“Your mum!”

Teenagers’ swearing by mother in English, Spanish and Norwegian*

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In this article we compare teenagers’ use of swearing by mother (SBM) in three audio-recorded corpora, The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language (COLT), Corpus Oral de Lenguaje Adolescente de Madrid (COLAm), and Språkkontakt och Ungdomsspråk i Norden (UNO-Oslo). Applying Ljung’s (2011) theoretical framework, we distinguish between ‘ritual insults’ (Your mummy’s got no lips), ‘name-calling’ (You motherfucker), ‘expletive interjections’ (Motherfucker!) and ‘intensifiers’ (A motherfucking bastard). The study showed, as expected, that SBM was more common in the Spanish than in the English data and far exceeded the use in the Norwegian data. The most common expressions were hijo de puta (“son of a whore”), your mum, and mora di (“your mum”), respectively, while the most frequent pragmatic function of SBM was ‘name-calling’ in Spanish and ‘ritual insults’ in English and Norwegian. A possible reason for the Spanish dominance might be the strong taboo on “whore mother”, as Spain is a Catholic country.

Keywords: swearing by mother, contrastive linguistics, English, Spanish, Norwegian

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1. Introduction

Swearing by mother (henceforth SBM) is a type of swearing that involves offending someone by way of his/her mother. Although the SBM sometimes refers to a sister or some other female relative and sometimes even the father, here we concentrate on the mother, since the mother is the most important and frequent target in this type of swearing (cf. Section 2). SBM involves both addressing someone directly (by ritual insult and name-calling) and addressing someone indirectly (by expletive interjections and intensifiers). The offence has mainly sexual connotations, referring to promiscuity or incestuous relations, but it may also refer to unfavourable personal characteristics such as obesity, ugliness or stupidity.

Having worked with spoken teenage corpora in English, Norwegian and Spanish for approximately 20 years (Stenström et al. 2002, Hasund 2006, Drange 2009), we have been struck by the differences in how the teenagers employ the mother theme in their swearing across the languages, and wanted to explore this further in a cross-linguistic study. Our findings correspond well with those made by Ljung (2011) in his cross-cultural study of swearing in 25 different languages. He observes that ‘the mother theme’ is frequent in all the Romance languages (including Spanish), but that “the inhabitants of Germanic-language areas do not as a rule use the mother theme in their swearing, with the important exception of English, in particular American English” (Ljung 2011: 121f.). Given that the COLT corpus is from England, we can also add British English to this assertion. As regards Scandinavian languages, Ljung (2011: 121) notes that SBM is not used – “at least not on an important scale”. However, he also points out that this is an area which is now changing due to immigration, and that his own home country, Sweden, “now has sizeable groups of young speakers to whom swearing in terms of the mother theme is entirely natural” (Ljung 2011: 122). We wanted to investigate whether this change was also taking place in Norway.

Teenagers are notorious for their use of ‘slanguage’, that is language that includes not only slang words, fillers, hedges and smallwords, but also taboo and swearwords, amongst which bitch, which is sometimes used as a substitute for mother, as in the expression son of a bitch, has a strong position (cf. Stenström et al. 2002: 63ff). So far, the topic of SBM by teenagers has hardly been touched upon in linguistic literature, despite its prominent role in teenage talk. This is probably due to the earlier lack of corpora consisting of spontaneous teenage talk, an obstacle that has been removed thanks to the collection of The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language (COLT), Corpus Oral de Lenguaje Adolescente (COLA) and Språkkontakt och Ungdomsspråk i Norden (UNO). We find that it is high time to shed some light on how SBM is realized in teenage conversation, and even more so from a contrastive point of view, which gives an insight into
national similarities and differences. As pointed out by Crystal (1995: 173), swearing is a universal phenomenon, but this does not necessarily mean that SBM by teenagers is as frequent all over the world.

The mother theme occurs in different types of swearing, as interjections (*Holy motherfucker!*), intensifiers (*he is a motherfucking bastard*), as well as insults (*you motherfucker!*), of which ritual insults are probably the most well-known type (cf. Labov 1972). ‘Ritual insults’ are formulaic expressions that are not to be taken seriously, in contrast to personal insults, which are intended to offend the addressee. Speakers may exchange insults about each other’s mother (or other relatives) in a lengthy, playful series of reciprocal counters sometimes called ‘battling’, which is a kind of ‘ritual insult’ where two speakers take turns insulting one another by naming the other’s mother or some other member of the family until there is no comeback (Labov 1972, Kochman 1983, Eder 1990, Sheldon 1992, Stenström et al. 2002, Ljung 2011). The borders between ritual and personal insults are sometimes diffuse: what the recipient interprets as a personal insult may have been intended as ritual by the speaker and vice versa, and in many cultures insults may trigger violent responses when they are perceived as personal rather than ritual. As the most popular taboo theme, it is the mother theme in particular which triggers this aggressive reaction (cf. Ljung 2011: 114). A well-known example is reported by Ljung (2011) from the 2006 World Cup football final, in which the French football player Zinedine Zidane headbutted the Italian defender Marco Materazzi for having called his sister a whore. Materazzi later claimed that he did not even know Zidane had a sister (implying that the insult was ritual rather than personal), but Zidane obviously took it personally (Ljung 2011: 115).

In the UNO corpus we find another, less violent, example of a ritual insult taken personally. Interestingly, it occurs in an all-female conversation between four Norwegian girls aged 15–17. Anne says “You’re a whore, and so is your mum” whereby Mona replies “Don’t talk about my mum like that” (our translation). What Mona reacts to as an insult is not the fact that she is called a whore herself, but that her mother is called a whore.

Swearing more generally has been dealt with by McEnery (2006), who gives an overview of swearing in England from its historical origins to the present in terms of “bad language”. Stenström (2006) discusses Spanish and English girls’ use of taboo words and found that, although taboo words were more frequent in the English girls’ talk, sexual taboo words dominated among the Spanish girls.

The present study looks at SBM through a contrastive perspective by comparing its uses in spoken teenage language corpora from three different languages, English (London), Spanish (Madrid) and Norwegian (Oslo). The data is presented in Section 3 and the search procedure and method of analysis are presented in Section 4. Using the theoretical and methodological framework for the analysis
of swearing in Ljung (2011) as a starting point (cf. Section 2), we investigate the form, frequency and pragmatic functions of the SBM. Our main focus in this article is on form and frequency, and less on pragmatic functions; a more thorough discussion of the pragmatic functions of the SBM is given in Hasund et al. (2014). The findings are presented in Sections 5.1–5.3. In Section 5.4 we briefly discuss the sociolinguistic aspects of mother swearing in each corpus, commenting on the distribution of SBMs according to sex, age and social background.

2. Theoretical framework

We have chosen to apply Ljung’s (2011) theoretical framework for the analysis of swearing. His definition of swearing runs as follows:

i. Swearing is the use of utterances containing taboo words or topics.

ii. The taboo words are used with a non-literal meaning.

iii. Many utterances that constitute swearing are subject to severe lexical, phrasal and syntactic constraints that suggest that most swearing qualifies as formulaic language.

iv. Swearing is emotive language: its main function is to reflect, or seem to reflect, the speaker’s feelings and attitudes (Ljung 2011:4).

In the following, we shall briefly discuss mother swearing in view of these four criteria for swearing.

As regards the notion of ‘taboo’, it is well known that swearing in most languages touches upon the three major taboo areas of religion, sex and bodily waste. SBM usually deals with sex and often contains sexual taboo words: in English we have motherfucker, son of a bitch, your mum’s a slut, in Spanish hijo de puta “son of a whore” and in Norwegian mora di er ei hore “your mum’s a whore”. However, as Ljung (2011:5) notes, some SBMs do not contain any taboo words as in Your mother! Your sister! where the taboo is merely implied. In such cases, “one has to infer from the context whether the expression is intended as swearing or not” (Ljung 2011:5).

As regards ‘non-literal meaning’, mother swearing balances on the same border as swearwords such as faen “Satan” in Norwegian, which is still very offensive to many Norwegians, particularly Christians, because it is taken as literally calling on Satan (Hasund 2005:21). With SBM, the literal vs. non-literal issue is so crucial that it is reflected in the terms ‘ritual insults’ vs. ‘personal insults’. As mentioned in Section 1, ‘ritual insults’ taken personally may trigger aggression and violence in some cultures. A religious swearword such as faen,
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however, would (in Norway) at the most result in scornful looks expressing shock and moral indignation – but not violence.

Some SBMs qualify as ‘formulaic’ language, others do not. While noun phrases such as *motherfucker* and *hijo de puta* are not subject to formal change (except inflectional forms), ritual insults may take various forms. They are usually built around a formula (predictions involving sexual offence regarding someone’s mother), but may be realized as any kind of sentence type (cf. Section 5.2 below).

Like all swearing, SBMs serve an ‘emotive’ function. They are used to reflect, or seem to reflect, the speaker’s feelings and attitudes, which may range from strongly negative (e.g. *motherfucker* used as a personal insult) to intensifyingly positive (e.g. *it’s motherfucking fabulous!* and *de puta madre* “excellent”, literally “of your whore mum”). In battling, speakers throw ritual insults at each other as a playful game, where the winner is the one who can outwit the other by delivering the most absurd and creative insult. The question of the emotive function of ritual insults in battling is probably somewhat different from other types of SBM, but that is a matter we shall not pursue any further in this article.

In the following sections, we give an overview of SBM in English, Spanish and Norwegian.

2.1 SBM in English

As Green (2000:1308) observes, *your mother!* was first used in the United States in the late 19th century as an exclamation where the implication was *go fuck your mother*!. In present-day English, it is the form *your mum* that predominates in swearing rather than *your mother*, and mother swearing built around the *your mum*-formula is used in both the US and England (cf. ritual insult and battling described in Section 1 and 2). That expressions including *your mum* are popular in different contexts is reflected in its use as a brand name for clothes and the names of songs, videos, reviews, and so on, as is evidenced on several web pages, for instance the Yo Momma show on MTV.1

According to Green (2000:806), the term *motherfucker* appeared in the US in the 1910s as a ‘supreme insult’. It was later used for things one dislikes and, as time went on, with meanings varying from negative to positive, e.g. *Jimi Hendrix was a bad motherfucker on guitar* (Green 2000:806). The noun *motherfucker* is not mentioned in *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* from 1987, nor in *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* from the same year, while *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998:1206) defines *motherfucker* as “vulgar slang,

chiefly N.Amer. a despicable or very unpleasant person or thing. The derived adjective motherfucking, too, is characterized as vulgar slang. Like your mum, the word motherfucker appears, for instance, in lyrics and brand names, such as The Motherfucker Song on You Tube and the brand name of a wallet.

Another expression alluding to somebody’s mother is the well-established son of a bitch which Oxford English Dictionary dates back to the 14th century. It is described in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1987: 1005) as “someone one strongly dislikes: bastard”. Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary (1987: 1389) has the following entry: “If you call someone a son-of-a-bitch, you are referring to them in a very offensive way, usually because they have made you angry or upset; used especially in American English”.

2.2 SBM in Spanish

Mother swearing is very common and has a long history in Spanish. According to Diccionario de la Lengua Española, the expression hijo de su madre (“son of his mother”), pronounced with emphasis, is said to call somebody a “bastard” (our translation). It corresponds to the expression hijo de puta (“son of a whore”) from the same dictionary. The same definitions of these expressions are used in Diccionario de la Lengua Castellana from 1734 (1734: 156). This is not a new way of swearing in Spanish, which is shown by the fact that hideputa (from hijo de puta) was used in the Spanish novel La Vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus Fortunas y Adversidades published in 1554, and also in Cervantes’ famous novel El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha, first published in 1605. According to Moliner’s (1997: CD-ROM edition) Diccionario del Uso del Español, hijo de puta is the strongest and most vulgar Spanish insult. The same dictionary mentions the positive expression Bendita sea la madre que te parió (literally “blessed be the mother who gave birth to you”). This expression functions as an insult when omitting the word bendita, i.e. la madre que te parió “the mother who gave birth to you”, as registered in Diccionario de la Lengua Española (online).

La madre que te parió is the only expression in Diccionario de la Lengua Española which includes the word madre “mother” and has negative connotations, although the expression mentar la madre a alguien “say something about somebody’s mother” is explained as “insulting somebody gravely by insults against his or her mother” (our translation). In Sanmartín Sáez (2003), we find very few swearwords involving madre “mother”, e.g. cagarse en la puta madre de alguien


“shit on somebody’s whore mother”. Here, we also find the expression *de puta madre* “of whore mother” connected to the verb *to be: ser de puta madre* meaning “to be exceptional” (our translation) (2003: 525). *Clave Diccionario de Uso del Español Actual* (2000: 1132) also mentions the expression *de puta madre*, meaning “great” or “very good”. That is, there are only a few routinized expressions with negative connotations including the word *madre* in the dictionaries consulted, while the mother theme is an important theme in swearing in the Romance languages. The expression *de puta madre*, like the English *your mum* (cf. Section 2.1), is also used in non-offensive settings, as the name of a restaurant in Göteborg and as a brand name for clothes and accessories.

2.3 SBM in Norwegian

As observed by Ljung (2011: 5), the mother theme in ritual insult is now gradually entering the Scandinavian languages. The mother theme is not mentioned in Tryti’s (1984) study of Norwegian slang, nor in Jenstad (1992, 1999) on Norwegian insults (“skjellsord”), which are the only publications on Norwegian slang and swearing from this period. A search in the major Norwegian online dictionaries (*Bokmålsordboka, Nynorskordboka* and *Ordnett.no*) gave no entries for any of the SBMs studied in the present article. In Tryti’s Norwegian slang dictionary from 2008, however, there are several entries: *mora di!“your mum!”* (with different spelling variants) is described as a “recent insult, implying an offensive utterance about somebody’s mother” (our translation). The expression *moraknuller* “motherfucker” (and variants) is described by Tryti (2008) as an insult which is a translation loan from English. There are several forms which compete as translations of *motherfucker*, which show that the expression is still not well established in Norwegian. In addition to *moraknuller*, we have *moraknuller, morapuler, morrapuler, mamnapuler, mammaknuller*. It seems that the form *moraknuller* is becoming the preferred form. *Morra – with double r – is a recent, nonstandard spelling variant of *mora* (literally “the mum”). The inflectional *-a* ending and in particular the double *r* reflects a pronunciation associated with a spoken, working-class, East Oslo dialect.

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6. Or perhaps re-entering is a better word. The Swedish expression *horson* “son of a whore” was used up to the 15th century (Ljung 2011: 172), and in Norwegian *horunge* “child of a whore” was an old insult which disappeared from the language.
2.4 The form and pragmatic functions of mother swearing

In his typology of swearing, Ljung (2011:22, 30, 33ff) describes a number of different pragmatic functions of swearing, of which the following four are relevant for the present study: ‘ritual insults’, ‘name-calling’, ‘expletive interjections’ and ‘intensifiers’. There is discussion among researchers about whether insults and name-calling should be included in studies of swearing (cf. Fjeld 2002: 153, Rathje & Andersen 2005:4f.). For a study of SBM, however, we find it necessary and useful to do so, as ‘ritual insults’ and ‘name-calling’ are closely linked to the more “core” swearing categories, expletive interjections and intensifiers.

The four categories of SBM found in our data are defined as follows:

   
   A: *Your mummy ain't got no lips!*
   
   B: *Your mum's got a moustache!*
   
   A: *You mum's got a hairy tongue though!*

   (35001a)7

We regard ritual insults as clausal constructions. The expressions *your mum!* and its equivalent in Norwegian *mora di* are, in this case, regarded as abbreviated clauses (cf. Section 5.2).

ii. **Name-calling**: Epithets, i.e. evaluative noun phrases expressing the speaker’s negative attitude towards the addressee or a third party, aimed directly at the addressee or in referring to a third party (Ljung 2011:33) e.g. *You motherfucker! (He is a) son of a bitch!*

iii. **Expletive interjections**: Cathartic outlets for the speaker’s feelings, not primarily aimed at others (Ljung 2011:30), e.g. *Oh motherfucker!*

iv. **Intensifiers**: Items that amplify and/or emphasize the meaning of an adjective, adverb or noun (Stenström et al. 2002:139, Ljung 2011:33), e.g. *You are motherfucking crazy! He is a stupid motherfucking bastard.*

Based on this, we define mother swearing as a type of swearing that involves offending someone by way of his/her mother. It involves both SBM that are addressing someone directly (ritual insult and name-calling) and swearwords that address someone indirectly (expletive interjections and intensifiers). The offence is mainly sexual (promiscuity/incest), but may also refer to unfavourable personal characteristics (obesity, ugliness and stupidity).

7. File reference to the corpus in question, cf. Transcription Key.
3. The corpora

This study investigates mother swearing on the basis of data from three audio-recorded corpora of spoken teenage language, which are all accessible online: the English corpus COLT (The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language), the Spanish corpus COLAm (the Madrid part of Corpus Oral de Lenguaje Adolescente “Oral Corpus of Teenage Language”) and the Norwegian corpus UNO-Oslo (the Norwegian part of Språkkontakt och Ungdomsspråk i Norden “Language Contact and Teenage Language in Scandinavia”). All three corpora consist of spontaneous everyday conversations between teenagers with similar socio-economic backgrounds. The conversations were all self-recorded by one of the participants in each conversation, and no adult researcher was present during the recordings.

COLT was collected in London in 1992–1993 and has served as a model for the collection of the other corpora, for instance in terms of participants, recording procedure, and transcription conventions. The collection of COLA began in Madrid in 2003 and is still ongoing. It consists not only of teenage conversations from Madrid (COLAm), used for the present study, but also from Santiago de Chile (COLAs) and Buenos Aires (COLAba). The UNO-Oslo corpus was collected in Oslo in 1997–1998, as part of a larger project on Nordic teenage language (cf. above). Table 1 gives an overview of the three corpora:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corpus</th>
<th>Region/country</th>
<th>Year of recording</th>
<th>Words of transcribed text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COLAm <a href="http://colam.org">http://colam.org</a></td>
<td>Madrid, Spain</td>
<td>2003–2005</td>
<td>401,318^8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One limitation evident in Table 1 is that the three corpora have been compiled at different time periods, which may have influenced the use of swearwords. However, as is well-known, the swearing repertoire of a given language community changes very slowly (cf. Fjeld 2002: 153, 165; Ljung 2011), so this may constitute less of a problem than if the object of study had been slang words, which are known to change more rapidly (Stenström et al. 2002).

^8. At the time of collecting the expressions for this study. The online corpus is still being revised, so that the total number of words may now be somewhat different.
Although the recruits, i.e. the students who had volunteered to do the recording, were all teenagers (13–19 years old)\(^9\), some of them chose to record conversations with friends and family members who were younger or older than themselves, so that all corpora contain some data from children or adults in addition to teenage language, which constitutes the main bulk. Both genders are represented in the corpora, and there are all-female, and all-male as well as mixed conversations, in both dyads and groups. Since the teenagers were entrusted with the recordings as well as filling out the data logs, we cannot tell exactly how many boys and girls took part in the conversations.

As regards social class, we chose London and Madrid informants from schools in districts characterized as high, middle and low on the socio-economic scale. The Norwegian corpus, however, covers only two socio-economic groups, high (middle-class) and low (working-class), in line with the Norwegian egalitarian tradition and a less fine-grained social class system. We have some information on the ethnic origin of the recruits in England and Norway, but not of those in Spain.

4. Search procedure and method of analysis

Bearing in mind that the category mother swearing may also include SBM involving other relatives, we initially searched for other kinship terms (words in each language for “father”, “daughter”, “son”, “sister”, “brother”, “grandfather”, “grandmother”, “uncle”, “aunt”, “cousin”, etc., including variants such as “mum” and “granny”). We also searched for the well-known son of a bitch in COLT and hijo/a de puta in COLAm, which do not contain the word mother/madre, but where bitch and puta serve as a kind of denigrating substitute with direct reference to somebody’s mother.

The results were displayed in a KWIC concordance, and were then checked manually, in order to delete cases not used as SBM. While many examples could easily be identified from the KWIC display alone, some examples had to be analysed in depth. For these, we listened to the sound files and read larger extracts from the conversations in order to establish whether they were actually used as SBM. So, although we cannot place ourselves in the “real life” situation in which the mother swearing was expressed, the access not only to the transcripts of the entire conversations but also to the sound files and information about the speakers provides a good idea of the functions.

Our initial search showed that in the data from Madrid, all the family swearwords belonged to the category of SBM. In the Norwegian data, all the examples

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\(^9\) There were 33 recruits in COLT (England) and 45 in UNO (Norway); we do not have the exact number of informants for the COLAm subcorpus.
referred to the mother except one: *faren din er kvinne* “your father’s a woman”. In the English data, the findings were less clear. Although the majority of the swear-words involved mother, quite a few involved *dad* (40 cases), two involved *auntie* and one involved *gran*, as illustrated in Example (1):

(1) A: Bollocks!  
B: Your mum!  
A: Your dad! Your auntie Jackie bollocks to this!  

(35808)

Our search confirmed the claim that SBM are indeed usually targeted at somebody’s mother (cf. Ljung 2011:32), so we decided to focus on those targeting mother only, abandoning other family members altogether.

Having identified the SBM relevant for our purpose, we categorised each occurrence according to its lexical and grammatical form in each language. Further, we estimated the relative frequency per 1,000 words of all forms of the SBM and compared the relative frequency in the three languages. Finally, we classified each example according to the pragmatic categories mentioned in Section 2 and compared the relative frequency across the three corpora.

5. Findings

5.1 The frequency of SBM

Considering that Spanish has a long history of mother swearing, we were not surprised to find that the Madrid teenagers used SBM far more often than the teenagers in London and even more so than those in Oslo, as shown in Figure 1:
In light of Ljung’s (2011) observation that SBM are currently entering the Swedish language (cf. Section 1), it is notable that we find SBM in the Norwegian data. The collection of the UNO-Oslo corpus in the late 1990s probably captured the beginning of the use of SBM in Norway. When COLT was compiled in London in the early 1990s, mother swearing was already established in English, so it is as expected that there is a higher frequency of SBM in COLT than in UNO-Oslo. An interesting question is whether SBM are as frequent in today’s London teenage language as when COLT was collected in the 1990s. This, however, is not possible to verify without access to a more recently collected corpus of London teenage talk, such as the Multicultural English Corpus (MEC) from 2008 (cf. Cheshire et al. 2008), which we did not have access to when writing this paper.

5.2 The form of the SBM

In this section we will present the lexical, grammatical and syntactic realizations of the SBM in the three corpora.

5.2.1 English

In the London material, there were four types of mother swearing: constructions involving *your mum*, *motherfucker*, *motherfucking*, and *son of a bitch*. Figure 2 presents the frequency of the different forms in English:

![Figure 2. Form and frequency of SBM in English (COLT)](image-url)
As Figure 2 shows, the most frequent form of SBM is your mum (n = 160), which occurs in different combinations. It is used alone (i.e. not as part of a longer utterance) as an SBM 16 times, of which 15 occur with the 2nd person pronoun: your mum and only one with a 3rd person reference: <name>’s mum. More frequently, however (143 cases), it is part of a longer construction: Your mum’s a slut! or Has your mum fallen pregnant yet? In these longer utterances, too, the 2nd person predominates (135 cases), and there are only eight cases with a 3rd person reference: […] his/her/<name>’s mum […]. In all these your mum-swearwords, the form mum predominates. In addition, there is one case involving mummy: your mummy ain’t got no lips.

Examples (2)–(5) illustrate how the your mum-swearwords may be realized in the abbreviated form your mum or as any kind of clause type:

(2) **Abbreviated**: Your mum! (35808a)
(3) **Declarative**: Your mum’s a slut! (35809a)
(4) **Interrogative**: Is your mum pregnant yet? (No? Well tell her to give me my fucking money back then!) (35808a)
(5) **Imperative**: Go tell your mum to stop changing her lipstick! (cos she’s making my cock look like a rainbow) (35805a)

The expression motherfucker occurs ten times. In four cases, it is used in the singular form as a stand-alone, i.e. not part of a longer utterance (motherfucker 2, you motherfucker 2). In the remaining six cases, it is part of a longer utterance, and occurs both in singular and plural form, as illustrated in Examples (6) and (7):

(6) A: all tape listeners, Claire Johnson  
   B: (laughter) [fat!]  
   A: [is a] really fat ugly rough motherfucker! (41606a)
(7) He goes bring the motherfuckers down (32610a)

The expression motherfucking (n = 4) was only found as an intensifying adjective, as in Example (8):

(8) O shut up you fat ugly motherfucking cunt! (41102a)

Son of a bitch corresponds to Spanish hijo de puta (cf. Section 5.2.2) in that it only indirectly refers to the mother. It is used only twice in COLT, in both cases as a vocative addressing the 2nd person, as shown in Example (9):

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10. All cases involving the abbreviated expression your mum had to be carefully analysed in context in order to determine whether you mum was used as SBM or as a neutral statement of fact concerning somebody’s mother.
and he goes (sharp intake of breath) and he goes (shouting) Get out of my fucking cab, you dirty son of a bitch! (unclear) He gets out of the cab, right. So he gets out of the cab.

5.2.2 Spanish

Even though there is a high frequency of mother swearing in the Madrid corpus (0.93 per 1,000 words, n = 375), there are only a few different realizations. Figure 3 shows the frequency of the different forms in Spanish:

![Graph showing frequency of different mother swearwords in Spanish](image)

As Figure 3 shows, the most frequent type of swearwords involves the word puta “whore”, sometimes together with the word madre “mother” (n = 95), and sometimes only with indirect reference to the mother, as in hijo de puta “son of a whore” (n = 270). In contrast to COLT and UNO-Oslo, the incest theme does not occur at all in the Spanish data; i.e. there are no expressions equivalent to motherfucker and moraknulle “motherfucker” in Spanish.

As mentioned, the most frequent mother swearword in the Madrid corpus overall is the expression hijo de puta (n = 270). Regarding the form, the noun hijo “son” varies in gender (hija “daughter”) and number (hijos “sons”, hijas “daughters”). The noun phrase is also used without the preposition de as in mira hijo puta “look son of a whore”. Hijo de puta is used alone as in Examples (10) and (11):
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(10) mira tú hija de puta qué pasa
    “look, you, daughter of a whore, what happens?”

(11) A: pero se me había olvidado
    “but I had forgotten it”
    B: a mí también
    “me too”
    hijo de puta
    “son of a whore”

It is also used as part of longer utterances, where it is used as subject, as in Example (12) or as subject complement as in Example (13):

(12) el hijo de puta va aprender muy rápido eh
    “the son of a whore will learn fast, yeah”

(13) eres un hijo de puta cómo me salga
    “you are a son of a whore however I say it”

There are also a few examples in the corpus where puta “whore” is replaced by other negative expressions with indirect reference to the mother, such as coño “cunt”, as in Example (14):

(14) que e e no hace falta hijo de coño decir a dónde vayas
    “it is not necessary son of a cunt to tell where you are going”

Coño with reference to the mother is also used in the expression coño de su madre “his/her mother’s cunt” (n = 1) as seen in Example (15):

(15) A: tres años
    “three years”
    B: coño de su madre cojones
    “his/her mother’s cunt balls”
    C: ya te ha escuchado
    “he/she has heard you now”

The expression puta madre occurs 95 times in a variety of expressions as shown in Table 2 below. The expression de puta madre (lit. “of whore mother”) is the most frequent expression involving puta madre (n = 56). Puta madre is used alone (n = 4) or preceded by pronouns and prepositions (n = 13 + 2), but as we can see in Table 2, it is also used as part of the expression me cago en “I shit on”, as in me cago en tu/su puta madre “I shit on your whore mother” (n = 18) and me cago en tu puta madre de mierda “I shit on your fucking whore mother” (n = 1). The swearing formula used to be me cago en Dios “I shit on God”, but in this corpus we find examples where Dios “God” is replaced with tu puta madre “your whore mother”.
Offensive use of *tu madre*, which is the direct correspondence of *your mum*, occurred only twice, as seen in Example (16) and (17):

(16) *tu madre* es una puta hijos de puta maricones Noruega puta (malce2-14)  
“your mother is a whore sons of a whore queer Norway whore”

(17) *tu madre* es una zoooorrrra (malce2-8)  
“your mother is a fox”

Finally, the expression *la madre que le parió* “the mother who gave birth to him/her” (*n* = 7) is not always insulting, but the examples found in COLAm all occur together with other insulting expressions, which allows for the interpretation of them as SBM. It occurs with a 2nd and 3rd person pronoun (*la madre que te/le/ les parió* “the mother who gave birth to you/him/her/ them”). In some of these examples, *la madre que le parió* is used together with the swearing formula *me cago en […]* “I shit on […]”, creating the combined expression *me cago en tu puta madre de mierda* “I shit on your fucking whore mother”.

### 5.2.3 Norwegian

In the UNO-Oslo corpus, there were only two types of realizations of SBM, constructions involving *mora di* “your mum” and *morapuler/moraknuller* “mother-fucker”. The distribution is shown in Figure 4.

The results are similar to those in COLT: *your mum*-expressions (and variations) are by far the most popular type of SBM. In the nine cases where *mora di* is used alone (i.e. as an abbreviated clause), it always occurs with a 2nd person pronoun: *Mora di!* “Your mum!”.

Of the 38 cases where *mora di* is part of a longer utterance, 31 cases have a 2nd person pronoun: *mora di* “your mum”. The remaining seven cases have a 1st person pronoun: *mora mi* “my mum” or a 3rd person reference: *mora til* `<name>` “<name>’s mum”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>puta madre</em> “whore mother”</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>tu/su puta madre</em> “your whore mother”</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>a tu/su puta madre</em> “to your whore mother”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>de puta madre</em> “of your whore mother”</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>de puñetera madre</em> “of your whore mother”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>me cago en tu/su puta madre</em> “I shit on your whore mother”</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>me cago en tu puta madre de mierda</em> “I shit on your fucking whore mother”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>95</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to the abbreviated form *mora di*, the *mora di*-swearwords may be realized as any kind of sentence type (as in COLT, cf. Section 5.2.1), as illustrated in Examples (18)–(20):

(18) **Declarative:** *Mora di dekker hele universet!*  
“Your mum covers the entire universe!”

(19) **Interrogative:** *Skal vi dra til kiosken og kjøpe mora di på halvpris?*  
“Do you want to go down to the kiosk and buy your mum at half price?”

(20) **Imperative:** A: (latter)<ironisk>mora til <B> er delig ass</>  
(laughter) <ironically><B’s mum is hot.</>  
B: *Ja du, se på mora di a!*  
“Hey, look at your mum!”

The expressions *morapuler* and *moraknuller* “motherfucker” occur three times in UNO-Oslo and they are used as part of longer utterances, as in Example (21):

(21) *Du er så jævla moraknuller ass.*  
“You’re such a bloody motherfucker”.

The forms *mammapuler* and *mammaknuller* (literally “mummy fucker”), which are sometimes used in present-day spoken Norwegian, do not occur in the data.
5.3 The pragmatic functions of SBM

As regards pragmatic functions, SBM in the three corpora falls into four major categories: ritual insults, name-calling, expletive interjections, and intensifiers, as described in Section 2. Figure 5 shows the overall distribution in the three corpora:

![Figure 5. Pragmatic functions in the three corpora](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ritual insults</th>
<th>Name-calling</th>
<th>Expletive interjections</th>
<th>Intensifiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian (UNO)</td>
<td>0.22 (n = 46)</td>
<td>0.01 (n = 3)</td>
<td>0.005 (n = 1)</td>
<td>0 (n = 0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish (COLAm)</td>
<td>0.005 (n = 2)</td>
<td>0.6 (n = 242)</td>
<td>0.21 (n = 83)</td>
<td>0.12 (n = 48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English (COLT)</td>
<td>0.37 (n = 160)</td>
<td>0.03 (n = 11)</td>
<td>0.002 (n = 1)</td>
<td>0.009 (n = 4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the following sections, we shall briefly look at the correspondence of form and pragmatic function in the three corpora. A more thorough discussion of the pragmatic functions are given in Hasund et al. (2014).

5.3.1 Overall correspondence of form and pragmatic function

Figures 6–8 show the different pragmatic functions of the forms presented in Sections 5.2 in the English, Spanish and Norwegian data, respectively. The figures will be discussed in Sections 5.3.2–5.3.5.

Figures 6–8 show that each of the pragmatic functions are realised by a limited set of forms (one or two), except expletive interjections in Spanish, which are realised by four different forms. The figures further show that each form serves only one or two different pragmatic functions. In the following sections (5.3.2–5.3.5) we give examples of and discuss the different pragmatic functions shown in Figures 6–8.
Figure 6. The correspondence of form and pragmatic function in English (COLT)

Figure 7. The correspondence of form and pragmatic function in Spanish (COLAm)
5.3.2 Ritual insults

Although there is a certain degree of formulaicity and predictability in ritual insults, it is in this category that we find the largest variation. At one end of the scale, we find the abbreviated forms *your mum* in English and *mora di* in Norwegian. At the other end of the scale, we find – in COLT and UNO-Oslo only – the longer and more elaborated sequences following the typical playful battling pattern (cf. Section 1 and 2) as illustrated in Examples (22) and (23), from COLT and UNO-Oslo, respectively:

(22) COLT

A: *your mum’s* a (unclear), and I fuck her and I slap her and she still comes back for more.

B: yeah, *your mum* keeps changing her lipstick, makes my cock look like a rainbow […] *his mum’s* got fucking kick start <laughing> on her vibrator</>

A: she normally does it, with washing machines.

B: *your mum* kick starts her fucking hoover! (35808a)

(23) UNO-Oslo

A: nei ikke *mora di mora di* er -kke så pen
“no not your mum your mum ain’t that pretty”

B: (latter) <leende> den var frekk </> (latter)
“(laughter) <laughing> that’s rude</> (laughter)”

C: fy faen. (utyd)
“shit (unclear)”
Teenagers’ swearing by mother in English, Spanish and Norwegian

B: *mora di* er -kke så pen, (latter)
   “your mum ain’t that pretty (laughter)”
A: nei hu er jo -kke det, (utyd)
   “no you’re right she isn’t (unclear)”
C: *mora di* tror hu er skikkelig delig ass, (utyd)
   “well your mum thinks she’s really hot (unclear)”
A: *mora di* er så feit at a ser ut som en pakke med pølser i nakken. (osunjel)
   “your mum’s so fat her neck looks like a pack of sausages.”

The constructions allude to a variety of taboo topics, not just prostitution or incest, but also ugliness, obesity, bodily waste and death.

Unlike COLT and UNO-Oslo, there are only two examples of ritual insults in COLAm, one of which is shown in Example (24):

(24) COLAm
   A: *tu madre* es una zoooorrrra (risa)
      “your mother is a fox (laughter)”
      hijo puta mamahuevooos
      “son of a whore testicle sucker”
   B: ahora palabrotas en colombiano hijo puta mamahuevo (malce2)
      “now bad words in Colombian son of a whore testicle sucker”

The ritual insults in Spanish, which all allude to prostitution, are less elaborated than those in COLT and UNO, which means that lengthy battling sequences are altogether missing. A possible explanation of this could be that since SBM in Spanish has a longer history, they are more routinized and thus used as fixed expressions.

5.3.3 Name-calling
The name-calling swearwords are used with direct reference to the addressee, or with reference to a third party not present in the conversation. In Examples (25), (26) and (27) there is a clear direct reference to the addressee; in Example (25) it occurs in an imperative clause; in Example (26) due to the 2nd person singular form of the verb; and in Example (27) it is reflected in the 2nd person pronoun *du* (“you”).

(25) COLT
   A: And you see that truck what just went by
   B: Yeah.
   A: your mum’s got her fanny stuck up the exhaust of it. Beat that one *motherfucker*!
   B: Don’t be funny. (35808)
This is the end of a ritual insult sequence, where *Beat that one motherfucker* prevents a further comeback on the part of B, and where the use of *motherfucker* reflects the allusion to B’s mother’s erotic extravaganzas.

(26) **COLAm**

_pues que eres un hijo de puta coño_  
“you are a son of a whore cunt”

Here, *hijo de puta* is directed towards a boy who confesses that he has punched another boy.

(27) **UNO-Oslo**

_A: (raper) \(\text{“(burps)”}\) \[osunje1\]

_B: du er så jævla moraknuller ass (latter) \[osunje1\]

“you’re such a bloody motherfucker (laughter)”

Speaker B’s *jaevla moraknuller ass* is probably caused by A’s bad manner, burping.

Examples (28)–(29) illustrate name-calling swearwords with reference to a third party:

(28) **COLT**

He goes bring the *motherfuckers* down \[32610a\]

(29) **COLAm**

ah ah ah ah que envidia me dan los *hijos de puta* \[mabpe2-01\]

“ah I envy them the sons of a whore”

### 5.3.4 Expletive interjections

Expletive interjections are basically cathartic outlets for the speaker’s feelings. In contrast to ritual insults and name-calling swearwords, they are not primarily aimed at others (cf. Ljung 2011: 30). In COLT, there is only one instance (Example (30)) used as an expletive, involving the expression *motherfucker*:

(30) **COLT**

_A: Hey, <B>, where you going?_ \[38001\]

_B: Motherfucker! I was supposed to be going home._

In Example (30), A asks in what sounds like a neutral tone where B is going. The question seems to function as a reminder, triggering the expletive *motherfucker*, as if B is mad at himself (and not at A) for forgetting to go home. Therefore, *motherfucker* appears to function as an expletive interjection similarly to *fuck* or *shit*, and not as an instance of name-calling.
As Figure 5 shows, the use of SBM as expletive interjections is far more common in the COLAm corpus than in COLT and UNO-Oslo. The Spanish expletives include *me cago en tu puta madre* “I shit on your whore mother”, *la madre que le parió* “the mother who gave birth to him”, *tu puta madre* “your whore mother” and *hijo de puta* “son of a whore”, the latter of which occurs in Example (31):

(31) **COLAm**

A: *vamos*  
“come on”

B: *[fuera de juego]*  
“[off side]”

A: *[vamos no] joder hijo (risa) de puta*  
“[come on no] fuck son (laughter) of a whore”

There are also some cases where the intensifying expression *de puta madre* is used alone as an expletive interjection, as in Example (32):

(32) A: *en tres cuartos de hora llega*  
“he will be here in three quarters of an hour”

B: *de puta madre*  
“shit”

In Example (31), A and B are probably watching a soccer-match on TV, and *hijo de puta* is used as an expletive interjection, expressing the speaker’s reaction to the game. Similarly in Example (32), *de puta madre* is an expletive meaning “shit”, indicating the speaker’s reaction to the fact that someone is to arrive in 45 minutes.

In the UNO-Oslo corpus, there is only one case where *mora di* is used as an expletive interjection; see Example (33):

(33) **UNO-Oslo**

A: *<snakker inn i mikrofonen>Master master master.</>*  
“<talking into the microphone> Master master master.</>”

B: *Mora di, faen.*  
“Your mum, shit”

C: *(latter) Vi må ha noe på innsida*  
“(laughter) We need something on the inside”

The boys are talking about the tape recorder, and judging by the context, it seems that the swearword *mora di* is not directed at a particular person. There is no metacomment or response related to the expressions uttered by other speakers. Furthermore, *mora di* co-occurs with *faen* “satan”, which is one of the most common expletive swearwords in Norwegian. For this reason, we regard this case of *mora di* as a swearword used as an expletive interjection.
In some cases, it is impossible to state whether a swearword is used as name-calling or as an expletive. This is because the same expressions are used in both types of swearwords, and when we do not find clues in the verbal interaction indicating whether the swearword is directed at somebody, we would have needed information about the non-verbal communication to clearly determine its function. Example (34) is one case in point:

(34) **COLAm**

joder creía que salía uno *hijo de puta*. vamos para arriba vah (malce4-07)

“shit I thought that one was coming out son of a whore let’s go upstairs ok”

Here, the swearword *hijo de puta* could be directed to the addressee (name-calling), but it could also function as an expletive interjection expressing the speaker’s negative feelings about the situation. In the cases where the swearwords are used without any reference to the addressee or a third party (by specific words or judging by the context), the swearwords are classified as expletive interjections.

5.3.5 **Intensifiers**

There are no examples of intensifiers in the Norwegian data. In the English data, *motherfucking* is the only expression in this category. It occurs four times (0.009 per 1,000 words) and is only used as an intensifying adjective to describe people, as in Example (35):

(35) **COLT**

O shut up you fat ugly *motherfucking* cunt. (41102a)

The Spanish data has the highest frequency (0.12 per 1,000 words n = 48), but here too, only one expression is used: *de puta madre*. It is used as an intensifying adjective or adverb (meaning “great”) to describe people, as in Example (36), things, as in Example (37), and actions, as in Example (38):

(36) **COLAm**

Y yo que soy un tío *de puta madre* pues tengo una novia que es *de puta madre*

“I’m a great guy so I have a girlfriend who is great” (malcc2-16)

(37) Tuvo un año *de puta madre* en COU aquí

“He had a great year at COU here” (maesb2-03)

(38) Está *de puta madre* en Serrano no.

“One has a great time at Serrano, right” (maore2-01)
5.4 The sociolinguistic aspect

In this section, we will comment briefly on the sociolinguistic aspect of SBM. As the three corpora are not directly comparable regarding social categories for various reasons (cf. Section 3), we are unable to provide conclusive frequencies to show the sociolinguistic distribution in each corpus. We would, nevertheless, like to point to some interesting tendencies.

In the English data, SBMs are found among both boys and girls and in all three social classes (high, mid and low). There is also a spread across age groups, so that the SBMs have a wide distribution in COLT; i.e. they are not restricted to one particular subgroup. However, a closer look at the speakers showed that a 13-year-old boy with a lower class background was responsible for over three quarters of the total number of SBMs. Among the girls, several SBMs were found among 14-year-olds with a lower class background. It should be added that some of the speakers have a multi-ethnic background, though we lack information as to what extent this is the case.

In the Spanish data, too, SBMs have a wide distribution, and are found among both boys and girls and in all social classes. Here the majority of the SBMs are used by the middle class boys, but again we lack convincing statistics that allows us to draw any conclusions.

In UNO-Oslo, the distribution is much more restricted. All SBMs occurred among the speakers with a lower class background from a multi-ethnic area in east Oslo, a finding which is in line with Ljung’s (2011:122) findings from Sweden, where SBMs were frequent in a Stockholm suburb with many immigrants. In UNO-Oslo, it is nevertheless noteworthy that SBMs occurred among speakers from different schools and age groups. Thus, SBM is not restricted to one specific group of teenagers, but is known and used in a larger area – that is, within Oslo east. However, 46 out of 50 SBMs occurred in a single conversation between four girls aged 15–17 representing Norway, Macedonia and Eritrea. The remaining four instances were used by boys and occurred in three different peer groups, all multi-ethnic, representing Norway and Pakistan. Since SBM only occurred in the multi-ethnic peer groups, one may speculate that they have entered Norwegian through immigration and direct language contact (cf. Kotsinas 2000:21–22) between Norwegians and speakers from what Ljung (2011:122) calls ‘mother-theme-using cultures’, but this is probably only partly true. It is also likely that there is an influence through indirect language contact (Kotsinas 2000:21–22) i.e. through popular culture such as music, films and television. In Example (39) the

11. COLAm is not sufficiently tagged for age to make any reliable statistics for comparison with COLT and UNO.
expression *mora di* appears to be a translated quote from the American English film *Men in Black*, where the speaker describes a man throwing SBMs at a monster while attacking it:

(39) **UNO-Oslo**

A: Men in Black, *leende* (utyd) som ligger på gulvet. */> så bare tråkka han på -n: *lager lyd* ng:</>

“Men in Black *laughing* (unclear) who lies on the floor */> , he just steps on it’ *makes a sound*ng:</>”

B: *ja,*

“yes”

A: *ja, det var tanta di,* *lager lyd* ng: */> *mora di,* (latter) *leende* så stop-

per det monsteret helt */> (osv.gu1A)

“yeah, that was your aunt, *makes a sound*ng:</> your mum, (laughter)

*laughing* then the monster stops completely */>’

The influence from popular culture would account for a broader spread of SBMs, and at the time of writing, we know that SBMs are used not only in Oslo but in other Norwegian cities too. As regards gender, we noticed that the majority of SBMs occurred among girls. This could be an indication that Norwegians have borrowed the words without borrowing the culture from which they originate. The strong associations with masculinity and sexual offence inherent in the mother swearing evaporate, in a sense, when the SBMs are used among girls. This is, however, a topic which requires further investigation.

6. Conclusions

In our view, the most interesting finding in the present study is that SBM occurred in the Norwegian data, and it is likely that the compilation of the UNO-Oslo corpus in the late 1990s captured the beginning of mother swearing in Norwegian. Overall, there are not many SBMs in the UNO-Oslo corpus, and they only occur in the multi-ethnic peer groups in East Oslo. In present-day Norwegian, we know that SBMs are more common and are used in cities other than Oslo. However, they are still largely connected to multi-ethnic areas and are not, at least not yet, part of mainstream Norwegian teenage language.

SBMs are more frequent in English than in Norwegian and even more so in Spanish, where they have a very long history. The fact that some of the most common expletive interjections and intensifiers in Spanish are SBMs may be seen as an indication that they have undergone a long process of fixation and routinization and have lost some of their original semantic meaning. In English, too, some
SBMs have taken on the function of expletive interjections and intensifiers; we believe, however, that these are still not part of mainstream English to the same extent as they are in Spanish. In the Norwegian data, there are no cases of SBMs used as intensifiers, and only one case which might be analysed as an expletive interjection. When SBMs are used in the Norwegian data, they occur in ritual insults or name-calling, where the speakers express a high degree of awareness of the semantic content. Although this is changing, we believe there is still a long way to go before SBMs become sufficiently routinized to be used by Norwegians in the same way as *de puta madre* in Spanish, i.e. without an awareness of the original semantic content.

As regards the form and semantic content of the SBMs, the English and Norwegian data differ from the Spanish data in two important respects: firstly, English and Norwegian both have the incest theme in the expressions *motherfucker/moraknuller* and *motherfucking*, while the incest theme is completely absent from the Spanish data. In Spanish, the prostitution theme is by far the most common, and, as just mentioned, it is firmly established in both expletive interjections and intensifiers. Secondly, the English and Norwegian data contain several examples of lengthy ritual insults sequences, whereas these are virtually absent in the Spanish data.

There are probably several explanations for these differences. The strong taboo on the concept of whore mother in Spanish may have to do with the fact that Spain is a Catholic country, where the mother figure has a sacred position. England and Norway are both protestant countries, where the mother figure is less sacred; hence there is a poorer breeding ground in England and Norway for taboos and swearing connected with “whore mother”. Although we do find the whore mother theme in all three data sets, our findings illustrate that Spain has had a much longer tradition for such SBMs. In English and Norwegian, SBMs are connected with a number of different aspects. As regards sex, it is not just prostitution, but also incest, as in *motherfucker* and *moraknuller*. While SBMs related to prostitution, such as *hijo de puta* and *son of a bitch*, have the word *mother* as a target, the incest swearwords *motherfucker/moraknuller* have the words *fucker/knuller* as a target. To put it differently: the strongest taboo word in *son of a bitch* is *bitch* (the mother), while the strongest taboo word in *motherfucker* is *fucker* (the person who is said tofuck his mother). In addition, SBMs in the English and Norwegian data may refer to a number of unfavourable personal characteristics, such as obesity, ugliness or stupidity, as is evident from the numerous ritual insult sequences found in both corpora. In sum, then, there seems to be less “obsession” with the whore mother theme in England and Norway than in Spain. There also seems to be a larger space for variation and creativity in English and Norwegian mother swearing, where the majority of SBMs are ritual insults, which are much
less fixed and routinized (although they, too, are based around certain formulas). In Spanish, in contrast, the focus is on a restricted number of fixed expletive interjections and intensifiers.

We would like to point out some of the limitations of this study and give some suggestions for future research. As mentioned in Section 3 one evident limitation is that the three corpora have been compiled at different time periods (from 1992 to 2005). Ideally, of course, one should compare corpora of spoken teenage language compiled during the same time period, and this might be a task for future researchers. As the compilation of spoken corpora is very demanding in terms of time and resources, another possibility would be to compare corpora of informal written texts (websites, blogs, etc.), or spoken texts that are already accessible (films, videos, song lyrics, etc.) compiled in the same period of time across the different languages.

As regards the sociolinguistic distribution, the three data sets are not fully comparable due to the circumstances explained in Sections 3 and 5.4. Although all three corpora provide some information on social categories, the different criteria used in classifications make cross-linguistic comparison difficult. We will therefore limit ourselves to pointing out some interesting tendencies that could be the topic of future research. Considering the traditional connection of SBMs to masculinity, it is interesting to find that in all three corpora they are used by girls as well as boys.12 As mentioned in Section 5.4, the strong association with sexual offence inherent in SBMs evaporates, in a sense, when the SBMs are used among girls (e.g. if a girl is called a *motherfucker*). In the English and Spanish data, we may add that they are also found in all age groups and the three social classes, although certain groups dominate (in English, boys 10–13 from the lower social class dominate, in Spanish, the middle class boys dominate). In the Norwegian data, the distribution is more restricted. Here, SBMs are only found in the multi-ethnic areas in East Oslo (with the lower social class girls 15–17 dominating). A question which would require further investigation is whether SBMs have entered Norwegian through direct language contact in multi-ethnic areas, or indirectly through cultural influence from, for instance, the media – or perhaps both ways.

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12. Although we lack information about a few of the speakers regarding age, we are certain from listening to the audiorecordings that the SBM in our data are all uttered by young speakers and not by adults.
References


Dictionaries


Appendix

Transcription key

(35808), (41102), etc. number of COLT conversation
(mabpe2), (malcc2), etc. number of COLAm conversation
(osunj1), (osvggu1), etc. number of UNO-Oslo conversation

[hello] simultaneous speech

[hello] sentence-like boundaries; also continuing, terminating, questioning and exclamatory intonation,

[..] left out words

(unclear) unclear utterance

(laughter) paralinguistic features

<laughing> text </> beginning and end, paralinguistic features e.g laughter while talking
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