there is a small social distance between Vincent and Jules and Vincent is able to be very direct.

4. Conclusions and discussion

The style of the dialogue in the movie is smart and quick. The register consists of irony, parables, taboos and stereotypes. The taboos and the stereotypes used can not be said to contribute to the impression of smartness, although they are an important part of the style.

The stereotypes described above work as a way to reinforce the image that the director wants to create for the viewer. Some of them are somewhat regular, like the gangsters, and some of them feel a bit unusual, like the mixture of gangster and god that Marsellus Wallace is portrayed as. Mick Short (1996) has a short passage on stereotypes in his book where he explains that a stereotype can be “used in setting up the web of disapproval”\textsuperscript{77}. This means that a stereotype can work either positive or negative and this is how the director uses stereotypes both in the portrait of the characters and in their language.

The stereotypes in the language are partly ethnic and sexist and partly clichés from other movies or TV series. The first ones do not contribute to the style like the second does. To portray Jules as a person who will walk the earth is certainly a blink to the audience, and those with special interest in old TV series or films. In this way the director will get approval from this particular audience.

The taboo words are mostly swearwords and ethnic taboos, along with a few religious ones. The taboo that can be said to contribute to the style of the movie is the word \textit{nigger} which is used in many different ways; as a friendly word, as a derogatory word, as a word that describes any other person or as a word in which it means control, as when Marsellus Wallace wants to make sure Butch does what he is told. The same goes with the word \textit{motherfucker} that is used in the same way; it is both positive and negative, which could be confusing. The word \textit{bitch} is also used about both men and women, but almost always in a derogatory way. Allan and Burridge describes the fact that \textit{nigger} can be used both in a positive and a negative way\textsuperscript{78} which correspond to how the word is used in the dialogue. \textit{Bitch} seems to be the

\textsuperscript{76} Thomas, p 128
\textsuperscript{77} Short, p 75
\textsuperscript{78} Allan & Burridge, p 82, 101
exception here, although in real life it has been reclaimed by feminists. See for example the magazine *Bitch*\(^{79}\). According to Romaine there are more derogatory words for women than for men. The use of the word *bitch* in the dialogue is in the line with this. When it regards the men, the derogatory words can be positive while the word reserved for women can not.

The dialogue changes style mainly due to stress and conflict. When the characters are under stress their coolness disappear and they act more irrational. When the stress is gone, the coolness is back, as with Jules and Vincent when they leave the coffee shop. The exception to this is Marsellus Wallace and Mr Wolf, especially Mr Wolf, who never loses control. They are always cool and in control, all the others will in some parts of the movie lose their coolness and their smart way of talking, but not these two characters. The language changes from indirect to direct when a situation gets tense. Thomas explains this with the fact that indirect language is costly and risky. That is why it is inappropriate for a strained situation. Things might get even worse.

One other thing that is very interesting is what has to be called fear of women. Jimmie is more scared of his wife than he is of the police or the armed gangsters in his kitchen. Even though he has a dead body in his garage, all he can think about is that he under no circumstance wants to be divorced. Jules describes himself as “pretty much a vegetarian” because his girlfriend is. This could be the same the reason why he does not want to eat pork either, but he uses different arguments when talking to Vincent. Vincent for his part seems almost insecure, like a little boy when he is at the dinner with Mia and wants to ask her about the rumour of the foot massage is true or not. Mia then more or less orders him to dance, he does not want to, but he does not have the courage to say no to her. It comes as a bit of surprise that these rough characters deep down are afraid of women. In his movies after *Pulp Fiction*, Tarantino will use more strong women that will also scare the men.

The importance of pop culture can not be neglected. This study is a part in this approach and it could be a starting point for further research on, for example, other movies with great impact on the western pop cultural world, music or other cultural phenomena that has made a lasting impression. Although pop culture is a modern phenomenon it has deep roots. This could be a starting point for further research. Where does it all begin?

\(^{79}\) http://bitchmagazine.org/
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