

## A Sociolinguistic Analysis Of Verbal Bullying In *Matilda* Movie

Wafaa Nasser Hussein  
hum885.wafaa.naseer@student.uobabylon.edu.iq  
Prof. Dr. Salih Mahdi Adai  
hum.salih.mahdi@uobabylon.edu.iq

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### **Abstract**

*In social interactions, people communicate to build relationships by exchanging ideas and information. They use language to interact with others and to express their ideas as well as their intentions to those listening. Sometimes, people use the language not for the purpose of communications but in order to devalue or harm others which is known as bullying. The present paper deals with verbal abuse (verbal bullying) that certain characters in Matilda movie engage in and to analyze them sociolinguistic ally. The chosen samples will be analyzed quantitatively by using a theoretical framework based on Holmes' (1991,1992) studies to sociolinguistic, social variables and the social dimensions, which is divided into four scales, Rigby (2002) to refer to the functions of bullying and Stephenson and Smith (2002) to show its types, and qualitatively. It is concluded that several characters use language in abusive way (direct verbal bullying), the social distance scale is the one that is most frequently utilized in the film, according to the classification of these scales. It is also discovered that the most common function of bullying is to get power and control.*

**Key words:** verbal bullying, social dimension, social variables, Matilda movie.

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### INTRODUCTION

A movie is a series of images that are quickly projected onto a screen to give the appearance of motion and continuity. Filmmakers must also have a purpose for making films; they do not just make them for fun. A film may have a variety of topics, including humor, social issues, politics, love, education, and more. A movie is also a contemporary literary work that has scenes, language, and storylines that are performed by actors and actresses in order to entertain viewers. A movie's existence has its own place in the evolution of human civilization and history, making it a product of human culture as well. The two main goals of a movie are to entertain and educate viewers. People will undoubtedly find amusement in seeing a movie, and they will also learn from the morals and messages it conveys. People will be more receptive to new ideas and expand their creative expression about social, economic, political, romantic, and other aspects of life. Movies attempt to convey specific meanings through their productions. As a result, viewers need first observe it carefully in order to infer the precise or most important message it contains. One could assume that a movie is a remembrance of someone's memories. It seems as though the author will document their unique experience. Additionally, it has an intention. For this reason, the author hopes that there will be some value from the story and wishes to raise awareness of it by publishing it through the film itself. However, there are instances when the language used by the actors or actresses in a film causes viewers to not fully comprehend a particular scene. Even after repeatedly seeing the film, the outcome would not be as seamless as the audience had anticipated. There are a couple sequences in the entire film that likely leave viewers feeling very perplexed as they attempt to decipher the language utilized (Brown and Gilman, 1960). Bullying is when someone abuses, forcefully dominates, or

intimidates another person by using force, compulsion, harsh taunting, or threats. The action is habitual and frequently repeated. Perceiving a disparity in social or physical power is a necessary precondition. This disparity sets bullying apart from confrontation. Bullying is a subset of aggressive behaviour that is typified by repeated, hostile purpose, and an unequal power dynamic.

A social phenomena known as bullying is defined by interactions that are perceived as harmful and are aimed at one or more people. This study's challenge is to comprehend how language is used to control, injure, and exert power in the context of bullying at school. This entails examining the motivations, outcomes, and interpretations of spoken communication in instances of bullying. The study came to the conclusion that verbal bullying, in its most basic form, might be an insult that is associated with power imbalances and an unfriendly function. Bullying is linked to the use of authority to get or enhance the bully's advantages in the circumstance. For instance, bullies utilize their social status to coerce others into doing things by verbally bullying them. Also, it concluded that the social distance scale is extensively used to gain social power (Holmes,1991). A subfield of linguistics called sociolinguistics examines how language and society interact. It investigates how social factors impact language use and structure as well as how language evolves and changes in various social environments. The study of sociolinguistics also looks at how language preserves or modifies social identities and norms.

In this case, language use in daily life is undoubtedly an integral part of humanity. In order to communicate with others, people need language. Here, language serves as a bridge between individuals. In order for the listener to comprehend what the speaker is saying, language is required to convey the speaker's thoughts and emotions. In certain communities, for example, members of a group may speak a different language. In this case, people truly accept the language being used and speak as usual, even when they engage or communicate with each other using a new word. The same listeners may believe that they will not fully comprehend their new talk, even though they belong to the same tribe (Holmes,2001).

Thus, after the discussing what bullying is from the perspective of social dimension, then concerning a bullying language, it is really correlated with the existence of linguistics, and linguistics is the study of human language, but now linguistics is a science that concerns itself with all aspects relating to language, examining it from all of the theoretical viewpoints. The use of bullying through a movie called "Matilda" will be analyzed, with in this movie characters use bullying many times. Then forms of bullying that found in the movie will be identified? And what are the functions of bullying used in the movie?

## 2. BULLYING

Olweus' definition (2003, p. 9) is widely used and effective: "A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other students." To do "negative actions," such as threatening, taunting, and using disparaging names, one uses words (verbally). When someone physically strikes, shoves, kicks, pinches, or restrains another person, that is known as bullying. Making facial expressions or gestures, isolating someone from a group of friends, and deliberately ignoring them are examples of negative actions. Bullying may happen to anybody, at any age, and in any situation, including the workplace, school, or home. Stephenson (2005,p.45) defines traditional bullying as "A form

of social interaction in which a more dominant individual (the bully) exhibits aggressive behavior which is intended to and does in fact cause distress to a less dominant individual (the victim)". The paper shows the influence of sociolinguistic variables on bullying to gain a better understanding of it. Only four social variables such as gender, social class, power, and position are used in the present study. Therefore, concerning bullying, the current study aims to analyze the effect of the four social variables just mentioned.

The social dimension serves as a gauge of the speakers' varying social standing and can also reveal the context in which language is being utilized. Stated differently, the social dimension is the way that language is utilized to express its purpose, topic, style, and mood. This paper is inextricably linked to the social dimension of communication because it also examines the social function. When a member of a community wants to vent anger toward another member, for example, they will think about the social aspect of the situation before speaking. Holmes, Bell, & Boyce (1991) state that there are four related social scales, those are: 1) a social distance scale, 2) a status scale, 3) a formality scale 4) functional scales. Only three social scales are used in this study: social distance, status and formality.

## 2.1. FORMS OF BULLYING

In an effort to develop a comprehensive understanding of bullying, scholars have put forth a variety of models that try to define the many types of bullying. implies, for instance, that bullying can be classified according to Stephenson and Smith (2002,p.12) into two forms: "direct" bullying, which occurs during in-person interactions, and "indirect" bullying, which is characterized by covert actions and may include a third party, such as distributing false information or acting in a way that excludes others. By distinguishing between two types of bullying—"malign" bullying, which is characterized by deliberate and purposeful behaviors, and "non-malign" bullying, which is perceived by the perpetrators as harmless or merely a kind of amusement—Rigby(2007,p.15) has highlighted the concept of intent in his classification. In his analysis of "non-malign" bullying—in which adults, including teachers, take activities that could harm pupils without meaning to—the author explains the idea of educational bullying. The phrase "malign bullying," according to Rigby, refers to a form of bullying when the objective is to purposefully cause harm to another individual. The malignant nature of this type of bullying is believed to stem from the deliberate exploitation of a power imbalance.

## 2.2. FUNCTIONS OF BULLYING

Rigby (2002, pp.168-169), shows that an evolutionary mechanism that has enabled human survival is thought to have imprinted the drive to bully others, especially youngsters. It's hard, if not impossible, to evaluate such general notions about bullying. These hypotheses include those that attribute bullying to peer groups, the broader community, early family environments, and hereditary factors. The propensity of bullies to use aggression in the pursuit of pragmatic goals lends credence to the notion that bullying should be viewed as goal-directed conduct (Volk, 2014, p.329).

### 1-REPUTATION (SOCIAL DOMINANCE)

As to a number of studies, aggressive behavior is strongly predicted with perceived popularity. According to de Bruyn (2010, p. 547) the "popular bully" is "a person who is at the center of a group in terms of attention, attraction, and dominance but also frequently involved in aggression". Bullying can be used as a tactic to strengthen ties within the group and boost achievement relative to other groups. Some engage in bullying as a way to show their commitment to a single person who is the victim's opponent or to avoid being excluded (Volk, 2014, pp. 329). This could account for the actions of some bullies' aids or spectators who wish to join a strong group on their own.

At the group level, bullying for social dominance can turn into an in-group vs. out-group activity with the intention of promoting membership in a preferred group while negatively affecting the welfare of members of opposing groups. In order to accomplish dominance goals, bullying motivated by race, religion, or ethnicity may include group-level conflict (Volk, 2014, pp. 330). Bullies are found to have greater levels of perceived popularity and peer-reported dominance when it comes to achieving social dominance on an individual basis. Since it is an indirect way to obtain tangible benefits like resources or chances for dating and reproduction, acquiring dominance and social status is an important objective (Volk, 2014, pp. 329-330).

In peer groups, social rank is established in large part by the selective use of aggressive conduct. Peer relationships are formed in preschool, and as kids get older, they start to choose their peers more carefully. Hierarchical social structures develop when some students and groups gain acceptance and power over other students and groups. In elementary school, students start acting hostilely toward one another in an effort to maintain and improve their social status. Popular kids use violent conduct to openly demonstrate their authority over others (Farmer & Cadwallader, 2000, p. 170). Smith (2004, p. 143) shows that "Bullying behavior is considered to be a form of proactive aggression, the goal of which is to gain social outcomes, in this case dominance or status among peers".

"The ability to bully another person conveys status upon the one with more power, thus establishing his or her place within the social hierarchy, at least in relation to the victim," according to Kolbert and Crothers (2003, p.81). In other words, when a youngster successfully bullies another, they are either intentionally or inadvertently trying to move up the social scale. Correlations between bullying's developmental traits provide credence to the idea that bullying has evolutionary roots. Throughout late infancy and early adolescence, bullying becomes more common, suggesting that it is an effort to establish a social hierarchy (Kolbert & Crothers, 2003, pp. 84-85).

The popularity of bullies is a major cause for concern because it is thought to enable bullies to influence their buddies to harass other kids. We can presume that female peers who imitate relationally aggressive females do so out of fear and without their own permission, since popular-aggressive kids are hated, as relationally aggressive girls are (Garandeau, 2009, p. 123).

## 2-RESOURCES

In contemporary societies, arguments about toys, gadgets, and/or privileges are common, particularly between siblings. Even though they may bully for social superiority inside the family, sibling bullies look for more tangible resources than those engaged in most types of peer bullying. As students vie with one another for grades, scholarships, and future employment—all of which are based on criteria other than social popularity or power—bullying is a prevalent occurrence in many professional institutions. Therefore, bullying can be used to obtain material resources (such food or money) without regard to advantages like increased popularity (Volk, 2014, p. 330). Bullying has "costs and benefits and as being in some circumstances adaptive for an individual doing the bullying (e.g., by gaining resources or defending sub-group identity), even if not beneficial for the victim or the wider community," according to the evolutionary perspective on bullying (Monks, 2009, p.1530).

## 3-POWER AND CONTROL

A threat schema, such as "Everyone is going to bully me," may be activated by bullying. This may cause negative self-other beliefs, such as "I'd better ruin her reputation before she ruins mine," which can make a person aggressive in social settings to keep control and power (Swearer &

Hymel, 2015, p. 349). Bullying can manifest itself in many different ways. Any persistent harm done to another person by a stronger individual or group of individuals may be considered bullying conduct. Keep in mind that "stronger" does not necessarily mean "physically more powerful." It usually happens in the presence of other types of force or strength. Some kids intrude on others because they have stronger personalities. They are more resolute, sometimes less sensitive, and have a harsher personality. They might have particular skills that enable them to harm people without harming themselves (Rigby, 2007, p.19).

As a result, some examples include the capacity for physical conflict, strong language skills, mental and verbal agility, and the capacity to degrade others. Children may be more powerful than others despite these skills since they have achieved the status of group leaders and may win others' support (Rigby, 2007, p. 19).

### 2.3. BULLYING AS SOCIAL DIALECT

Bullying is typically a subset of a language that is used by a specific group. It contains hazardous words and idioms that may be completely made up or distorted versions of already-existing ones. It is employed in casual settings. In formal settings, it is inappropriate. Bullying is the casual use of a word in a language or among a certain population. Although this type of language is tolerated in a certain social context, it is not regarded as the speaker's native tongue or dialect. Here, certain people try to use bullying to devalue one another. It happened because they try to be known by another group and become popular for society, and also they used this language to get power and control. Some terms are sensitive and have a stronger effect on others than a less well-behaved term. Bullying is used for a variety of reasons, but generally speaking, it expresses a particular emotional attitude. The same term may express completely opposite attitudes, or it may be used directly to insult or shock.

Concerning bullying language as a social dialect, there are typically a number of elements that influence how people speak to one another at any given moment. The emergence of the linguistic variety was caused by factors such as the speakers' occupation, status, or obligation. Teachers, priests, truck drivers, merchants, laborers, and employers must all speak different languages. This is due to the fact that their social surroundings and actions have an impact. Their vocabulary is where their linguistic diversity is most noticeable.

A social dialect is a linguistic variant that deals with a number of topics, such as the speakers' socioeconomic situation, age, sex, occupation, position, class, and social class. This type of variety is typically the most spoken about in sociolinguistics due to its connection to speakers' private concerns. Those statement is supported by (Wardaugh, 2006): "Social dialects originate among social groups and are related to a variety of factors, the principal ones apparently being social class, religion, and ethnicity." Social dialect affects many variables, for instance: social class, religion, and ethnicity. According to Siegel (2010) "Social dialect is a variety of a language spoken by a particular group based on social characteristic other than geography." In this context, social dialect also refers to a spoken language variety that is observable from the perspective of social characteristics. Based on the previous description, it can be concluded that a social dialect is one that is related to social class and status. The social dialect-related word "social class" describes the distinctions among individuals that are linked to variations in money, education, and social standing. diverse social groups have diverse speech patterns. Teachers, for instance, do not speak like farmers, and attorneys do not speak like the criminals they represent in court.

### 3. DATA AND ANALYSIS

To collect the data for the analysis the researcher watch the *Matilda* movie, describe the social setting, make a list of extracts used by the characters and analyze them.

### 3.1. THE DATA

The data of this paper is "Matilda " which is a comedy film directed by Danny Devito, adopted from Roald Dahl's 1988 novel. It is about a talented girl with horrible parents. She can talk like an adult even at a young age. Matilda learns to read on her own since her parents don't give her any attention. She has read a lot of books from the local library before she has even attended primary school. She spends her afternoons at the library, where Matilda is assisted in selecting great works by a kind librarian. According to Matilda's parents, she ought to watch more television and read less.

Matilda's father, Mr. Wormwood, is a dishonest car salesman. He deceives customers into purchasing completely worthless autos by employing a number of unlawful strategies. He makes a consistent effort to get Michael, Matilda's brother, ready to join him into the auto sales industry. When Matilda exposes her father's dishonesty, it further infuriates him.

Matilda makes the decision to discipline her parents for their treatment of her. She's hoping it would make kids less cruel and self-centered. In order to convince the family that there is a ghost in the dining room, she borrows a neighbor's parrot, gets her father into putting his hat on his head, and replaces her father's hair tonic with bleaching dye. Matilda learns how to handle bullies from these antics, but none of them have a long-term impact on her parents.

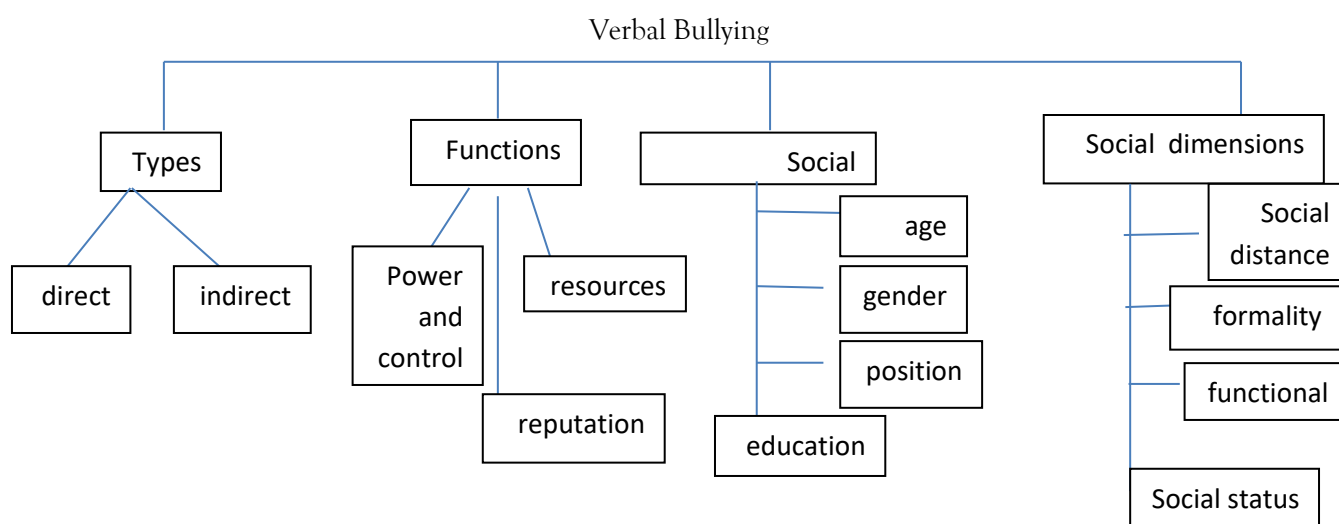
### 3.2. THE ANALYSIS

An eclectic model is used to analyze the chosen data quantitatively and qualitatively . This model is based on :

1-Rigby (2002) to refer to the functions of bullying and Stephenson and Smith (2002) to show its types.

2-To mention the social variables , the researcher follows Holmes (1992).

3- To express the social dimension , the researcher follows Holmes, Bell and Boyce (1991). Six extracts are chosen purposefully from the film , then analyzed.



Extract (1): "Keep your nasty mouth shut so we can all watch this program in peace".

**CONTEXT:**

The speaker here is Matilda's mother, who supports her father when he tells Matilda that she is an ignorant, unimportant little child and asks her to be quiet with offensive words so the family can watch TV.

**TYPE AND FUNCTION OF BULLYING:**

the mother made a mean comment about Matilda's mouth: "Keep your nasty mouth shut", describing her mouth as nasty because Matilda said something she did not like. She said so using her power as a mother, knowing that her daughter can do nothing about it .Direct bullying.

**Social variables:** this speech is said by the mother who is a female, adults and uneducated woman.

**Social distance:** this utterance is said by Matilda's mother to her, so there is a high solidarity level.

**Formality:** formality level is low because this utterance is from a mother talking to her daughter.

**Status:** the mother enjoys high status as a superior person.

**Extract (2): "Be quiet! Just keep your nasty mouth shut !"**

**CONTEXT:**

In this sentence, the father is ordering Matilda to be quiet and shut her mouth with an angry voice after she spoke to him about his hair and tried to give him advice for him to cut it straight because his hair was looking awful after he cut some of it to release it from his hat that got stuck to his head with glue.

**TYPE AND FUNCTION OF BULLYING**

direct verbal bullying is apparent when the father makes a mean comment about Matilda's mouth and forces her to be quiet. The function is to get power and control.

**Social variables:** this speech is said by the father who is a male, adults and uneducated man.

**Social distance:** Because of the family setting, there is a high level of solidarity.

**Formality:** there is a low level of formality appearing in the context.

**Status:** the speech is done from high status person to low status.

**Extract (3): "Don't butt in, your brother and I are busy with high finance".**

**CONTEXT:**

In this extract, the father commands Matilda not to interrupt his talk with her brother and tries to exclude her from their conversation about the profits they made from selling second-hand cars, even when she calculated the exact number of profits and told her father the correct result.

**TYPE AND FUNCTION OF BULLYING:**

The yelling at Matilda by her father and asking her not to interact with his conversation even when she gives him the correct answer is a clear example of direct verbal bullying that happened against her without any good reason. The function is to get power and control.

**Social variables:** this speech is said by the father who is a male, adults and uneducated man.

**Social distance:** Interaction has a high solidarity level since interlocutors know each other well.

**Formality:** low formality level since the interlocutors are talking in an informal setting.

**Status:** the superiority of the speaker is clear, so this utterance is marked with high status.

**Extract (4): "A thief! A crook! A pirate! A brigand! A rustler!"**

**CONTEXT:**

When the Trunchbull found that someone ate her cake, she accused a student named Bruce Bogtrotter that he was the one who ate it and started to insult him with different kinds of verbal

insults, using her social power as a manager and knowing that he could not do anything about it.

#### TYPE AND FUNCTION OF BULLYING:

The Trunchbull used name calling to insult Bruce verbally, and the continuous use of these insults using her social power is considered a clear type of direct verbal bullying. The function is to get social dominance.

**Social variables:** this speech is said by the headmistress who is a female , adults and an educated woman.

**Social distance :** low solidarity level is found in this utterance.

**Formality:** the formality level appears to be high since the setting is a school headmistress's office.

**Status:** The Trunchbull was speaking from a high status or superior position to a subordinate one.

**Extract (5): "Stand up, you disgusting little cockroach!"**

#### CONTEXT:

this sentence was said to Matilda from the Trunchbull because she thinks that Matilda put a newt into her water jug.

#### TYPE AND FUNCTION OF BULLYING:

the Trunchbull insulted Matilda by calling her a disgusting cockroach which is a kind of direct bullying . The function is to get social dominance.

**Social variables:** this speech is said by the headmistress who is a female , adults and an educated woman.

**Social distance:** low solidarity. The headmistress does not like children and has no good relationship with them.

**Formality:** high formality since the context is a class at school and the interlocutors are a headmistress and a student.

**Status:** The Trunchbull enjoys high status as a headmistress.

**Extracts(6): Mrs. Wormwood: " five years old and she is reading. Book, if you don't mind. That is not normal- the child is clearly an idiot." P.212**

#### CONTEXTS

it is between the mother and the father. when her husband ( the father) rushes in ,she ( the mother) shouts that their five years old daughter is "doing it again" it means ( she reads books again) . They are blaming her and get astonished that a little child was reading books.

#### TYPE AND FUNCTION OF BULLYING:

direct verbal bullying by using name calling. The mother described the girl as an idiot. It has got power and control function.

**Social variables :** this speech is said by the mother who is a female, adults and get a low education.

**Social distance :**high solidarity because the mother is talking to her daughter.

**Formality:** low formality since the setting of the speech is at home.

**Status:** the speech gets a high status since it is between the two parents about the little girl.

Table (1) Types and Functions of Bullying

No	Types of bullying	Fr.	Pr.	Functions of bullying	Fr.	Pr.
1	Direct	6	100%	Power and control	4	66.6%

2	Indirect	0	0	Social dominance	2	33.4%
3				Resources	0	0
Total		6	100%		6	100%

Table (1) shows that direct verbal bullying is used extensively, it gets (100%) which is high rate because the characters communicate verbally face to face, and they do not have the ability to engage in indirect exchange. Also, the table above, shows that power and control is the most dominant function of bullying that gets (66.6%), because the characters want to impose their power and control on others.

Figure (2) Types of Bullying

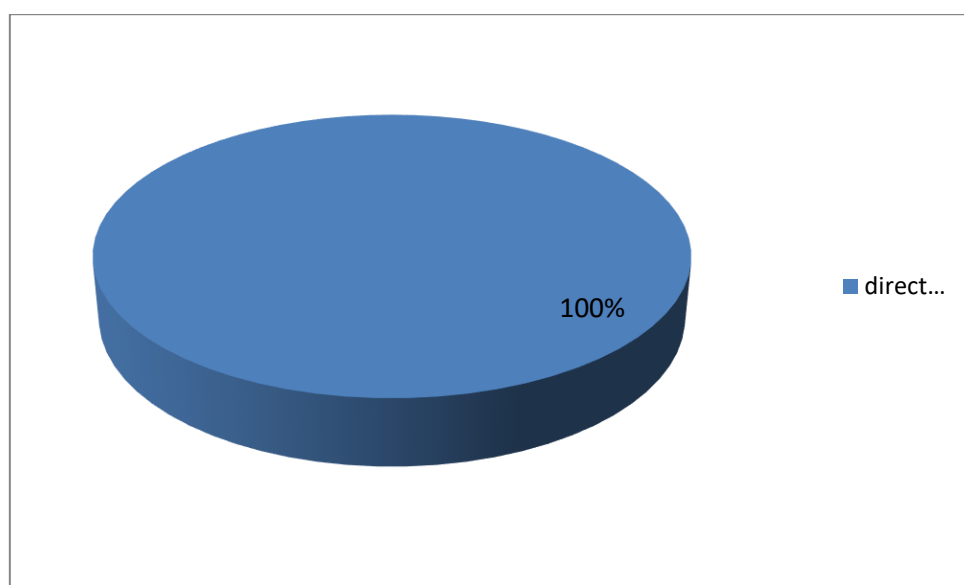
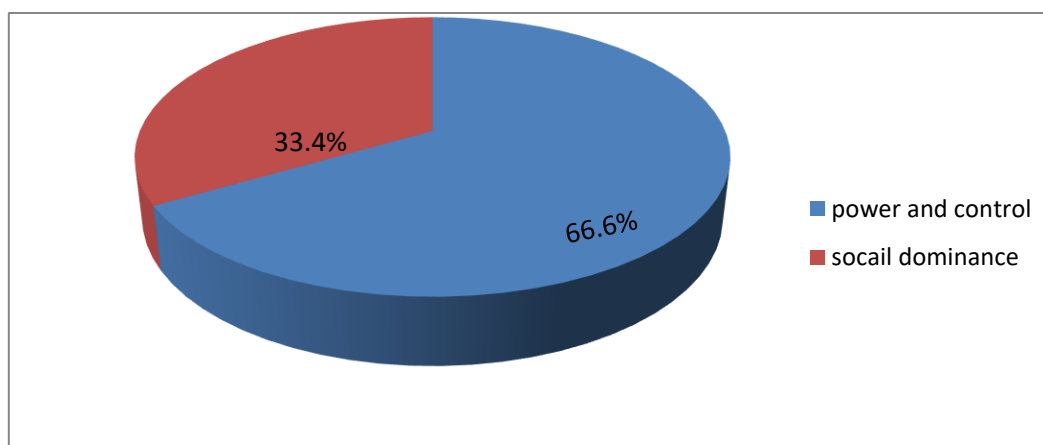


Figure (3) Functions of Bullying



According to the rates the direct bullying is the most dominant types of bullying and the indirect is avoided because the speakers do not engage in indirect speaking, while the functions of bullying power and control is extensively used is to impose opinions on others.

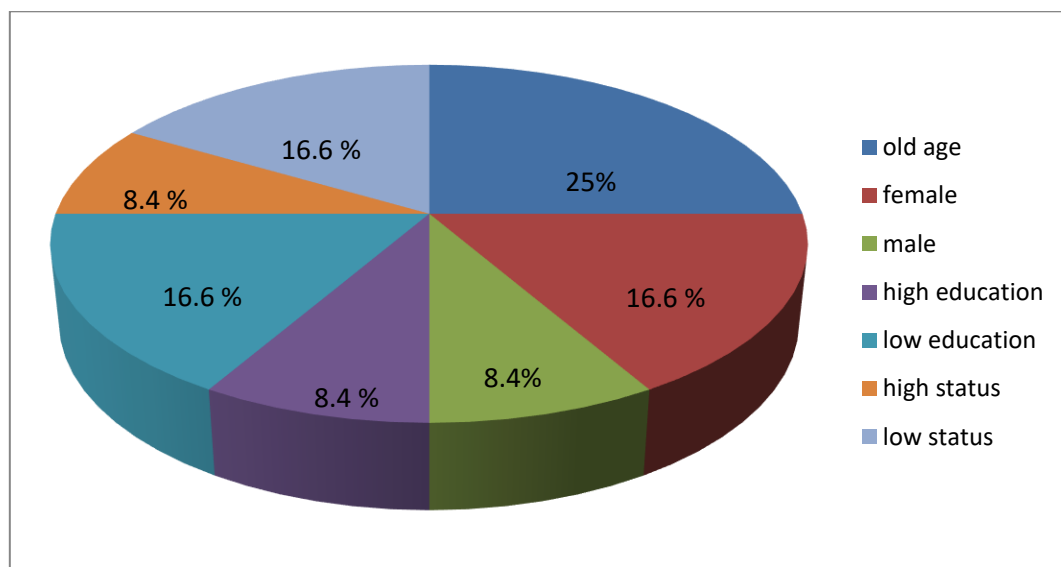
Table (2) The frequencies and percentages of The Social Variables

No	Social variables		Fr.	Pr.
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1	age	Old	6	25%
		young	0	0
2	gender	Female	4	16.6%
		male	2	8.4%
3	education	High	2	8.4%
		Low	4	16.6%
4	position	High	2	8.4%
		low	4	16.6%
Total			24	100%

Table (2) shows that old females with a low education and a low position use the verbal abuse in their speech more than the others.

Figure (4) The social variables



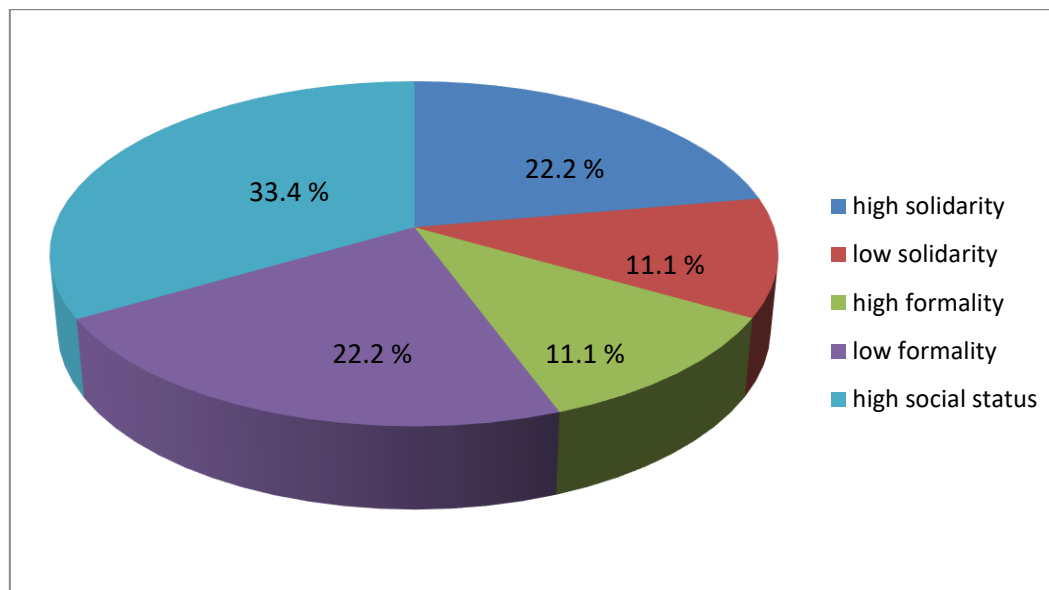
Related to table (2) the old females use the bullying more than the others and that is clear from their rates, the people who get a lower education and with a low position use abusive language more than others. This shows that old age, female gender, low education and position has more effect on using abusive language.

Table (3) The frequencies and percentages of social dimensions

No	Social Dimensions		Fr.	Pr.
1	Social distance scale solidarity	high	4	22.2%
			2	11.1%
		low		
2	solidarity Formality scale		2	11.1%
			4	22.2%
3	Social status scale low	high	6	33.4%
			0	0
Total			18	100%

Table (3) shows that people with high social status scale use the abusive language more than the others.

Figure(5) The social dimensions



From table (3), the social status scale is the most dominant scale that has got a great effect on bullying and that is clear from its high rate (33.4%) , because it describes the status classifications of the participants in a discourse . When speaking with someone from a higher social or professional level, certain precautions are made. Verbal bullying happens mostly in high solidarity relations, in low formality situations, and from a superior person with high status to a subordinate one.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded that

- 1-People tend to use direct verbal bullying to force people to do things using their social power, and this is what happened in the Trunchbull talks with the students, and the purpose of bullying is to gain power or express power, not to express emotions.
- 2-Verbal bullying was found in different contexts: family, school, friends, and proves to exist everywhere and still needs to be investigated.
- 3-The high solidarity that came with most of the cases of verbal bullying proves that bullies tend to bully people whom they know well or have an intimate relationship with.
- 4-Bullying tends to happen from high-status people towards their subordinates most of the time.

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