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Language Change in *The Simpsons*?

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Abstract

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Aim: The aim of this study is to examine the possibility of distinguishing a language change in one of our times' most popular sitcoms, **The Simpsons**, over a period of twenty years, with a specific focus on the family members, **Homer, Bart, Marge and Lisa**.

Theory: A real-time study of the sitcom **The Simpsons** will show a language change, and the twenty years of the show's existence will be adequate time to study the potential change. Potential, as languages constantly are changing, hence the expected change in the speech of the family members.

Method: A large corpus, of about 400 instances, of expressions and words was drawn from the first season and the 20th season to compare the seasons as well as the speech of the characters of **The Simpson** family. **The Simpsons** on DVD was used for the two seasons under study, thus a real-time study of the two seasons was achieved.

Results: As it is not permitted to use swear words on National American television, there has been little or no change when it comes to the use of actual foul language. Also, the expected increase of neologisms was not revealed by the investigation; instead my results indicate a decrease in such expressions. However, a greater political profile of the 20th season compared to the first season is conveyed. There has been little change in sexist and religious language, but the selection of episodes of the 20th season may account for this. Over all, there has also been a slight change towards a harsher tone of language in the 20th season compared to that of the first season.

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the possible language changes in **The Simpsons** over the first twenty years of the sitcom's existence. This investigation looks at whether the language use has become more or less political, religious or sexist since the start of the show in 1989. A closer description of the categories can be found in Section 2, **Method and material**. Words and phrases extracted from the show are considered from different angles, i.e. the meaning, the intended meaning when they are used, and in what context they are used. Background on the show is presented below as well as sociolinguistic aspects of by language change.

1.1 Background on The Simpsons

“Since its debut on December 17, 1989 the show has broadcast 454 episodes and the twenty-first season began airing on September 27, 2009. *The Simpsons Movie*, a feature-length film, was released in theaters worldwide on July 26 and July 27, 2007, and grossed US\$527 million worldwide” (*The Simpsons* 2010, *Wikipedia* [online]). Matt Groening created the characters in 1987 to be a part of *The Tracey Ullman Show*, but after three seasons it had developed into a half hour show on prime-time. Though this is not a paper on why this sitcom has become so popular, it is interesting to note that the spectacular popularity of *The Simpsons* has reached far beyond America and that expressions used in the show have influenced not only different cultures but also all ages and classes of people. “Some (like myself) wonder if *The Simpsons* has surpassed Shakespeare as the most widely quoted source in the English language” (Peters 2005).

“There is a recognition factor for young and old because of the wide range of characters in the show, according to Matt Groening, ‘perverts recognize themselves in **Mo**, smart kids love **Lisa**, there is something for everybody’” (Bengtsson 2009). To choose a working class family in a town like Springfield allows the creators of the sitcom to work with a great variety of themes. **Bart** and **Lisa** go to school, **Homer** works at a nuclear power plant, and **Marge** is a stay-at-home-wife with three young children to care for. As a result, themes of environmental problems, educational issues and typical family matters can be focused on in the show. Furthermore, the town of Springfield naturally includes all municipal interests such as the police, the church and politicians, hence giving the opportunity to engage in subjects concerning most questions of a modern society.

1.2 Sociolinguistic aspects of language change

Language change is a broad concept; it comprises several features, namely phonetic, syntactic, grammatical and semantic changes. Traditionally, the main interest for historical linguists lay in how to reconstruct languages and how they have changed over hundreds of years, mostly

concerning sound changes. Contemporary changes, like syntactic change and semantic change were barely considered. Not until the latter half of the twentieth century did these get attention (see, for example, Aitchison 2001: ix).

Causes for change are also diverse, there are internal psycholinguistic factors residing in the language structure and, there are external sociolinguistic factors such as social factors outside the language system (Aitchison 2001:134). The characters' language can change because of changes of the above mentioned sociolinguistic factors such as social class, sex and age, which are the primary determinants of social roles. These are most vividly displayed in *The Simpsons*. These determinants shape and describe the individual not only by how he or she appears, but also by how they speak (Chambers 2003:7). Social roles determine who you are and how you are perceived, but other issues also affect our individuality.

In addition to social class, sex and age, there are networks of people influencing and forming the way individuals behave and converse. **Homer Simpson** and his family belong to the upper working class, "clerks and semi-skilled workers" (Chambers 2003:43), and their networks are family and friends, work and school, the church and the pub, acting as enforcers of their attitudes. "Our speech, . . . , is emblematic in the same sense as is the car we drive or the way we dress for work, but, obviously, our speech is much less manipulable, much harder to control consciously, and for that reason much more revealing" (Chambers 2001:7). Causes for change, as such, are not reviewed here (see Chambers 2001 for more discussion) but are rather presented as means to identify different possible language changes and factors influencing our speech style.

1:3 Power and language

Sociolinguistic research also addresses the potential influence language has in being a factor on groups' and individuals' possibility to dominate others. "It is important to increase the awareness of the values we give different languages and dialects to make us understand the power of speech rather than to pursue pronunciation errors" (Aitchison 2001:259). In *The Simpsons* there are several obvious differences in speech of some characters. Often people with some sort of position, like **Mr. Burns**, but also **Lisa** and **Side Show Bob** have a typically upper class American accent or are very well spoken. Speech is then used to portray a special type of character, for instance, the above-mentioned **Mr. Burns**, the CEO of the power plant; by speaking the way he does, he reinforces his status. As an audience we recognize the effects of **Mr. Burn's** speech as we are aware of the differences between him and, for example, **Homer**. However, it is not as apparent to the characters of the show that Mr. Burn's speech is a factor in how he is perceived as being intimidating and humiliating. One person who does not seem to be affected by this is **Lisa** who, on the matter of

speech, is roughly on the same level, though she does not use her speech to intimidate people but rather to enlighten them.

Homer and **Bart**, on the other hand, use an unpretentious and straightforward vocabulary which contributes to making them seem irresponsible and immature. However, when listening to what they really say or how they conclude a conversation, there is often some kind of message:

- 1) *Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls. Contrary to what you've just seen, war is neither glamorous nor fun. There are no winners, only losers. There are no good wars, with the following exceptions: The American Revolution, World War II and the Star Wars Trilogy.*
(Bart 1:5)

Even **Bart's** language, shown in (1) above, rises to another level for this special occasion. *Homer's* comments require at times more attention:

- 2) *There's a danger in this town bigger than all dips put together.* (Homer 1:4)

He is, in this episode, trying to save the people of Springfield from all sorts of dangers, the greatest one being that of the power plant. You need to know about **Homer** and about the circumstances of the situation to understand that he is actually very concerned about his family and the life of the inhabitants of Springfield. To show his concern he thinks of what he at the moment feels is the greatest danger of all namely that of dips in the road. "...bigger...dips..." becomes a metaphor for the power plant.

To make the characters of the show more real, the scriptwriters have carefully chosen language variants to reflect many aspects of society. *The Simpsons* characters use different speech styles; the eloquent **Lisa**, **Homer** and **Bart** who are impulsive and creative, and **Marge**, the thoughtful mother, use styles chosen to make these characters more intriguing and credible, thus, making their speech and vocabulary important components of how they are perceived. There are, of course, a multitude of speech styles in the show, e.g., **Apu** the Indian shop keeper, **Snake Jailbird** who speaks with a "Valley Boy" accent, **Mr. Burns** who speaks with an overly formal and antiquated style, among others. However, in this essay the focus is on the speech of four characters of *the Simpsons* family, and therefore other characters, no matter how interesting their speech styles are, are not covered here.

2 Method and Material

There are different ways of establishing an expected language change. According to Chambers (2001:212), when studying speech change over time, there are two kinds of surveys one can use, real-time and apparent-time studies. The former is made over many years and with comparable groups of individuals and sometimes actually the same persons. However, the apparent-time study is more frequently used and is carried out by interviews with persons of different ages at the same time. This kind of study is quicker, whereas a real-time study should be performed over many years before you can draw any conclusions; moreover, the apparent-time study is not dependent on the time factor. A real time study can be used in this analysis as it is possible to follow the same individuals within a time span of twenty years.

The first season began Dec 17, 1989 and ended May 13, 1990 and, the 20th season began Sept 28, 2008 and ended May 17, 2009; all these episodes can be watched on DVD or on the internet. For this essay both seasons were obtained on DVD, hence the possibility to use the function for hearing impaired/subtitles for expressions and spelling. As season one consists of 13 episodes versus 21 episodes of season 20, a choice of 26 episodes was made (13 from season one, 13 from season 20) to balance the corpus drawn from the two seasons. Also, the selection of episodes was evenly selected from the 20th season as not to choose only the first or last 13 episodes. By analyzing the entire first season and episodes 1-5, 10-12 and 17-21 of the 20th season, a comparison of the expected changes in the spoken language of **Homer, Bart, Marge and Lisa Simpson**, should be possible.

After collecting words and phrases from the first and 20th seasons, an organization of the corpus was compiled. The examples are arranged into four different categories and are presented in the text below in tables under the headings of *Foul Language and Neologisms*, table 1 in section 3.1, *Political Language*, table 3 in section 3.2, *Sexist Language* table 3 in section 3.2, and *Religious Language*, table 3 in section 3.2. Swear words, name calling, insults and taboo words are categorized as foul language. Neologisms are included in the same table as foul language as, in this study, there is a strong connection between the two (see section 3.1 for further details). These four categories, based on vocabulary, have been looked upon the situation in which linguistic interaction takes place, and also, in reference to what is actually happening in the show. As the aim to look at specific words and to establish the expected change of the vocabulary in certain areas, such as foul language, became difficult (since the explicit use of swear words is not allowed on prime time US television), this caused the investigation to take on a wider scope and include phrases and the situations they were spoken in. Examples and discussion are presented in section 3.1 and 3.2 below.

3 Discussions and Results

Generally, the first season is more family-, work- and school-oriented, whereas the 20th season is more politically and religiously oriented. Even though the tables show that there are fewer comments with a religious tone in the 20th season, the episodes display more variation of religious beliefs than in the first season. Of course, the 20th season is also more modern when it comes to technology, for as example, as it is a time when the internet and mobile phones have become part of everyday life, also topics concerning environment and health issues are a feature of this period conversations. This essay is not necessarily concerned with specific sexist, political or religious terms and phrases but with the fact that language encodes thought and the dialog is a linguistic reflection of attitudes.

3.1 Foul language and Simpsons' coinages

Due to censorship and broadcasting rules, abusive language is not permitted. In the US, the Federal Communications Commission (the FCC) is the controlling department of what is said on television; however, they can only intervene after and not before foul language has been used. Between 6 am and 10 pm, profane language is banned. The Supreme Court has established three criteria for establishing whether or not a statement is profane;

“An average person, applying contemporary community standards, must find that the material, as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest; The material must depict or describe, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by applicable law; The material, taken as a whole, must lack serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value” (The Federal Communications Commission).

Only *damn* and *ass*, either by themselves or in combinations/compounds, are used, but only four times in the first season and three times in the 20th season.

In season one, **Homer** starts using:

3) *Why you little...*(Homer,1:1)

and,

4) *son of a...*(Homer, 1:4)

mostly when shouting at **Bart**. In this dialog he simply excludes the expected foul word and leaves it to the audience to understand what he really means. These expressions are used throughout the seasons, but the tone in season 20 gets rougher, as is seen in the following:

- 5) *You'd better settle down, boy or I'll drag you into the blind spot of that security camera and beat you with one of those big thick women magazines with all the ads in it.* (Homer 20:3)

Even though the vocabulary per se is not violent, the impression of the situation is.

Marge, on the other hand, at times uses strong words to make herself heard, but the harshest she is likely to say is:

- 6) *Get your butts down here!*

Nonetheless, this is her choice; she chooses to speak in this way so her children can learn how to express themselves appropriately. When she wants to ventilate strong feelings, she prefers to use old fashioned expressions such as:

- 7) *Just a darn...* (Marge 1:13).

Lisa too chooses to be more expressive. She is perceptive and intelligent and not afraid of using foul language but decides instead to be articulate. Only when arguing with **Bart** does she resort to using harsher vocabulary, but even then the worst she says is something like *bratty brother* (Lisa 1:6) or *jerk* (Lisa 1:6).

No matter what taboos there are in a society, it is always possible to express or imply profane language by other means, such as, euphemisms, synonyms or by symbols (Einarsson, 2009:130). The scriptwriters of *the Simpsons* are exceedingly aware of this, and to circumvent the rules there is a well-established use of neologisms already from the start of the sitcom. **Bart** and **Homer** are most likely to express their frustration and anger with sudden outbursts of foul language. They are also the characters most known for their neologisms. According to Macmillan, 2007, a neologism can be either a new word or expression, or an existing word used with a new meaning. The neologisms of *The Simpsons* can be considered to be a natural result of the censorship, which prohibits the use of foul language. When you cannot use certain words you can, instead, exclude them, as in examples 3 and 4, describe them, or invent new words. **Bart** gives an example when he explains the word *Kwyjibo* as the family plays Scrabble. He could, if allowed, have used a profane word to explain what he meant.

- 8) *Big dumb balding North American ape with no chin.* (Bart 2:1)

To illustrate the decrease of foul language and Simpsons' coinages from season one to season 20, Table 1 is presented below. Also, Table 2 illustrates the individual speech change of the characters from season one to season 20.

Table 1: Foul Language and Simpsons' coinages per Seasons

Season	Season One	Season Twenty
Foul Language	140	84
Coinages	31	35
Total	171	119

Table 1 shows the amount of foul language instances from season one to season 20 and how many of the expressions are neologisms. There was a decrease in the use of foul language and coinages. One explanation may be a more straightforward speech style in season twenty; also, the change of themes from domestic to political could have an effect on the language. Though there are a few more neologisms in season 20, the total amount of foul language is less than in season one.

Table 2: Foul Language and Simpsons' coinages per Character per Seasons

Character/Season	Homer	Bart	Marge	Lisa
Season One				
Foul Language	61	64	8	7
Coinages	10	13	3	5
Total	71	77	11	12
Season Twenty				
Foul Language	43	23	5	13
Coinages	13	11	9	2
Total	56	34	14	15

Table 2 demonstrates the use of foul language versus Simpsons' coinages by the characters. Between the characters there is still approximately the same distribution of foul language use, even though the overall change has been a decrease instead of an increase. **Bart** has had the largest decrease and **Marge** has actually had an increase in the use of neologisms. This could be explained by more speech time for **Marge** in the 20th season (see 3:2:2), however, a closer analysis of speech time is not within the scope of this study.

3.2 Changes in topics of family conversation across seasons

It is problematic to select only isolated words for the corpus, since, if taken out of their context, they do not illustrate the meaning of what is actually expressed in the show. Hence, the corpus includes expressions as well as individual words.

There is a clear tendency towards a choice of more political topics for the show in the twentieth season. But even though there is less sexist and less religious language, the topics of the episodes have become more varied when it comes to religion and more political when discussing sexist language.

3.2.1 Politics in topics of family conversations

Political language, as topics related to political and socio-economic issues are used in this study to include different aspects of interests in politics, such as concern or involvement in politics. As mentioned above there is a clear tendency toward more political themes for the show in the 20th season. The major part of the political topics in season one is family- and nation- oriented. Thus in 1:11 **Lisa** makes a statement about one of America's constitutional rights when arguing with an exchange student from Albania:

9) *I'm defending a country where we can think and worship any way we want.* (Lisa 1:11)

However, in 1:6, she also criticizes the political system when she, being depressed and full of despair, says:

10) *I'm wailing for the homeless, living in a car. The Iowa farmer whose land has been taken away by unfeeling bureaucrats. The West Virginia coal miners...*(Lisa 1:6)

Lisa is the character who openly expresses a frequently critical view on American society but even **Homer** makes comments that can be interpreted as political. In 1:3, when he is fired from the power plant and is contemplating what to do with his life, he makes a comment that, in the context of his unemployment but also as a question concerning alcoholism as he begins to drink heavily:

11) *Beer. Now, there's a tempting solution.* (Homer 1:3)

In season 20, there are more current issues, such as the discussion on eating habits and how it affects individuals. **Homer** diets from time to time, yet there are no comments on him being obese even though it is a highly political issue due to the consequent health problems of overweight individuals. More time, of the sitcom, is spent on the effects of sugar, maybe because of **Bart's** over activity. **Bart** himself makes this comment as he devours M&M's and Coke:

12) *I don't know why I do the things I do.* (Bart 20:3)

Homer comments on what **Bart** can eat, being aware of the consequences of too much sugar.

13) *No jell-o for you Bart, it will keep you up at night.* (Homer 20:18)

The problems of sugar have fairly recently attracted attention as the effects on children can be devastating in relation to, e.g., concentration, sleep or hyperactivity. Jell-O is a dessert made of

gelatin, sugar, water and food coloring. These questions can today be considered political as they cause various costly problems for the society.

There is also a clear tendency towards more criticism of American society and of how public service is handled. In the 20th season there are frequent comments on the school system:

14) *You come to school to help him to get good grades? Isn't that why we pay public school teachers those enormous salaries?* (Homer 20:18)

15) *And because of cutbacks they were combining math with P.E. They were playing dodgebook.* (Marge 20:19)

In these two examples, irony is used to make a point about school issues that are certainly political even though the vocabulary is not. Several other issues are also addressed, for instance:

-environmental questions:

16) *There is no Springfield 50 years in the future! With global warming trapping the CO2 inside our poisonous atmosphere, our super-heated oceans will rise drowning our lowlands leaving what's left of humanity baking in deserts that once fed the world!* (Lisa 20:17)

-immigration:

17) *I'm starting to think this town was better off before all these immigrants arrived.* (Homer 20:20)

-elections:

18) *I'd like to vote for president, governor and anything that will take money away from our parks and libraries.* (Homer 20:4)

19) *This machine (election device) is rigged. This doesn't happen in America. Maybe in Ohio, but not in America.* (Homer 20:4)

-private finances/health care:

20) *I'm not insured! For the first time in my life, I'm financially responsible for my own actions!*
(Homer 20:11)

Likewise, there is the political question of how to emancipate women by removing old prejudices and traditions leaving many women the option to look after their children and their home. Lisa is a great challenger of various political issues and she expresses them eloquently:

21) *Because a woman should not have to depend on a man. Snow White was brought back to life by a lady doctor.* (Lisa 20:20)

3.2.2 Sexist undertone in topics of family conversations

Sexism is the belief that men and women should be treated differently and are suited to different types of jobs and positions in society. Even though this is not an obvious problem in *the Simpsons*, the vocabulary of the characters is restricted by rules (The Federal Communications Commission), when there is a tendency to express sexist notions.

As noted by Crystal (2003:368), there has been a major linguistic change in the vocabulary since the 1960s because society has a different outlook on sexism. An effort to change vocabulary to a more neutral third person instead of the old 'male-oriented' words has been implemented by giving guidelines for nonsexist usage. When we communicate we confirm or change our view on women and men... Our speech can change our attitude as well as affecting others as regards theirs and their opinions (Edlund Erson Milles 2007:21). *The Simpsons* has a great impact on people regarding idioms as well as many values including sexism and traditional female/male behavior. Even though the show is not openly sexist in vocabulary, it is very traditional in the characters' choices of occupation. There are also differences between the sexes concerning their interests and how they speak. **Marge** is a housewife, while **Homer**, her husband, goes to work to provide for his family. Women in the sitcom have typically feminine occupations, and all authoritative positions are held by men; girls play with their friends while the boys are up to mischief. This manifests itself in, among other things, how the characters speak and the amount of speech time they have in the show. This question is discussed in the BA essay, *Gender in the Simpsons*, by Anna-Karin Mattsson (2009), where the author discusses the amount of speech time per person in *The Simpsons*. Mattsson's study shows very clearly that the speech time of women is much lower than that of men.

One significant aspect of the sociology of language is to make people aware of the power of language, about how it can contribute to groups', and individuals', ability to dominate others. To use sexist vocabulary is to use that power (Einarsson 2009:19). Verbal sexism may also involve

using foul language with sexual signification, which is controlled by censorship but not impossible to outmaneuver.

22) *Virgin... What are you? A girl?* (Homer to Bart 20:10)

Sexism may also involve the intention to demean a person because of his or her gender. In the examples 25-27, familiar expressions demonstrate deep-rooted stereotypes:

23) *I can't let Marge support the family.* (Homer 1:3)

24) *Dad, do laundry?* (Bart 20:2)

25) *Let's not get mushy, son!* (Homer 1:1)

To hinder or suppress a person because of gender is sexist and this is a reoccurring phenomenon in *The Simpsons*, which relates to both females and males. On the other hand, there are attempts to make the sitcom less controversial with regard to gender issues, by establishing a more modern tone:

26) *Mom, I'm glad you brought me here [beauty parlor] but isn't it more important for a woman to be smart and powerful than beautiful?* (Lisa 20:20)

As early as in the first season **Bart** produces a clever pun for the female variant of mailman:

27) *fe-mailman* (Bart 1:10),

in which he plays at the homophones female and **fe-mail**.

As discussed earlier, (1.2 and 3:2:1) language is not a conscious choice and most of us are not aware of its effects. Chambers describes it like this:

Ordinarily, we simply take for granted the numerous ways we use language in our social interactions because they are so deeply embedded in our daily affairs. It is also hard for them [people] to understand how much we reveal about ourselves – our background, our predilections, our characters – in the simplest verbal exchange. (Chambers 2003:2)

The characters' way of speaking might be a way for the scriptwriters to make the audience aware of the power of language as well as traditions. Sexism in terms of vocabulary is not a problem, though the idea of the feminine side being in need of a provider emerges in comments like:

28) a) *A woman can be smart, beautiful and powerful, like Queen Elisabeth I. She had it all except the most important thing.* (Marge 20:20)

b) *Please, don't say 'a man.* (Lisa 20:20)

c) *No! A husband.* (Marge 20:20)

3.2.3 Religion in topics of family conversations

Religious language may relate to beliefs and practices of a particular religion. Almost all religions are at some point brought up in the show. In the two seasons there are episodes about Christians, Catholics and Muslims. Most of the citizens of **Springfield** attend the local church, **The Western Branch of American Reform Presbyteranism**, even **The Simpsons** family. However, **Homer** often tries to escape the weekly visit to church much to **Marge's** dismay:

29) *I'm just trying to get a little goodness into the family.* (Marge 1:8)

Homer, on the other hand, seems to misunderstand a great deal about his religion:

30) *It's me Jesus. I've come from my workshop in the North Pole to say, don't evict the Simpsons.* (Homer 20:12)

Bart and **Lisa's** attitude to church is similar to that of their parents', that is **Lisa** is interested and as **Marge** goes to church as it is the proper thing to do. **Bart** as Homer does not like church and questions it as much as possible:

31) a) *Lisa, Bart, what did you learn in Sunday school today?* (Marge 1:8)

b) *The answers to deep theological questions.* (Lisa 1:8)

c) *Among other things, apes can't get into heaven.* (Bart1:8)

This conversation takes place after a visit to church. **Marge** wants to know if the children have learnt something at Sunday school, **Lisa** has of course and **Bart**, as he thinks his father is a big hairy ape, has learnt that **Homer** will not go to heaven.

As the political topics in the 20th season have become more national and global, as opposed to more local in the first season, religion also progresses in the 20th season to be more global and to cover other religions and sects. However, in the chosen episodes there is only one short mention of the Catholic Church, the remainder is about **the Simpson's** private beliefs and the different holidays. There is also a tendency to demonstrate the commercial side of the previously so religious holidays:

31) *Ah, son, you don't need all that junk. You've got something much more important. A decent home and a loving father who would do anything for you.* (Homer as Santa 1:1)

In season one **Marge** is trying to make her family learn something in church to become better persons:

32) *Homer you embarrassed us in front of the whole congregation. And today's sermon was one you really should have listened to.* (Marge 1:8)

Then, in season 20, she seems to be caught between the two sides of religion and commercialism as Example (33) illustrates.

33) Looks like those kids found the true spirit of Halloween, or Thanksgiving, or whatever (Marge 20:4).

Table 3: Changes in topics of family conversations across seasons

Season/Topic	Season One	Season 20
Political language	23	52
Sexist language	22	18
Religious language	14	12

Table demonstrates the differences between the two seasons concerning political, sexist and religious language. The figures represent instances of political, sexist and religious speech. There is a clear trend of increase in items of political language and decrease in gender related words and phrases in the 20th season as well as in references to religion. As discussed, the selection of thirteen episodes out of the 21 existing ones can have had an impact on this statistical outcome.

Table 4: Changes in topics of family conversations across seasons per characters per seasons

Season/Character	Homer	Bart	Marge	Lisa
Political language				
Season one	11	5	2	5
Season 20	27	4	11	10
Sexist language				
Season one	10	2	9	1
Season 20	5	3	6	4
Religious language				
Season one	4	1	7	2
Season 20	7	2	2	1

Table 4 demonstrates here the changes in speech topics of the characters from season one to season 20. The figures represent instances of political, sexist and religious language. There is a rise in the use of political language, and a fall in the use of sexist and religious language. This is partly because of the choice of episodes for the corpus but mainly there is an apparent increase of political topics for season 20.

4 Conclusions

This study intended to establish a possible change in vocabulary by the family individuals in the sitcom **The Simpsons**. However, the increase in foul language and Simpsons' coinages was smaller than expected. Instead, surprisingly, the opposite was found, less use of neologisms as well as less use of foul language. Also, the subsequent increase of sexist, religious and political speech seems to be absent except for the rise of political discourse. Hence, there is a greater political profile of the 20th season compared to the domestic profile of the first season. However, the show is not less family-oriented, on the contrary, instead of issues concerning the family itself, the themes are often of great relevance to everyday life of families nationwide, even worldwide. Political issues of national and global interest are more frequent in the 20th season, and there is a distinct criticism of American society demonstrated in various ways in the conversations of the family. Even though there has been a change in topics for the show, the change has not affected the language use to the same extent. A harsher tone has also developed along with a more direct language in conversations, especially between **Homer** and **Bart**. Nonetheless, there has not been a greater use of the familiar Simpsons' coinages nor has the language become more foul.

One aspect of the excluded episodes is that they may represent other themes, thus, effecting the outcome of the results. However, the extent of the analyzed material, in terms of the number of episodes and volume of dialog, should be large enough to represent a fairly precise outcome, though

one cannot eliminate it as a possible effect. Also, although some of the examples may not immediately appear to be foul, political or religious, it should be considered that in the context of the show there is a correlation between what happens and the language evidenced in the corpus.

Partly because of the strict rules of what is allowed on television, the scriptwriters have been forced to be innovative in letting their characters express themselves by making the characters be individuals with their own special way of thinking and communicating.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Corpus, The Simpsons First Season

Foul Language

1:1

one fat guy, B	show-off, H	spill it, H	
crazy, H	nuts, H		
Why you little..., H	hell, B		
Washout, H	sleezy, H	scrawny little bag of bones, H	
Onslaughts, L	loser, H	pathetic, H	Prowlers, M

1:2

Shut up, H	big dumb balding ape with no chin, B		
I'll show you!, H	Yikes, B	eat my shorts!, B	Crap, H
Crummy system, H	nuts, H	lunk, H	blows up, H
You're damned, B	save your breath, B	old noggin, H	jeez, H
Fooling around, M	lard-butt, H	fat lady, B	fat one, H
dumb kid, B	why you little..., H	stupid, L	
March you butt out here, M		dumb, B,	dimwit, L

1:3

Incompetent, B	putting him down, B		
A big worthless nothing, H	Hpunk, H	unemployed whale, B	old guy, B
Damn!, H	Utter failure, H		idiot, H
Nut, H	stinks, H	doozies, H	

1:4

Burp, B		bonehead, H	
scratch yourself, B	Rotten egg, L		
Blow a gasket, B	shut your mouth, B		
snap out of it, H	knock it off, H		
can the chatters, H	uncontrollable hellions, H	savages, H	
don't have a cow, B	belching, B	freaks, B	
dump, B	why you..., H		

here's five you haven't met, H	fat guy, B	licked, H
driving a stake through the hearts of those who love you, M		
ogre, L	Why you..., H	son of ..., H

1:5

Greasy mitts, L	teacher's pet, B	apple-polisher, B	butt-kisser, B
Grease the wheels, B	butter up, B	sniveling toad, B, L	
Little egg sucker, B, L	backscratcher, B	bootlicker, B	
Honor student!, B	Mr. Name-caller, L	knock your block off, B	
Put up your dukes, B		bully killer, L	
Bully, B, H		chunkified, B	
bully friend, M	chunky, M	dumb, B	
family jewels, H	nuts, B	bully, B	
shake kids down, B	saturation bombing, B	losers, B	
Get your butt down here right now!, H		Gory, B	

1:6

Scarfed down, B	stupid, B	saxs-a-ma-thing, H	what the...H
old and slow and weak and pathetic, B		bratty brother, L	
wise guy!(irony), H	You little..., H		
Knock you out, B	put him out of his misery, H		
On the ropes, H	pound the tar out of, H	smarty-pants, H	

1:7

shut up, B	Ay carumba!, B		
fool!, H	Don't have a cow dad., B		
What the..., H.	Buck naked, H	homeboy, B	
Hang ourselves, B	dudes, B	what the hell are you talking about, sir?, B	
Stupid egghead, H	brilliant beast, M		

1:8

Pulled a few boners, H	murderous mob, B	ledpipeinch, H
------------------------	------------------	----------------

Get your butts down here, M
no way José, M
cowabunga!, B

we stink, H

Little scamp, H

Cheese everybody off, B you little..., H

bad kids, B

Lynch mobs, H

1:9

gay Paris, B

big deal, B

what the hell...B

Oh, brother! L

1:10

Hotcakes, B

poor sucker, H

ass, H

Blimp, M

ah, baloney, B

I'm a whale, H

gross, L

Butt, L

planet cornball, H

this place bites, B

Ay caramba, B

butt, B

Stick a needle in your eye?, B

Jam a dagger in your thigh?, B

Eat horse manure pie?, B

Pint-size, H

nutcases, H

Why you little...H.

Why you big...M

sick people, B

1:11

Jeez Louise, H!

Clumsy Homer, B

sucker, B

paper-thin commitment, L pal, B

stupid, B

Bunch of creeps, B

Darn tootin' H

Suckers, B

1:12

Your doomed, B

the gruesome twosome, H ay carumba!, B

Insane criminal genius, M mob mentality, B

What the hell...B

crook, L

You girls just stay here and relax. (Homer)

The boys certainly are taking a long time. (Marge when cleaning and decorating the shelter)

After all, we built a fire and we don't know nothing about nature. (Marge)

1:8

1:9

1:10

I will not call my teacher "hotcakes" (Bart)

Your boy idolizes you. He does, and when he sees you treat women as objects, he'll think it's okay.

I think you should take Bart to meet this exotic belly-person. I want him to see that she's a human being with real thoughts and feelings. (Marge to Homer)

1:11

1:12

1:13

Political

1:1

Ah, son, you don't need all that junk. You've got something much more important. A decent home and a loving father who would do anything for you. (Homer as Santa)

TV's taught me that miracles always happen to poor kids at Christmas. (Bart)

1:2

Hey, it's a crummy system. (Homer about taxes)

Frosty Krusty flakes is what got him where he is today. It could be one of these chemicals that makes him so smart. (Homer)

1:3

Beer. Now, there's a tempting solution. (Homer, when fired and depressed)

There's a danger in this town bigger than all dips put together. (Homer about the power plant)

1:4

Remember, as far as anyone knows, we're a nice, normal family. (Homer)

...sometimes I think we're the worst family in town. (Homer)

All our money, the college funds, the TV. (Marge)

1:5

Tough day at school, boy? (Homer when Bart gets beat up at school)

Grandpa, I think this guys a little nuts. (Bart about war veteran)

I can't promise you victory, I can't promise you good times....I promise you victory, I promise you good times. (Bart when recruiting for bully fight)

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls. Contrary to what you've just seen, war is neither glamorous nor fun. There are no winners, only losers. There are no good wars, with the following exceptions: The American Revolution, World War II and the Star Wars Trilogy.(B)

1:6

I will not instigate revolution. (Bart)

I'm wailing for the homeless, living in a car. The Iowa farmer whose land has been taken away by unfeeling bureaucrats. The West Virginia coal miners...(Lisa)

I choose not to participate. (Lisa)

Lisa, get away from that jazz man! Nothing personal. I just fear the unfamiliar. (Marge)

1:7

Credit (Homer)

1:8

Just a statue? Is the Statue of Liberty just a statue? (Homer)

It's a symbol of what we all can do if we just put our minds to it. (Lisa)

1:9

1:10

1:11

The main export is furious political thought. (Lisa)

I'm defending a country where we can think and worship any way we want. (Lisa)

Maybe Lisa's right about America as the land of opportunity. And maybe Adil has a point that capitalism is oiled with the blood of the workers. (Homer)

1:12

1:13

Religious

1:1

Ah, son, you don't need all that junk. You've got something much more important. A decent home and a loving father who would do anything for you. (Homer as Santa)

God bless him! (Marge about Homer)

1:2

Sometimes even the best sheep stray and need to be hugged extra hard. (Marge)

1:3

1:4

Homie, get in the car. (Marge looking like the devil to Homer)

Say Grace first. (Homer)

Ignore the boy Lord. ... Dear Lord, thank you for this microwave bounty...Did you see them at the picnic? Of course you did, you're omnivorous. Oh Lord, why did you smite me with this family? (Homer)

Amen (the family)

Are we supposed to listen to you badmouth us to the Man Upstairs? (Marge)

1:5

1:6

I'm just wondering, what's the point. Would it make any difference at all if I never existed? (Lisa)

1:7

1:8

Sunday school

I'm just trying to get a little goodness into the family. (Marge)

Laza-who? (Homer)

Homer you embarrassed us in front of the whole congregation. And today's sermon was one you really should have listened to. (Marge)

Lisa, Bart, what did you learn in Sunday school today? (Marge)

The answers to deep theological questions. (Lisa)

Among other things, apes can't get into heaven. (Bart)

1:9

1:10

1:11

1:12

1:13

20:10

Losers, H idiot, H mysterious weirdo, H
Millionaire playboy, H rational sceptic, L

20:11

Suck shack, B slurp my snot, B dear, stupid insurance company, H
Screw you, H losers, B ay caramba, B
Skin rash, B tipsy witches , H brainy outcast, L

20:12

Boobies, H sucker, H Mr.Sceptical, H
Bummer, H doodily-did, M the scum of the earth, H you little..H
Your mad, H lisa's gay, B stupid, H ass, H
Lousy stinking

20:17

Bullies, B happy pills, M
Dizzyland, L bad little kids are you nuts? Creepy
El Barto Skinner's Bane, B the Sultan of Spid Wads, B
The Dean of D-Minus, B the Ay Caramba Kid, B bad little kids, B nuts, B
Creepy, B

20:18

Why you little...H Burn, Barty, burn, H moron, B
Loser, H loner, H failures, H clique, L
Unsulst, H envytations, H hatehugs, H hate, L
Spamming with faint praise, H Toledo Take-back, H
Childless weirdoes, H strident, L hectoring, L
 In your face, losers!, H Hot mom, H

20:19

Overhydrated, M lousy teachers, B dodgebook, M
 psychopathic school inspector, M
Crappier, H dudes, H lame, L

Loser,B schmoozer, B

Lie like hell, B

20:20

Crazy talk, H he sucks, H fools, H you suck, M

Bad baby! M

20:21

Assbook, B no way mister! M Norwads, B

Sloopy-bloopy, M barley jerks, B

xylophobia, H

You little...H Deeper than hell, M

Sexist

20:1

Oh, my God! This is an erotic bakery! (Marge)

Marge, I can see you withholding sex or cake. But withholding sexy cake! (Homer)

20:2

Dad, do laundry? (Bart)

20:3

Boys will be boys. (Marge)

20:4

Why is it when a woman is confident and powerful, they call her a witch? (L)

Girls don't like trucks. Come back when you're something else. (Bart to truck, changes into pink car)

20:5

20:10

Virgin! What are you? A girl? (Homer)

20:11

20:12

Oh, Mardi Gras, you see a lot of boobies. (Homer)

20:17

She had more curves than a Hot Wheel track. (Bart)

You've finally become the boy every mother dreams of, a girl! (Marge)

20:18

20:19

20:20

Mom, I'm glad you brought me here [beauty parlor] but isn't it more important for a woman to be smart and powerful than beautiful? (Lisa)

A woman can be smart, beautiful and powerful, like Queen Elisabeth I. She had it all except the most important thing. (Marge)

Please, don't say "a man". (Lisa)

No! A husband! (Marge)

Because a woman should not have to depend on a man. Snow White was brought back to life by a lady doctor. (Lisa)

Unless you're not man enough! (Marge)

No, dear, I'm a man, dear. (Homer)

20:21

I'm glad you've come here to take all the jobs we don't wanna do! (Homer about not wanting to date Marge's sisters)

Political

20:1

Where's the IRA when you need 'em? (Bart)

Two kinds of Irish people? (Bart)

You have a common land, a literature and the sweetest song on earth. (Lisa)

This was such a pleasant St Patrick's Day until the Irish people showed up. (Marge)

Bail jumpers, welcome. (Homer)

20:2

It's a complete violation of your rights. (Lisa when h and m spy on b)

Maybe there's too much sugar in the Sugar Frosties Candy'Oes? (M)

...my coca leaf addiction is under control. (H)

20:3

You did have that one sip of alcohol when you were pregnant. (Homer)

You'd better settle down, boy or I'll drag you into the blind spot of that security camera and beat you with one of those big thick women magazines with all the ads in it.(Homer)

I don't know why I do the things I do. (Bart while eating mms and drinking coke)

...the Daily Growl is the only news paper that's not afraid to say how great this country is!

How's the war going? We're winning! That's great! And our standing abroad? Fantastic! (Homer)

Enjoy the upper lower middle class. (Bart)

20:4

I'd like to vote for president, governor and anything that will take money away from our parks and libraries. (Homer)

This machine is rigged. This doesn't happen in America. Maybe in Ohio, but not in America. (Homer)

And, for those of you who feel we've trampled on a children's classic, I'm encouraging to write to the following address... (Marge)

20:5

Video games, the reason this generation of Americans is the best ever. (Homer)

I know parts of our marriage are based on lies, but so are a lot of good things, religion, American history...(Homer)

20:10

A simpler time, when the only thing we worried about was the total nuclear annihilation. (Homer)

(I had a Presidential election stolen from me. But I moved on...Al Gore)

...and the punishment for murder is...well it varies from state to state and by race...(Homer)

It's like bringing Richard Nixon to the Watergate...(Homer)

20:11

You're the Governments problem now. (Homer on schools first day)

Insurance is the greatest deal ever. If I get hurt, I get paid and man do I get hurt. (Homer)

I'm not insured! For the first time in my life, I'm financially responsible for my own actions! (Homer)

20:12

I have this magical thing called a home equity loan. I borrow all the money I want and the house gets stuck with the bill. (Homer)

(Balloon payment, 37% interest compound, not understanding the contract fee. Mortgage broker)

...you said I wouldn't have to pay until the future. This isn't the future! It's the lousy, stinking now! (Homer)

(this country takes care of it's middle class, house auctions, foreclosures. Mortgage broker)

20:17

There is no Springfield 50 years in the future! With global warming trapping the CO2 inside our poisonous atmosphere, our super heated oceans will rise drowning our lowlands leaving what's left of humanity baking in deserts that once fed the world! (Lisa)

What's therapy gonna do for me when the world is in ashes? (Lisa)

Lisa's a little young to be taking happy pills. (Marge)

20:18

The Truth in Board walking Law has really done a number on this place. (Lisa)

It's mac and cheese from the school cafeteria, the blandest food known to man. (Lisa)

No yellow for you Bart, it will keep you up at night..(Homer)

You come to school to help him to get good grades? Isn't that why we pay public school teachers those enormous salaries? (Homer)

From now on, the only thing I'll ever do for you is cosign if you want a gun. (Homer)

20:19

Schools have bathrooms. I'm a woman so my going in unattended won't cause a panic. (Marge)

The only person getting an education here today was me in how bad it is. (Marge)

And because of cutbacks they were combining maths with P:E. They were playing dodgebook. (Marge)

Springfield Elementary's rating is so low it's more than two standard deviations below the norm. (Lisa)

I can't understand that math reference because I went to Springfield Elementary! (Homer)

We could go to a school where special doesn't always mean bad. And where the teachers doesn't have to moonlight as telemarketers. (Lisa)

20:20

Because a woman should not have to depend on a man. Snow White was brought back to life by a lady doctor. (Lisa)

20:21

Look at me I'm saving the earth. (Homer eating an eco burger)

He called me Sir. That means he knows I'm better than him. (Homer)

Gee, this Ogdenville influx has been great for everybody. (Marge)

Typical foreigners, clogging up the system. (Homer at the hospital)

I'm starting to think this town was better off before all these immigrants arrived. (Homer)

I'd just like to remind you that we were all immigrants at one time. (Lisa)

And you with your alcoholism. (Marge)

...needs a name that evokes America's proud history of citizens rising up to defend our way of life.

(Homer) (Proposals, the Klan, the Nazis)

What can we do to keep one group of people away from another group of people.(Homer)

Haven't we always taught the children to make friends with those who are a little different? (Marge)

Ja, Ja (Maggie) Maggie's first words are in Ogdenvillese! (Marge)

Now do you see why we must build that fence? (Homer)

Religious

20:1

It always comes down to transubstantiation. (Lisa)

Kindly deeds and they're done for free. (Homer singing with Flanders)

20:2

20:3

20:4

Finally a Boxing Day that lives up to its name. (Bart)

Before you kill me, I gotta know. What is the one true religion? (Homer, answer; a mix of voodoo and Methodist, Krusty)

Looks like those kids found the true spirit of Halloween, or Thanksgiving, or whatever. (Marge)

20:5

Limbo! You mean the dance or that place where unbaptized babies go? (Homer)

...being chaperoned by an actual Christian. (Marge)

20:10

God doesn't need his own special day. (Homer)

What about Sunday? (Bart)

Sunday's the Lord's day, boy. Not God's. Completely different guy. (Homer)

20:11

20:12

(It's Ash Wednesday, everybody! Set down your gins and confess your sins! Ned Flanders at midnight on Mardi Gras)

And on the zillionth day, God created hugs! And it was good! (Homer)

It's me Jesus. I've come from my workshop in the North Pole to say, don't evict the Simpsons.

(Homer)

20:17

20:18

20:19

20:20