



ANALYZING OF TABOO LANGUAGE IN THE SCRIPT OF 'UNCUT GEMS' FILM BY SAFDIE & BRONSTEIN

Sholihatul Hamidah Daulay¹, Dimas², Alvindi³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Padang, Indonesia

Author's correspondence. E-mail: sholihatulhamidah@uinsu.ac.id, Phone: +6281397380038

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Abstract

This research examines the use of taboo language in the film *Uncut Gems*, focusing on identifying the types of taboo language and their functions. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the study analyzes linguistic features within the film. The findings reveal four types of taboo language: vulgarity (69 occurrences, 61%), epithet (30 occurrences, 26%), obscenity (12 occurrences, 10%), and profanity (3 occurrences, 3%). Each type serves distinct functions in the narrative, including being provocative, showing contempt, drawing attention, and mocking authority. The most frequent function was provocation (65 occurrences, 61%), followed by showing contempt (23 occurrences, 21%), drawing attention (19 occurrences, 17%), and mocking authority (1 occurrence, 1%). Taboo language plays a crucial role in intensifying the film's emotional impact and enhancing the portrayal of complex social dynamics. This study contributes to understanding how language in film serves as a tool for narrative depth and audience engagement, offering insights into the interplay between language, story, and social context in cinema.

Keywords: Film; Sociolinguistics, Taboo Language; Uncut Gems

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji penggunaan bahasa tabu dalam film *Uncut Gems*, dengan fokus pada identifikasi jenis-jenis bahasa tabu dan fungsinya. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, studi ini menganalisis fitur linguistik dalam film tersebut. Hasil temuan menunjukkan empat jenis bahasa tabu: vulgari (69 kejadian, 61%), epitet (30 kejadian, 26%), obsenitas (12 kejadian, 10%), dan profanitas (3 kejadian, 3%). Setiap jenis memiliki fungsi yang berbeda dalam narasi, termasuk untuk memprovokasi, menunjukkan penghinaan, menarik perhatian, dan mengejek otoritas. Fungsi yang paling sering muncul adalah provokasi (65 kejadian, 61%), diikuti dengan menunjukkan penghinaan (23 kejadian, 21%), menarik perhatian (19 kejadian, 17%), dan mengejek otoritas (1 kejadian, 1%). Bahasa tabu memainkan peran penting dalam meningkatkan dampak emosional film dan memperkuat gambaran dinamika sosial yang kompleks. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi dalam pemahaman bagaimana bahasa dalam film berfungsi sebagai alat untuk kedalaman narasi dan keterlibatan audiens, serta memberikan wawasan tentang hubungan antara bahasa, cerita, dan konteks sosial dalam sinema.

Kata Kunci: Film; Bahasa Tabu; Uncut Gems



1. Introduction

Communication plays in social interactions, communication is crucial to daily living. One can satisfy emotional demands, enhance mental health, and discover the meaning of pride, jealousy, love, affection, and even hatred through conversation (Mudjiono, 2012). Social communication suggests that in order for people to collaborate with one another, communication is a crucial component of connecting with others in a variety of sectors (Hess, Markson, & Stein, 1988: 87). Therefore, Unnsteinsson (2022) proposes that the proper function of language is communication. The use of language for communication is crucial to human social interaction and the formation of social communities. Humans are able to express their thoughts and intentions toward things through language. As a result, everyone has a unique method for selecting from among the many words that can highlight the meaning or objective of a given statement. When upset or furious, some people might find it more convenient to express themselves strongly (Rabiah, 2018). For instance, there are situations when someone says terms that are deemed inappropriate and should never be used. Using taboo language is one method they communicate their emotions (Burrige, 2006: 2-3).

In general, taboo refers to things that are regarded as sacred and are not allowed to be handled or spoken because they are taboo or forbidden. The term "taboo" is a cultural construct and is thought to possess unique qualities. There are taboo words and behaviors that should never be spoken or done in any society (Irwan, 2021). Both are related to one another because, according to Fairman (2009:27), certain taboo activities have the necessary taboo words, while others do not. The problem of taboo is pervasive throughout the world; certain phrases or sentences are now extremely delicate to discuss.

Movies frequently contain a number of taboo words or sentences. The performers employ prohibited phrases to draw the audience's attention in the film, although some viewers are impacted by other variables and may not grasp the banned words in the film. Cultural differences are one of the causes that contribute to speech that is difficult to understand, making it difficult for viewers to understand some of the messages in films. Uncut Gems movie is one such example. The purpose of this study is to identify some of the movie's accurate words or sentences. Certain facts that the listeners may find taboo languages are highlighted. Certain words or sentences have been around for so long that people use them frequently and may no longer view them as improper. The film Uncut Gems describes someone custom of carrying out his duties in a variety of illegal activities, such as gambling and illegal transactions and more criminal cases. Given that some character expressions in The Uncut Gems movie may not be understood by viewers, the researcher is interested in looking into the usage of taboo in the film.

Language is a phenomenon that can take on many different forms (Halliday & Hasan, 1991; Holmes, 2001). One of the phenomena of language is taboo words. When forbidden words are spoken, it can lead to misunderstandings between speakers and listeners regarding what they signify. As a result, researchers are drawn to studying issues that could arise from a film that depicts society and human existence. In this instance, the researcher's research object is the film Uncut Gems. In this instance, the researcher consulted a number of earlier studies (Anggita's, 2015; Taufik, 2017; Dina, 2020; Siregar, 2021; Nurcholis et.al, 2023) that addressed the taboo language present in the film. Though they looked into the same topic as the current study—a movie—their subjects were distinct from the Uncut Gems movie, which is the subject of this research. Therefore, the findings of this study could add to the body of knowledge regarding taboo language studies in the film. Even though the topic of study is the same between this research and previous studies, there are differences namely

classification of taboo language and the data obtained is of course very different even though the object is a film in finding a taboo language.

2. Method

Descriptive qualitative analysis and description of the taboo language kinds and functions in the *Uncut Gems* movie were conducted based on the study object. Researchers used this approach because it provided solutions to the formulation of the problem by analyzing and explaining the facts. The dialogue that the characters in the film *The Uncut Gems* said served as the research's primary source of data. Researchers used themselves as the instrument (Human Instrument) to gather data. Researchers serve as human instruments in this study, and script paper as research instruments as well. Data collecting involved a number of steps. The researchers first go over the entire plot of the *Uncut Gems* film and check online for screenplays. Subsequently, the researchers see the film once more and compare the transcript to the film. Lastly, the researchers moved and categorized the chosen conversations that contained taboo language.

A number of procedures were used to examine the data, in accordance with Miles and Huberman (2012). The first step is data reduction, where the data are compiled, organized, and directed toward the research aims. Following data collection, utterances containing forbidden words were categorized and analyzed, and the raw data was entered into a table. Analysis leads to ongoing data reduction. During the first step, data is segmented, and summarized. The researcher categorized the data in the second step, data display, to clarify the types and purposes of the taboo language in the dialogues after the data were reduced. Lastly, draw and validate conclusions. In this final stage, the researcher gathers data or findings and transforms them into a new understanding of the study. Thus, the types and purposes of taboo words were discovered by the researcher.

3. Results and Discussion

Four categories of taboo words are proposed by Batistella (2005). They are obscenity, profanity, vulgarity, and epithets. This study used those theories to identify and categorize the types of taboo words found in the movie "*Uncut Gems*" script. Analysis was conducted to determine the prevalence of each type of taboo word in the manuscript. The results of this study are reflected in the following data in chart 1.

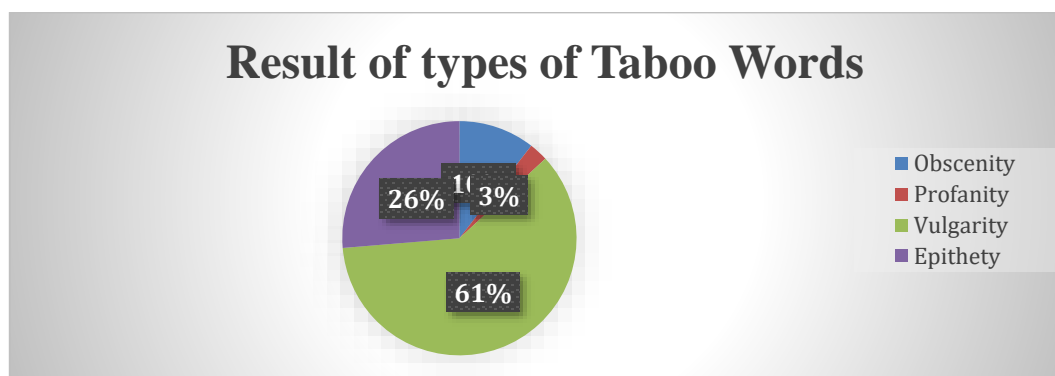


Chart 1. Taboo Words Types

All four categories of taboo words are present within the script of the film "Uncut Gems." It is noted that a total of 114 taboo words are identified within the script. The table shows that vulgarity is the most commonly utilized type by characters, appearing 69 times (61%). Epithety featured 30 times (26%), followed by obscenity 12 times (10%), and profanity 3 times (3%). The study shows a considerable use of various types of forbidden language throughout the screenplay of "Uncut Gems," with vulgarity being the most common. This implies a purposeful representation of individuals using vulgar or socially incorrect language, which contributes to the film's depiction of gritty reality or intensity. This research also uses Wardhaugh's theory (2006), Taboo words have four functions: They are to show contempt, to draw attention, to oneself, to be provocative, and to ridicule authority. The analysis findings are shown in the data chart below:

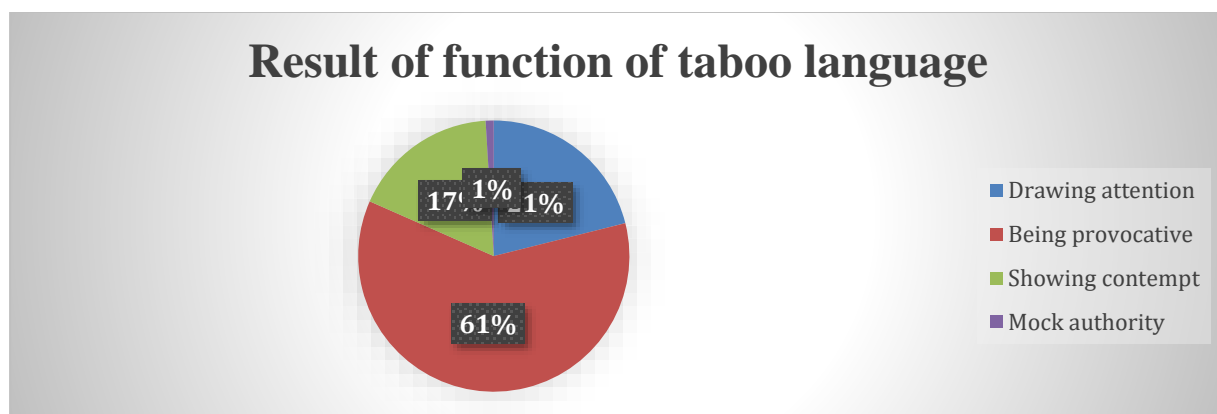


Chart 2. Taboo Language Function

From the data above, it could be concluded that the highest frequency of the taboo word function is to draw attention, appearing 23 times (21%). Being provocative appears 65 times (61%), followed by showing contempt 19 times (17%), and to ridicule authority 1 time (1%). Taboo words are expressions of language that are deemed rude, obscene, or banned in particular cultures. Taboo words are regarded contentious because they are frequently connected with strong emotions, are used to attract attention, and can be unpleasant or obscene in some countries or cultures. The usage of forbidden words might be seen as a technique to express oneself, question cultural standards, or elicit a reaction from others. However, their use can be perceived as disrespectful, obscene, or even unlawful in some situations, which is why they are contentious.

3.1 Types of Taboo Language

a. Obscenity

Obscenity phrases are prohibited from public usage due to their negative impact on the senses, immodesty, and morals. The movie *Uncut Gema* has 12 instances of obscenities, one of which is reproduced below:

Howard tries to give her the flowers. She swats the into the floor.

DINA : Shove em up your ass. Time-Warner and Gas arent paid. We'll have no gas and no TV.



HOWARD : They're not shutting anything off, you idiot. It's just a big misunderstanding, I'm moving funds around.

The dialogue above contains an obscenity since Dina uses the term "ass" to describe sexual activity in a literal meaning. Howard offers a bunch of flowers as a sign of peace, but Dina responds quickly and harshly, knocking them on the floor. Her answer is filled with rage and anguish, as she complains about overdue Time Warner and Gas bills, portraying a picture of impending utility disconnection and hardship. Howard, in an attempt to appease her, tells her that there is no impending shutdown while condemning her. He claims he is actively fixing the issue by transferring money, yet his statements reveal a defensive tone. The angry encounter depicts a dynamic of poor communication and rising pressure in their relationship, exacerbated by financial difficulties and emotional pain.

b. Profanity

Profanity is the least common sort of banned word. The movie contains three instances of profanity, accounting for 3% of the total. Profanity arises when someone uses the term "religion" in an inappropriate, secular, or apathetic manner. In the movie *Uncut Gems*, Nadav and Howard frequently use profanity during the conversation as Nadav becomes panicked. Here are some examples of discussions from the movie:

Nadav suddenly panics, runs to the bed, and moves it out of the way. He pulls up the carpet and using a metal shim, pries open a floorboard. Underneath sits a plastic Duane Reade bag.

NADAV (CONT'D) (crying) : Thank god! Oh, thank fucking god!

HOWARD : What is that? Cash?

Howard opens the bag and sees bundles of cash.

In this excerpt from "*Uncut Gems*," Nadav's sudden panic and relief are evident as he discovers a hidden stash of cash. His emotional outburst is characterized by profanity, specifically the phrase "thank fucking god," which underscores the intensity of his emotions and the gravity of the situation. The profanity serves to emphasize the rawness of Nadav's feelings and the sense of desperation or urgency in the scene. Additionally, Howard's subsequent question, "What is that? Cash?" highlights the significance of the discovery and adds to the tension of the moment. Overall, the profanity in this dialogue contributes to the authenticity of the character's emotions and the gritty realism of the film's portrayal of high-stakes situations.

c. Vulgarity

Researchers identified 69 vulgar terms used during conversations as the most common sort of language in *Uncut Gems* movies. An example of vulgarity may be seen in the following conversation. Howard sees the Rolex around his wrist.

HOWARD : You put that on in front of him?

NADAV : What ?

HOWARD : That watch, did you put that on in front of him?

NADAV : Uh.. yeah...

HOWARD : You flaunt that shit in front of a schwart a?

NADAV : Arthur ?



HOWARD : Arthur left the window open on purpose dum dum. Probably texted some of his boys that you had jewelry and shit laying around, clearly you have a rolex, right?

In this conversation from "Uncut Gems," the word "shit" is used in a colloquial and derogatory manner to emphasize Howard's frustration and disapproval of Nadav's actions. Howard questions Nadav about wearing the Rolex watch in front of someone, expressing concern and incredulity. Nadav's response indicates his confusion, leading to Howard's further questioning about flaunting "that shit" in front of a "schwartz," using the term in a derogatory manner. The word "shit" is employed here to intensify Howard's language and convey his disdain for Nadav's behavior. It adds a coarse and confrontational tone to the conversation, reflecting the volatile nature of their interaction. Additionally, Howard's accusation implies that Nadav's actions could attract negative attention or danger, further heightening the tension in the scene. Overall, the use of the word "shit" in this dialogue contributes to the vulgarity and gritty realism of "Uncut Gems," reflecting the characters' rough and uncompromising demeanor in their high-stakes environment.

d. Epithety

Racism, defined as prejudice or discrimination based on race or ethnicity, frequently causes societal taboos because of its intrinsic harmful impact on individuals and communities. These taboos emerge when society condemns such behavior and works to foster an inclusive and egalitarian environment. Stereotypes, which are oversimplified ideas about certain groups, can also cause social taboos by perpetuating damaging misunderstandings and contributing to separation. Social taboos are important for increasing understanding and combatting prejudice because they challenge preconceptions. Furthermore, marginalized groups who face social, political, or economic disadvantages are both protected and possibly marginalized by social taboos, depending on the circumstances. In certain circumstances, taboos protect against prejudice and foster appreciation for variety. However, in other contexts, taboos may inadvertently reinforce existing power imbalances and contribute to the perpetuation of marginalization. Thus, navigating social taboos requires careful consideration of their impact on marginalized groups and their role in promoting social justice and equality.

All of those explanation was part of epithety. In the film Uncut Gems, epithets are frequently used in conversation between characters. Epithet is referenced 30 times, accounting for 26% of the total. Here's an example of epithet dialogue from a movie.

Ray takes the chain from the briefcase, puts it around his neck and stands up to look in a mirror.

HOWARD (CONT'D) : Ray, let me ask you something, is it true you fly two G-6s, one for you and the other for your team.

RAY : You think I'm getting on a plane with 3 Reggie's? That's half a ton nigga. It's not that much to have a second plane, that type of shit is over-inflated to the public. Like people think it's a million dollars to fly a PJ. It's only about an extra 60, 70 grand. It's my life (take bong hit, holding breathe in) Fuck that. They can ride in their own plane.



In a scene from "Uncut Gems," the term "nigga" is used as an insult. It is vital to note that this word is exceedingly disrespectful and racially disparaging when used by someone who is not a member of the Black community. In this context, Ray, a Black character, uses it to refer to himself and maybe others in his community. Ray's usage of the term "nigga" in this exchange suggests a sense of familiarity or camaraderie within his group, since it is frequently reclaimed and used informally by some members of the black community. However, its use may still be contentious and harmful, particularly when it promotes negative stereotypes or racial hierarchies. Ray uses the term "nigga" to dismiss the concept of flying with others owing to weight and safety concerns. His vocabulary conveys a nonchalant attitude toward money and luxury while still demonstrating assertiveness and self-assurance. Overall, the usage of the term "nigga" in this conversation demonstrates the complexities and controversies surrounding epithets, particularly in the context of racial dynamics and social hierarchies.

3.2 Functions of Taboo Language

a. To Draw Attention to Oneself

In this study, the phrase "to draw attention to oneself" appears 23 times, accounting for 21% of the total. This function occurs when someone uses a term with a strong meaning to capture the listener's attention. Using harsh language, such as taboo terms, promotes quick responses from listeners. Here are some ways to draw attention to yourself.

Gabi lunges at Howard, pushing him against a wall of pink tile. Howard reluctantly retaliates and within seconds has Gabi in a headlock.

CARMELLE (O.S.) : Open this god damn door!

HOWARD (calmly) 30 seconds.

GABI : Fuck you!

Howard tightens the headlock. Carmelle escalates to a constant muffled wall of noise.

In the offered extract, the word "Fuck you!" serves as a vivid example of drawing attention to oneself through the use of harsh language. This explicit obscenity immediately draws attention due to its prohibited nature, eliciting significant reactions from listeners. The statement, which is rife with emotion, notably rage or irritation, heightens the dramatic tension of the action and provides insight into the characters' heightened emotions. In many cultures, using the word "fuck" to describe someone is considered disrespectful and confrontational, exacerbating its attention-grabbing effect. Gabi's shout of "Fuck you!" to Howard not only signals a heated disagreement but also sets the tone for the subsequent conflict.

b. To be provocative

Provocation is the most common function, accounting for 65 times of all conversations in uncut gems movie. This function happens when a speaker uses prohibited terms to elicit a certain response from listeners, such as offense or rage. A research-based example of becoming a provocative function is provided in the dialogue below.

Howard, barely listening, puts his phone on speaker so he can open up his browser to check an online sports betting site.

JIM (O.S.) (via speakerphone) : That cock-sucker what he did wasn't okay, and it put a real strain on everyone, screaming all that shit, and I don't think this, but everyone



knows that he was your guy, your rec and I knowzit's not always guilty by association but you were associated and nowzthis, it's not cool, you put me in a place that I don't want to be put in, I'm in a spot, you know that? How long I know you?

Howardz

: A long time.

In the excerpt from "Uncut Gems," the term "cock-sucker" is strategically employed to provoke a strong reaction from Howard, illustrating the function of provocation in dialogue. Through its highly offensive and derogatory nature, the term is intended to shock and elicit a visceral response, emphasizing the speaker's emotional agitation. Jim's use of such provocative language is a deliberate attempt to manipulate Howard's emotions, leveraging guilt and frustration to exert influence. This choice of words reflects power dynamics within the conversation, with Jim asserting dominance and control over Howard. Moreover, the use of such inflammatory language contributes to the overall tension and intensity of the scene, heightening the audience's discomfort and enhancing the dramatic impact. Thus, the term "cock-sucker" serves as a potent tool for provocation, driving the narrative forward and intensifying the emotional stakes of the interaction.

c. To Show Contempt

Contempt appears 19 times (21%). This function occurs when people use banned phrases to demonstrate disdain for others. The speaker intends to insult their opponent's pride since they believe their opponent is worthless. An example of its application is seen in the dialogue below.

Howard's phone vibrates loudly. He immediately silences it.

HOWARD : I understand that but he didn't expect you to live like a pig. He expected you to spend it, live nicely put the money somewhere untouchable.

NADAV : They didn't find it!

In this scene from "Uncut Gems," the phrase "live like a pig" is wielded by Howard to showcase contempt towards Nadav. Through this choice of language, Howard not only expresses his disdain but also implies that Nadav's lifestyle or actions are subpar and lacking in refinement. The phrase is designed to insult Nadav's pride and self-esteem, positioning Howard as superior and Nadav as inferior. It reflects Howard's disgust or disapproval towards Nadav's behavior, serving to belittle him and assert dominance in the conversation. Moreover, the repetitive use of contemptuous language like "live like a pig" throughout the film not only characterizes Howard as abrasive but also intensifies the tension and conflict within the scene, underscoring the power dynamics at play. Thus, the phrase serves as a potent tool for Howard to demonstrate contempt, reinforcing his perceived superiority while diminishing Nadav's worth in the exchange.

d. To Mock Authority

The function of mocking authority has the lowest frequency among all other functions of forbidden words, appearing only once with a 1% presentation according to 107 data. People may use forbidden terms to express dissatisfaction with public representations, such as governments or institutions. To clarify, a use example of the fake authority function is shown below.



Dina's phone rings. She looks at it. Silences it.

DINA : I have shit I have to do!

Dina's phone rings again. Shez shows the Caller IDzto Howard.

In the provided scenario, Dina's statement, "I have shit I have to do!", subtly mocks authority by expressing a dismissive attitude towards external demands or obligations. Through the use of casual and colloquial language, Dina conveys her dissatisfaction with being interrupted by phone calls, indicating a lack of regard for societal expectations or authority figures. This phrase not only undermines the perceived importance of the interruptions but also asserts Dina's autonomy and prioritization of her own tasks. By asserting her independence and asserting her own agenda, Dina subtly challenges the notion of being controlled or dictated to by external forces, thereby subverting traditional expectations of deference to authority. While not explicitly targeting any specific authority figures, Dina's statement reflects a broader defiance of societal norms and expectations, serving as a subtle form of mockery towards authority in general.

The other researcher Pavesi & Zamora (2020) stated that profanity conveys and evokes emotions, and due to its taboo-breaking nature, carries an offensive impact. By reflecting the roles it plays in everyday life, it enhances the composition of audiovisual language and amplifies cinematic dialogue. Yalkin & Veer (2018) indicated that taboo subjects portrayed in soap operas allows audiences to express their expectations regarding gender roles and religious norms. Additionally, soap operas shape viewers' mediated perceptions of religion. Therefore, rather than merely serving as a form of escapism, consuming soap operas encourages conversations about sensitive issues.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the analysis of taboo language within the screenplay of "Uncut Gems" reveals a comprehensive portrayal of various types and functions of forbidden words. The examination, guided by Batistella's classification (2005) of obscenity, profanity, vulgarity, and epithets, showcases the prevalence and significance of these linguistic elements in conveying intense emotions, gritty realism, and power dynamics within the narrative. Vulgarity emerges as the most commonly utilized type, underscoring the deliberate depiction of characters using socially unacceptable language to accentuate tension and authenticity. Conversely, profanity appears with the least frequency, yet each instance contributes to the rawness and authenticity of the characters' emotions and situations. Epithets and obscenities are also prominently featured, with each serving to highlight social taboos and power dynamics through their impactful usage.

Moreover, Wardhaugh's framework (2006) of taboo words' functions elucidates how these linguistic elements are strategically employed within the dialogue to draw attention, provoke reactions, show contempt, and even mock authority. The findings suggest a deliberate narrative choice to utilize taboo language as a tool for character development, scene intensification, and thematic exploration. By weaving taboo words into the fabric of the screenplay, "Uncut Gems" effectively captures the raw and visceral essence of its characters and their tumultuous world, while also provoking thought and reflection on societal norms and power dynamics. Overall, this analysis underscores the nuanced role of taboo language in film storytelling, serving as a potent vehicle for emotional expression, social commentary, and narrative depth. The virtue of this research lies in the in-depth explanation of how Uncut Gems utilised taboo language to authentically portray characters



and reinforce the turbulent world of the story. It also highlights the important role of taboo language in cinema as a means of emotional expression, a tool of social critique, and an element that enriches the narrative. As such, this research makes a significant contribution to understanding how taboo language can be used effectively to connect audiences with complex themes and social dynamics.

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