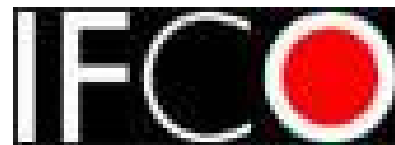


Assessing attitudes to strong language in film

Qualitative Research Prepared For



- In early 2006, IFCO asked Lansdowne Market Research, as a means of augmenting and completing the national survey of parents already carried out for IFCO by Lansdowne, to undertake qualitative research into issues relating to strong language in films.
- The Irish film, *Studs*, certified 15A by IFCO, was selected as a case study, in advance of its nationwide release in March, because it contained frequent strong language, including more than one hundred instances of the 'f----' word.
- The objective of the research was to inform IFCO as to the attitudes of parents and adolescents towards language in film through a series of screenings/discussions that 'sense checked' the language content of the *Studs* script.

- The research was qualitative in nature, and so we spoke to a relatively small number of respondents. In total we completed three group discussions:
 - Group 1 – Teenagers aged 15/16 years – Male and Female
 - Group 2 – Parents of teenagers – Male and Female
 - Group 3 – Youth workers – Teachers, National Youth Council, sporting bodies etc.

- The research was completed in February 2006 at IFCO's offices.

- The format of the group discussions was as follows:
 - 45 minutes – Group discussion on 'language in films' generally
 - 90 minutes – Viewing of *Studs*
 - 45 minutes – Group discussion on 'language content' in *Studs*

Attitudes to strong language at a social level



In broad terms, the adults and minors identified two “categories” of strong language.

■ The first category is “bad words” which are often used in the common vernacular and have a “slang” value and common currency. There is an acceptance, amongst the people we spoke to, of ‘slipping standards’ in everyday language generally. This perceived “slip in standards” is supported by the perception that the “f” word is becoming more commonplace.

■ The second category, and the one that causes greater levels of concern, is that considered to be “abusive language” directed at the person/specific groups. Both adults and minors are overtly aware of the ‘potential harm’ caused by using what are considered abusive terms in reference to an individual’s race, colour, gender and sexual orientation.

The Teenager Perspective

- ☐ The teenagers we spoke to expressed the view that teenagers of a “certain age” like to be able to display a “sense of maturity” around the use of strong language.
- ☐ The use of strong language is considered acceptable in certain contexts; its use can be tolerated when expressing relief, stress, anger or (of course) humour.
- ☐ However, there is a strong sense in which “mature” teenagers should know when it is appropriate to use strong language and when it is not.
- ☐ The inappropriate use of strong language is considered immature.

Aggressive use of strong language was considered to be a taboo amongst teenagers

The Parent's Perspective

- The parents we spoke to were equally pragmatic about the use of strong language.
- They agree with the view held by teenagers that “mature kids” should understand when strong language is appropriate and when it is not.
- By and large the “bad words” category (slang, non-abusive) may be tolerated in specific contexts, although most parents do point out they would prefer the non-use of any strong language by their children.
- In fact, parents were more concerned about the ‘social status’ that the use of bad/strong language creates around the image of their children. There is a degree of ‘snobishness’ that parents are keen to engender...
 - “I always think it’s the rougher kids or people in general that use bad language”
 - “You won’t hear bad language at a rugby match, you will at a soccer match”

Use of strong language is viewed in a social context – parents are concerned about the social stature that strong language implies for their children.

The Youth Worker's Perspective

☐ Those people we spoke to who work directly with young people, accept that the use of strong language had become more commonplace in Irish society.

☐ However, their concerns centred on how the use of strong language had become more abusive in tone, and, in their experience, they are finding that abusive language is becoming a far too common occurrence.

☐ Specifically, youth workers find the following categories of language to be most offensive and increasingly common...

- ☐ Abusive terms relating to race
- ☐ Abusive terms relating to sexual orientation
- ☐ Abusive terms gender

☐ Significantly, youth workers don't blame the 'media' (including film) as the source of this emerging phenomenon. They claim that the use of such language just comes from 'the street' and a changing Ireland...

The street shapes language...

"If you hear a kid calling someone a 'f***ing Chinese bastard' or whatever, they are not getting that from TV or Cinema. They are just getting that from the world around them and other kids."

"I don't think kids mimic what they hear in films, I think they mimic each other. Especially teenagers, they all just want to be as cool as each other. If its cool to swear amongst a group of them, they will all swear..."

"Sure it's impossible to keep kids away from language. Just getting on the bus, they can hear all kinds of words. Walking down the street, you are likely to hear anything, depending on who is walking behind you..."

The role of classification








The widely held view amongst the people we spoke to was that film classifications are an important indicator of the film content and that, in broad terms, the age classifications adequately indicates the likely extent and usage of strong language in films.



Equally, the classification system is considered a useful indicator of sexual or violent content in film.



By and large, most people have a set of preconceived expectations around each of the various classifications when it comes to language:

-  G – will contain no strong language
-  PG – may contain some mild swear words
-  12A – may also contain some mild swear words
-  15A/16 – will contain frequent use of swear words
-  18 – will contain frequent use of strong swear words.



All of the people we spoke to, young and old, claimed to understand the importance of context regarding the use of language in films. Strong language is permissible in film for humour, drama or even simply to **reflect the reality of a character's environment**.



The language used in the film *Studs*, for example, was considered to be appropriate as it reflects the reality of a both the **social standing of the characters** portrayed and the reality of a male football team.



As such, the language in *Studs* is considered to be **"banter" and "slang"** and not language that "crossed the line" into "abusive language against the person or specific groups i.e. ethnic, racial, gender specific.



However, **the frequency of use of "strong language" in *Studs* does cause some concerns** amongst both adults and minors. The concern being that the consistent use of swearing could socialise acceptance of swearing amongst less mature teenagers/children.



What does the 12A certificate mean to parents



The 12A certificate is now well understood to mean that 'children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult', so both parents and teenagers were keen to point out that this means often younger children will be viewing a film with that rating.



Parents describe the rating as 'safe enough'. It may have 'mild swearing', but a 12A film is not expected to have 'strong/abusive' language.



In the case of *Studs*, viewers didn't consider the language as too strong and they accepted its contextual use. However, it was the *frequency* of swearing that became an issue with this film.



Therefore, in terms of language content, 12A is judged not solely on context or 'strength of language'. It is also judged on frequency of strong language use.

The 'F' word is acceptable in a 12A film – but not too often...

IFCO

The use of language in films is now considered 'par for the course' and the general public accept this to be the case, given the role of language in 'setting the context' of a given narrative. Slang is acceptable, and even abusive language is acceptable, in creating dramatic effect. But frequency of usage is the key.

IFCO

When considering the certification of a film that has strong language, parents and adolescents would like IFCO to take the following factors into account:

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. Is the language being used 'in context' for dramatic effect?

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. Is the language overly abusive to the person (gender, race etc.)?

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. Is the frequency of strong language use too high?

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