

A Pragmatic Study of Defamation in Selected American Movies

Maryam Mahmood Hasan

mariam.ali2303@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Wafaa Sahib Mehdi Muhammed

dr.wafaa@colang.uobaghdad.edu.iq

College of Education for women, / University of Baghdad



تشويه السمعة في افلام أمريكية مختارة دراسة تداولية

مريم محمود حسن أ.م.د.وفاء صاحب مهدي محمد كلية تربية للبنات جامعة بغداد



Abstract

Language conveys ideas and builds relationships. However, it is sometimes misused and it causes harm to others. This occurs through defamation which is the act of intentionally making false and harmful statements about others damaging their reputation. It may have serious effects. It may expose the defamed person to social, psychological, financial and legal harms. This study focuses on how defamation is reflected in two American movies: *The Crucible* (1996) and *Gone Girl* (2014). It seeks to find out the motivations behind defamation in the selected movies; to investigate the pragmatic strategies employed to express defamatory statements against others; to discover the effects of defamation on the defamed and to identify how the defamed typically respond. The study uses Searle's Speech Act Theory (1976) and Culpeper's Impoliteness model (1996) to analyse the data. It is concluded that defamation is conveyed through the representative speech acts of accusing or blaming. Negative impoliteness strategy makes the defamatory statement more harmful. Individuals defame others mainly for revenge or to influence public opinion. Defamation causes serious damage, such as social or legal harm. The defamed usually responds with direct rejection or by clarifying the situation. *Keywords*: Defamation, Motivations, Impoliteness, American Movies

المستخلص

تنقل اللغة الأفكار وتبني العلاقات. إلا أنها قد تُساء أحيانًا في استخدامها بما يؤدي إلى إلحاق الضرر بالآخرين. ويحدث ذلك من خلال تشويه السمعة، وهو الفعل المتمثل في الإدلاء بتصريحات كاذبة وضارة عن الآخرين بقصد الإضرار بسمعتهم. وقد تترتب على ذلك آثار خطيرة. إذ قد يعرّض الشخص المشوّه سمعته لأضرار اجتماعية ونفسية ومالية وقانونية. تركّز هذه الدراسة على كيفية انعكاس تشويه السمعة في فيلمين أمريكيين هما: البوتقة (١٩٩٦) والفتاة المفقودة (١٩٠١). وتسعى إلى الكشف عن الدوافع الكامنة وراء تشويه السمعة في هذين الفيلمين، والتحقيق في الاستراتيجيات التداولية المستخدمة للتعبير عن العبارات التشويهية ضد الآخرين، واكتشاف آثار تشويه السمعة على من يتعرض له، فضلاً عن تحديد كيف يستجيب لها عادةً. وتستند الدراسة إلى نظرية أفعال الكلام لسيرل (١٩٧٦) ونموذج كلبيبر لعدم التأدب (١٩٩٦) في تحليل البيانات. وقد توصلت إلى أن تشويه السمعة يُنقل عبر أفعال الكلام التمثيلية كالاتهام أو المودنج كلبيبر لعدم التأدب (١٩٩٦) في تحليل البيانات. وقد توصلت إلى أن تشويه السمعة يُنقل عبر أفعال الكلام التمثيلية كالاتهام أو المودنج كلبيبر لعدم التأدب ذات الطابع السلبي تجعل العبارات التشويهية أكثر ضررًا. كما تبيّن أن الأفراد يشوهون سمعة الآخرين أساسًا بدافع الانتقام أو بغية التأثير في الرأي العام. ويسفر تشويه السمعة عن أضرار جسيمة، منها الأضرار الاجتماعية والقانونية، بينما يستجيب المشوّه سمعته غالبًا بالرفض المباشر أو بتوضيح الموقف.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تشوبه السمعة، الدوافع، عدم التأدب، الأفلام الأمربكية

1. Introduction

Language is supposed to be a tool of harmonious communication. However, it can be employed maliciously for specific purposes (Hassan & Muhammed, 2022). One such case is defamation. It is a false, misleading, or untrue remark that is made to harm someone's reputation. It can be categorised into two categories: libel, which is directed to the eye, and slander, which is directed to the ear (Vidhiasi et al., 2023). The defamer's utterances consist not only of words with their literary meanings, but they also have intended and hidden meanings behind them. The intended meaning is linked mainly to the context of the situation when interlocutors speak. Thus, this study lends itself to pragmatic analysis. Kreidler (2014, p.12) claims that pragmatics is a "person's ability to derive meaning(s) from specific kinds of speech situations, to recognise what the speaker is referring to, to relate new information to what has gone before and to interpret what is being said".

Although defamation has been widely studied from legal perspectives, social media posts, and political speech, little attention has been given to its pragmatic realisation in fictional discourse, such as American movies. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on how defamation is linguistically constructed in American movies, what pragmatic strategies defamers use, and how the defamed respond. It makes use of the speech act theory of Searle (1976) and Culpeper's (1996) model of impoliteness. It aims to identifying the most common motivations that incite the defamer character in American movies, uncovering the most frequent pragmatic strategies used by American movie characters to express defamatory statements, specifying the effects of defamation on the defamed individual, and discovering the typical responses of the defamed of defamation. To achieve these

aims, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1) What are the motivations that incite the defamer character in American movies?

2) What are pragmatic strategies are employed to express a defamatory statement?

3) What are the defamation effects on the defamed individual?

4) How does the defamed of defamation typically respond?

2. Literature Review

This section presents the concept of defamation, its motivations, effects, the response of defamation, and the criteria for identifying defamation.

2.1 Defamation Conceptualised

Etymologically, the word 'defamation' comes from Latin 'diffamatio'. It means to 'make a scandal of'. It is derived from 'diffamare', which combines the prefix (dif-) and (fama) to mean 'report' or 'rumour' (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). Defamation consists of two main elements: (1) a false and harmful statement; and (2) the statement causing social or financial harm to the defamed (Eades, 1986). Black's Law Dictionary defines defamation as "the act of harming the reputation of another by making a false statement to a third person" (Garner, 1999). Accordingly, a person's reputation is dynamic. It is changed due to the demands of the situation. It can be secured, restored, established, earned, harmed, affected, diminished, or slandered (Rolph, 2008). Moreover, defamation is any hint that makes the listener questions the honesty, integrity, or virtue of the defamed (Craig, 2013). It has a sense of passive aggression (Kadhim & Mohammed, 2021). The defamer only needs to plant doubt in the listener's mind regarding the defamed's morality.

There are two types of defamation: libel and slander. Libel is a written defamatory statement. In contrast, slander is a spoken defamatory statement. Libel can be found in newspaper articles, posts on social media platforms, or online blogs. Slander can be found during public gatherings as a false verbal accusation, defamatory remarks made in a conversation overheard by others, and harmful statements made during a live television broadcast (Kumar & Mishra, 2024). It is important to know why an individual makes such damaging statements. The following section explains the motivation behind defamation.

2.2 Motivations of Defamation

Defamatory statements often include words, phrases, sentences or even body language with a negative reference. Uttering a defamatory statement is motivated by several reasons like being forced by an instigator, seeking revenge, protecting oneself, influencing public opinion, or gaining control. For instance, the instigator, who has dominant power, instigates the defamer forcing him to make false and harmful statements about the defamed person to serve the instigator's aims (Nail et al., 2000). Seeking revenge occurs when the defamer resents the defamed's past actions, aiming to cause harm to the defamed as a means of punishment (Rosebury, 2009). Protecting oneself from punishment is another motive for defamation when the defamer resorts to defamation as a means of self-preservation, often to divert suspicion, shift responsibility, or escape punishment for wrongful actions. By redirecting blame onto the defamed, the defamers reduce personal risk and shield their reputation (Ibrahim & Hussein, 2021). Influencing public opinion is also a reason to utter defamatory statements, aiming to reduce the defamed's credibility by instilling suspicion and

hostility in the audience's thoughts, resulting in associating the defamed with a negative aspect. Gaining control is also the defamer's motive for defamation. It occurs by directing the audience's action and conveying false statements intended to incite hostility toward the defamed. Consequently, the audience's trust shifts from the defamed to the defamer, enabling the latter to gain greater influence over the audience's decisions (Ndatyapo et al., 2024). Making defamatory statements causes several effects. The next section explains the major effects of defamation on the defamed.

2.3Effects of Defamation

The main effect of defamation is ruining reputation. Moreover, it may lead to legal, social, psychological, and financial harm. Defamatory statements can cause legal consequences when the defamed is linked to a criminal behaviour. It leads to police investigation, arrest, and criminal charge (Brooks & Greenberg, 2021). Besides, it may lead to social harm, such as losing friends or being exposed to hostility. The defamed may face psychological harms, such as stress, anxiety, fear, isolation, and loss of confidence. It causes trauma and disrupts the defamed's ability to function normally in daily life. It may lead to financial harms, like losing job opportunities, suspension, or losing property (Ndatyapo et al., 2024).

2.4Responses of the Defamed

The defamed often responds differently to restore reputation and correct false claims. They may respond immediately in confrontation, or after a delay, or remain disengaged or silent. One of the strategies is direct rejection that serves as a defensive response to false defamatory statements. It enables individuals to reject untrue claims and protect their reputation. By directly refuting the false information. the defamed prevents misunderstanding and misjudgement (Bordia et al., 2006). Sarcasm is a strategy to respond as well. It involves using intentional verbal cues meant to mean the opposite of what the defamers say. It is made to criticise something humorously (Levine, 2014). They might resort to clarification to explain the situation directly with the defamer or others. This response is presented with the hope of preventing conflict and resolving the claims peacefully (Ndatyapo et al., 2024).

2.5 Criteria for Identifying Defamation

A defamatory statement succeeds when it effectively damages a person's reputation by satisfying certain criteria. In this regard, Lind's (1995) criteria for identifying defamation are adopted. First, the statement is false and defamatory. Second, the statement refers to the defamed, even without mentioning his name directly. The defamed can be identified through other means, such as his work. Third, the statement is shared with a third party who understands its meaning and can identify the defamed. However, if the statement is not understood or is read privately without the knowledge of others, it is not considered defamatory. Finally, the statement causes clear harm like the financial, psychological, social, or legal one.

3. Pragmatic Manifestation

Huang (2017) states that pragmatics is studying language use in specific contexts. Pragmatically speaking, defamation has perlocutionary effects on others. Defamation is realised pragmatically by certain pragmatic theories. This study utilises Searle's (1976) speech acts theory and Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness theory to investigate how defamatory statements are pragmatically expressed in language use. Usually, these theories are more likely to be activated in analysing such an issue (Hadi & Mehdi, 2023). This language may harm others using accusation or threatening speech acts causing damage in reputation and social standing (Najem & Abbas, 2024). Two American movies, *The Crucible* (1996) and *Gone Girl* (2014), are examined to discover how the pragmatic strategies are utilised to convey defamation.

3.1 Speech Acts

The theory of speech acts (SAs) is based on Austin's (1962) definition that performing a speech act involves doing several other things simultaneously. Issuing a defamatory statement has its effects on the defamed. Searle (1976) outlines five categories of illocutionary acts. The most relevant ones to this study are the following. Representatives highlight the speaker's beliefs, such as asserting or claiming. Commissives commit the speaker to future actions, such as promising or threatening. Expressives convey the speaker's attitude and feelings, such as fearing or lamenting. Negative SAs, such as blaming, threatening, or accusing, are forms of negative utterances (Mehdi, 2020). Therefore, engaging in any negative communication like defamation involves utilising various such negative speech acts (Muhammed, 2020). Usually, these speech

acts are more likely employed when examining defamation or aggressive language (Muhammed et al., 2023).

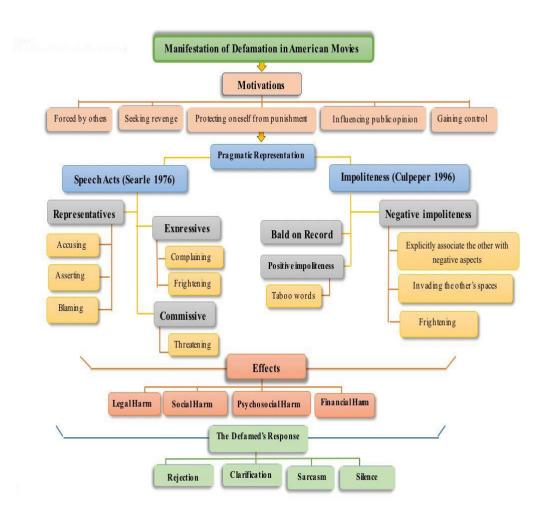
3.2 Impoliteness

Speakers may use offensive language to hurt an individual's character. This type of language can be classified as defamation. It violates social norms, which aligns with Culpeper's impoliteness theory (1996). Impoliteness has been defined as an instance in which "(1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)" (Culpeper, 2005, p. 38). In his first work on this theory, Culpeper (1996) identifies five strategies for impoliteness to attack the interlocutor's face. The most relevant strategies to this study are: Bald on record, where the speaker's utterance is direct, concise, clear, and unambiguous. It seeks to threaten the recipient's face without attempting to lessen the damage. Positive impoliteness causes the recipient to feel excluded or ignored in a particular activity. It involves utilising taboo words or inappropriate identity markers. Negative impoliteness is designed to damage the recipient's negative face desires. It involves explicitly associating the defamed with negative aspects, employing frightening language, or invading personal spaces. Using any of these impoliteness strategies adds another level of harm to the defamed as they hurt his feelings besides hurting his reputation (Nashmi & Mehdi, 2022).

4. Analytical Framework

This study develops an analytical framework based on issues from previous sections, including motivations, Lind's (1995) criteria, pragmatic theories, effects of defamation

language, and the defamed's response to defamatory statements. Effects include social, psychological, legal, and financial harm. Motivations include being forced by others, seeking revenge, protecting oneself from punishment, influencing public opinion and gaining control. The defamed's response involved direct rejection, sarcasm, and clarification. Searle's (1976) speech act theory and Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness theory are used to analyse defamation utterances. The framework is visualised in Figure 1.



5. Data and Analysis

This section presents the practical part. It outlines the data, its collection, description, and analysis.

5.1 Data Collection

Two movies are chosen for this study to analyse defamation: The Crucible (1996) and Gone Girl (2014). They are accessible on Cinemania. Two extracts from each movie are selected for analysis due to space limitation. The genre of these scripts movies is drama. The were obtained from https://www.scripts.com/. They are selected because they feature defamation, and they have high viewership. They also have more than one scene of a defamation conversation. Additionally, they present diverse social relationships, which help to show how defamation emerges in different interactional contexts. Finally, they highlight defamers' motivations and the consequences of defamation, making them suitable for pragmatic analysis. The movies were watched several times, the scenes were identified that contained defamation, the scripts were downloaded, and four extracts were selected that clearly show defamation. They are analysed following the analysis model designed by this study.

5.2 Data Description

A summary of the themes of the two movies is presented below.

5.2.1 The Crucible (1996)

It is an American drama movie. It is based on Arthur Miller's play. It follows a group of young women in a small town called Salem. The girls are caught dancing and accused of witchcraft by Reverend Parris, a local priest. One of the girls,

Betty, Parris's daughter, falls into a coma-like state, causing witchcraft rumours to spread throughout the village. These girls are accused of practicing witchcraft. To avoid the punishment of death, they claim that Satan controls them and that many people are helping him. They begin to slander and accuse numerous individuals without any evidence. Abigail, one of the young women, takes the opportunity to defame several characters in the story for personal reasons.

5.2.2 Gone Girl (2014)

It is an American drama movie. It is based on Gillian Flynn's novel (2012). It tells the story of a married couple. Nick Dunne (the husband) is a writing teacher. Amy (the wife) is a famous writer. Nick Dunne finds Amy missing on their fifth wedding anniversary. The local police are compelled to initiate a case of missing persons. Later, it develops into a murder inquiry when three days pass without any sign of her. Amy had a plan to frame Nick for her murder. She used her life insurance to purchase items and befriended a pregnant neighbour. Amy deliberately wrote false and negative information about Nick in her diary. She intentionally left the diary with the police. Later on, Amy returns with her ex-boyfriend, Desi Collings. She falsely accused him, claiming that Desi raped her, tied her up, and beat her. Medical examiners believed Amy's story. The FBI believes Amy and closes the case.

5.3 Data Analysis

Defamation appears in two extracts in each movie. Using a pragmatic approach, utterances are analyzed as units of analysis within the framework developed by the study. It focuses on how characters use language to defame individuals. An eclectic model with four stages guides the analysis: identifying defamation, assessing motivation, investigating pragmatics, exploring effects on the defamed, and considering responses from the defamed. The qualitative review covers all four extracts, while the quantitative analysis calculates frequency and percentage. Extracts with defamation are underlined.

1. The Crucible (1996)

Extract (1):

Mr. Hale: You've conjured her to be silent, have you not?

Tituba: She...She begged me conjure. She begged me make charm.

Abigail:_She lies! She sends her spirit into me in church. She makes me laugh at prayer.

Parris: She has often laughed at prayer.

Abigail: She comes into me when I sleep. She makes me dream corruptions.

Tituba: Why you say bad thing, Abby?

Abigail: Some nights I wake, and I find myself standing naked in the open doorway, without a stitch on my body, and she makes me do that... singing her damn Barbados songs, tempting me!

Mr. Hale: Tituba, when did you compact with the devil? Tell me.

Tituba: I don't. I don't campact with the devil.

Context: The conversation involves Mr. Hale, Tituba, Parris, Abigail, young girls, Goody Putnam, and Mr. Putnam. It takes place outside Tituba's house. Abigail falsely accuses Tituba of using witchcraft, saying her spirit controls her, makes her laugh during prayer, and behaves badly, like standing naked. Abigail does this to protect herself. Parris supports her to keep his reputation. Tituba is whipped to confess, but she denies the false accusations.

This extract has been chosen as it meets four defamation criteria. First, Abigail falsely accuses Tituba of practising witchcraft, claiming she controls her spirit, makes her dance, and enters her dreams. Second, these false and damaging claims are about Tituba and are clear and unambiguous. Third, Abigail makes these accusations publicly to Mr. Hale, Parris, others, including young girls, Goody Putnam, and Mr. Putnam, who hear her. Finally, the claims damage Tituba's reputation, leading to her whipping. Therefore, Abigail's statements qualify as defamation, which, during the Salem trials, often resulted in severe punishment, including hanging.

Defamer's motivation: Abigail's main motivation is to protect herself from punishment. She deliberately blames Tituba out of fear of being accused of witchcraft. Abigail tries to present herself as a victim rather than a sinner, thus avoiding severe consequences such as whipping and execution.

Pragmatic analysis: Abigail's defamatory statements are pragmatically evident in her speech as follows. In terms of SAs, Abigail's statements, "She lies! She sends her spirit into me in church. She makes me laugh at prayer," are representative SAs of accusing. Abigail accuses Tituba of witchcraft. Abigail's statements are not simply informative but intended to cause harm and influence how others perceive Tituba. Moreover, Abigail's

statements, "She comes into me when I sleep. She makes me dream corruptions" are representative SAs of blaming. Abigail blames Tituba for disturbing her sleep and manipulating her thoughts. These statements support the previous accusations; they add emotional intensity. Thus, Abigail presents herself as helpless and innocent. Additionally, Abigail performs a representative SA of accusing in the utterance, "Some nights I wake up, and I find myself standing naked in the open doorway...She makes me do that...Singing her damn Barbados songs, tempting me!" She claims that Tituba is the one who forces her to act in shameful and unnatural ways. These defamatory words accuse Tituba of controlling Abigail's actions and body.

Regarding impoliteness, Abigail's statement, "She lies! She sends her spirit into me in church. She makes me laugh at prayer," is an example of a bald on record impoliteness strategy. Her statement is direct. She does not try to soften the attack. Abigail's statement, "Singing her damn Barbados songs", functions as a positive impoliteness strategy. Abigail utilises taboo words such as "damn". Negative impoliteness strategy is also employed in Abigail's statements: "She comes into me when I sleep. She makes me do that". Abigail informs the listeners that Tituba controls her. Abigail points out that Tituba invades her personal space. Thus, Abigail makes Tituba appear dangerous and evil.

Effects of defamation: Abigail's defamatory statement led Tituba to social harms. She faces a bad reputation state and losing trust. It led to psychological harms which are fearing and anxiety. Moreover, it led to legal harms represented by arresting, whipping and threatening with execution.

Response of the defamed: Tituba responds to Abigail's defamatory statements by rejecting the defamatory statement. She replies, "Why do you say bad things, Appy?" She asks a question to stop the false claims. Then, she responds, "I don't. I don't campact with the devil". This is a direct rejection strategy. She clearly rejects the false claims and completely refuses to accept the blame.

Extract (2):

Mr. Danforth: Now, Ruth Putnam, when did you last see Mr. Jacobs?

Ruth Putnam: *He came to me two nights past...when I was in bed.* Mr. Jacobs: Ruth, you are mistaken. You know me. I am Mr. Jacobs, your neighbour. I have 600 acres next to theirs. She has known me all her life.

Ruth Putnam: He came through my window. Then he lay down upon me. I could not take breath. His body crush heavy upon me... and he said in my ear... "Ruth Putnam, I will have your life if you testify against me in court."

Mr. Danforth: what do you say to this charge, Mr. Jacobs? Mr. Jacobs: But... Your Honor...I must have these sticks to walk with. How may I come through a window?

Context: This conversation occurs between Mr. Danforth (a judge), Ruth Putnam (a young girl), and Mr. Jacobs (an older, respected neighbour) in a courtroom in Salem. Ruth is defaming Mr. Jacobs of witchcraft. She says Mr. Jacobs came to her in the night. Furthermore, she says that Mr. Jacobs threatened her life if she testified against him in court. Mr. Jacobs rejected these accusations immediately.

This extract satisfies the fourth criteria for defamation. First, Ruth Putnam falsely accuses Mr. Jacobs of attacking her in her bedroom and threatening her life. These accusations are false and portray Mr. Jacobs as violent and dangerous. They harm Mr. Jacobs's good name and character. Second, Ruth directly names Mr Jacobs and describes him clearly. She says he came to her bedroom and threatened her. This confirms that everyone knows who Ruth is talking about. Third, Ruth Putnam makes her claim publicly in front of the judge and others in the courtroom. Thus, the statements are heard by third parties. Finally, Mr. Jacobs is known as a respected landowner. Ruth's statements could lead people in the town to mistrust, avoid, or even see him as evil. These statements affect his relationships, business dealings, and reputation.

Defamer's motivation: Ruth's statement is motivated by her family's pressure. Her parents forced her to utter these defamatory statements. Her parents have personal motives, such as gaining land, which drives Ruth to defame him.

Pragmatic analysis: Ruth's defamatory statements are pragmatically evident in her speech. In terms of SAs, Ruth's utterance is a representative SA of asserting in "He came to me two nights past... when I was in bed". She asserts that Mr. Jacobs came to her two nights ago. Also, Ruth's utterance is a representative SAs of accusing in "He came through my window. Then he lay down upon me". She accused him of physical and sexual assault. Moreover, Ruth's utterance is a commissive SA of threatening. She says that Mr. Jacobs is threatening her in "I will have your life if you testify against me in court". She directly states that Mr. Jacobs intends to harm her. Ruth convinces the listeners that Mr. Jacobs is a dangerous and evil man.

In terms of impoliteness, Ruth uses a negative impoliteness strategy in the utterance, "He came to me two nights past... when I was in bed". Ruth explicitly associates Mr. Jacobs with negative aspects. Her claim contains inappropriate behaviour and sexual implications. Also, Ruth uses a negative impoliteness strategy in the utterance, "He came through my window". Ruth directly accuses Mr. Jacobs of entering her room without her permission. She claims that he invades her personal space. Additionally, Ruth uses a negative impoliteness strategy in the utterance, "then he lay down upon me, I could not breath. His body crush heavy upon me." Ruth uses frightening language. She portrays him as a violent person.

Effects of defamation: Ruth's statements are considered defamatory regardless of her age. They lead to financial harm, such as losing his land; social harms, such as a bad reputation, isolation, and disrespect; and legal harms, such as arresting, whipping, and execution.

Response of the defamed: Mr. Jacobs immediately responds to the defamatory statement by using clarification. He clarifies to everyone that it is physically impossible for him to enter her room. He also rejects Ruth's statement, stating "You are mistaken."

2. Gone Girl (2014)

Extract (3):

Amy: I will practice believing my husband loves me and will love this baby. That child really might save our marriage. But I could be wrong. Because sometimes, *the way he looks at me?* I think: Man of my dreams, father of my child: *This man of mine may kill me. He may truly kill me.*

Nick: Convenient end note.

Context: The words in this extract represent Amy's internal monologue. The event took place in Amy's office. These words are flashbacks. She wrote these words in her private diary. Her writing creates doubt about his character and intentions. The diary is left for the police purposely. The diary appears partially burned. She makes it seem like he tried to destroy evidence. The police arrest Nick later on.

This extract satisfies the four criteria for defamation. First, Amy's statement is completely false and defamatory. She portrays Nick in a very negative light. She suggests that he is capable of murder. Second, Amy's statement, "This man of mine," identifies her husband, Nick. Third, the statement is published to a third party. In this context, Amy left the diary to the police. Finally, Amy's words damage Nick's reputation in both his personal and professional life. Based on these four criteria, Amy's words about her husband can be classified as defamation.

Defamer's motivation: Amy's statement is motivated by taking revenge on her husband. Nick has betrayed her, and she wants to punish him by destroying his reputation and making him suffer. She did this out of revenge, anger, and hatred. Besides, her utterance is motivated to influence public opinion. She wants her supporters to view Nick negatively. She wants to end Nick's life and put him in prison.

Pragmatic analysis: Amy's defamatory statement is pragmatically evident in her speech as follows: In terms of SAs,

Amy utilises the representative SAs of accusing in her utterance, "This man of mine may kill me. He may truly kill me". Amy directly accuses her husband of being capable of murder. She portrays Nick as dangerous and a murderer. Her accusation is also supported by an expressive SA of frightening in her utterance, "Because sometimes, the way he looks at me". Thus, she increases the credibility of the accusation. Her utterance conveys emotions attitude, and psychological states. She expresses a deep sense of fearing.

In terms of impoliteness, Amy employs a bald-on-record impoliteness strategy in her utterance, "This man of mine may kill me. He may truly kill me". Amy accuses Nick in a clear, direct, and unambiguous manner. Additionally, Amy employs a negative impoliteness strategy in the utterance, "Because sometimes the way he looks at the?". She draws attention to Nick's look. She explicitly associates Nick with negative aspects such as murder. Thus, she increases the suspension in Nick's character.

Defamation effects: Amy succeeds in defaming her husband and shaping negative public perception against him. She manipulates the reader by using the child's story as a powerful emotional tool. Amy's defamatory statements lead to social harms, such as a bad reputational and disrespect; psychological harms, such as anxiety, fear, and isolation; and legal harms, such as arresting and police investigation.

Response of defamed: Nick employs a sarcastic tone. He means the opposite of what is stated.

Extract (4):

Boney: We found your diary, Amy. It contains a lot of concerning allegations-mental and physical abuse.

Amy: The ugly truth is that Nick didn't want a baby. He had money problems. He has a temper. But I love him.

Boney: she wanted to get pregnant. You attacked her.

Nick: I hit her? Never

Boney: She says pushed. You pushed her.

Nick: Did not happen.

Context: This conversation takes place in a hospital room in the afternoon. It occurs between Detective Boney and Amy Dunne in front of FBI agents. Boney questions her about her diary. The diary contains serious accusations against Nick. Amy confirms this accusation. She informs Boney about Nock's flaws. This is a part of Amy's plan to make Nick look dangerous while she pretends to be the victim. Later, Nick denies these accusations.

This extract satisfies the fourth criteria for defamation. First, Amy's statement is false and contains serious accusations. It portrays him as someone who is uncaring, has anger issues, and is financially irresponsible. Second, Amy's statement directly refers to him by name and makes specific claims about his behaviour and attitudes. The audience, including Boney, will clearly understand that these statements refer to Amy. Third, Amy's statement heard by all the present. Finally, Amy's statement caused special damage to Nick's reputation. It affects him socially and professionally. Based on these four criteria, Amy's words about her husband can be classified as defamation. **Defamer's motivation:** Amy utters these statements to get control over Nick and influence public opinion against Nick. She

manipulates Detective Boney and makes Nick appear guilty so she can play the victim role and maintain her marriage.

Amy's **Pragmatic** analysis: defamatory is statement pragmatically evident in her response to Boney. In terms of SA, Amy's utterance, "Nick didn't want a baby", is a representative SA of blaming. She blames him because he is the one who does not want to have a baby. She presents Nick as selfish, unsupportive, or unwilling to take responsibility. Moreover, Amy's utterance, "He had money problems", is an expressive SA of complaining. She complains that Nick is irresponsible and financially unstable. She aims to lower his credibility and reliability as a husband. Additionally, Amy's utterance, "He has a temper", is a representative SA of accusing. She presents him as violent and dangerous. Her statement supports the narrative abuse that was written in her diary. Furthermore, the expressive SA of complaining is also included in Amy's statement. Amy says, "The ugly truth." This phrase reveals her emotions and the difficult reality. Amy obtains sympathy and further support by employing expressive SA of complaining to enhance the credibility of her false claims.

In terms of impoliteness, Amy employs more than one strategy. Amy's statement, "Nick didn't want a baby," employs a bald on record impoliteness strategy. It defamed Nick through sensitive and damaging behaviour without attempting to mitigate the harm. The statement is unambiguous and presents him as selfish. Moreover, Amy's utterance, "He had money problems.", is a negative impoliteness strategy. She exposes his financial weakness publicly and reveals private information. She invades his private space. Amy's utterance, "He has a temper, " is a negative impoliteness strategy. She directly associates Nick with a negative aspect. She portrays Nick as potentially aggressive.

Effects of defamation: Amy successfully shapes a negative public perception of him and controls the legal system. Amy's defamatory statements about Nick led to social harms, such as a bad reputation, humiliation, and shame.

Response of the defamed: Nick rejects it directly twice. He says 'Never' and 'Did not happen'.

6. Discussion of Results

This section is devoted to presenting the results qualitatively supporting them quantitatively. and The quantitative results are tabulated to include frequencies and percentages. They are arranged from the highest to the lowest. This section fillfuls the study's objectives presented previously. Concerning the first objective, which reads: "identifying the most common motivations that incite the defamer character in American movies" The analysis of four extracts reveals that influencing others' opinion is the main motivation that incites the defamer in the data under scrutiny. Other motivations are to control, to protect oneself from punishment, to get revenge or being forced by others. Table 1 below supports these findings. It outlines the most common motivations for initiating defamation in the two movies.

Table 1 *Motivations of Defamation Found in the Selected Movies*

Motivations of Defamation	Frequency	Percentage
Influencing opinion of others	2	33.33%
Gaining control	1	16.67%
Protecting oneself from punishment	1	16.67%
Being forced by others	1	16.67%
Seeking revenge	1	16.67%
Total	6	100%

Concerning the second objective, which reads: "uncovering the most frequent pragmatic strategies used by American movie characters to express defamatory statements" The analysis reveals that defamers employ several pragmatic strategies. At the level of macro SAs, representative SAs are the most commonly used ones. At the level of micro SAs, accusing is the dominant. This indicates that the defamers present their false speech as a true statement, like direct accusation, to ruin the defamed's reputation. At the level of impoliteness, negative impoliteness strategies that explicitly associate the defamed with a negative aspect and invade the other's place are highly employed, followed by bald-on-record impoliteness and positive impoliteness. Tables 2 and 3 support these findings.

Table 2

Macro and Micro SAs Found in the Selected Movies

Macro SAs Micro SAs		Frequency	percentage
Representatives	Accusing	5	41.7%
	Blaming	2	16.7%
	Asserting	1	8.3%
Expressives	Complaining	2	16.7%
	Frightening	1	8.3%
Commissives	Threatening	1	8.3%
T	otal	12	100%

Table 3 *Impoliteness Strategies Found in Two American Movies*

Impol	iteness Strategy	Frequency	percentage
Negative	Explicitly	3	27.27%
Impoliteness	associate the		
	other with a		
	negative aspect		
	Invade the other's	3	27.27%
	space		
	Frighten	1	9.09%
Bald on record		3	27.27%
Positive	Taboo words	1	9.09%
Impoliteness			
	Total	11	100%

Concerning the third objective, which reads: "specifying the effects of defamation on the defamed individual" The analysis reveals that defamatory statements in the selected movies significantly affect the defamed. They lead to social harm, such as a bad reputation, isolation, shame, disrespect, and legal harm, such as arrest, whipping, or execution, psychological harm such as fear, anxiety and stress, and financial harm such as losing property. In *The Crucible* movie, defamatory statements cause bad reputation, panic, whipping and unjust executions, while in *Gone Girl*, defamation leads to bad reputation, humiliation, and arrest. In both movies, language is a powerful tool to defame, shape public perception and destroy reputations. Table 4 supports these findings.

 Table 4

 Effects of Defamation in the Selected Movies

Effects of defamation	Frequency	Percentage
Social harm	4	40%
Legal harm	3	30%
Psychological harm	2	20%
Financial harm	1	10%
Total	10	100%

Concerning the last objective, which reads: "discovering the typical responses of the defamed of defamation" The analysis reveals that the defamed respond with a range of typical responses. Direct rejection is the most common response strategy. Rejection includes openly rejecting the defamatory statements. The defamed often utilises strong and clear language. Another strategy is clarification. The defamed employs this strategy to explain the facts, correct misunderstandings, or justify their behaviour. The defamed also employs sarcasm as an implicit form of resistance. Thus, the defamed weakens the defamer without engaging in confrontation. No silent response were recorded in this study, as all the defamed responded actively. Table 5 supports these findings.

Table 5 *Responses of the Defamed Found in the selected Movies*

The defamed's Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Direct Rejection	5	71.43%
Clarification	1	14.29%
Sarcasm	1	14.29%
Silence	0	0%
Total	7	100%

7. Conclusions

This study reached several conclusions as follows:

- 1. In American movies, defamation is usually direct.
- 2. It is mainly represented by certain speech acts like accusing, blaming, and asserting.
- 3. Impoliteness strategies play a central role in amplifying the defamatory effect. Bald-on-record impoliteness is used for direct and unmitigated attacks, while negative impoliteness highlights invasion of personal space, frightening language, and exposure of private weaknesses. Positive impoliteness, including the utilisation of taboo words, is also employed to amplify hostility.
- 4. Uttering a defamatory statement never occurs haphazardly, and it is motivated in American movies by influencing the opinion of others.
- 5. Defamatory statements may have serious effects like social, legal and psychological harms. These harms show how melodious language use results in actual suffering.
- 6. The defamed mainly responds to any case of defamation with clarification, direct rejection or sarcasm. They never remain silent.

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