
Emotional Practices and Character Identity in American Popular Culture

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Corpus linguistic case study of the use of
emotive interjections in *Gilmore Girls*
(Warner Brothers, 2000-2007)

[Image not included for copyright reasons]

Overview

- Television and emotional practices
- Character identity and emotive interjections
- Corpus
- Results/limitations of corpus analysis
- Introduction to a three-pronged approach

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Why television?

- Despite increasing challenges by the new media:
 - ‘the ability to put the content out there [on other platforms] where they [people] want to see it is fantastic. But at the end of the day, the content has to start somewhere, and globally it is still driven by television’ (David Mott, Australia’s Channel Ten chief programmer).

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Why television?

- “Television programs and characters have a unique ability to become an intimate part of a household and family.” (Roman 2005: 130) → “parasocial interaction” and other media user-media figure relationships (Giles 2002)

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Why emotionality in television?

- Cultural construals (van Meel 1994, Turner & Stets 2005: 36) of emotions perpetuated in globally influential TV series
- Emotional practices: uses of language that work to conventionally realise emotionality

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Character identity in TV

- Character identity (characterisation) in TV neglected in stylistics and narratology (Toolan 2001: 80)
- But: contemporary television series are often character-driven

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Interjections and character identity

- Interjections are part of *surge features* that work as implicit cues to characterisation signalling emotion/attitude (Culpeper 2001: 190ff).
- Use of emotive interjections part of emotional practices that work to construe 'expressive identities' (Bednarek forthcoming) in the series;
- Formally definable 'outbursts' of emotion (Taavitsainen 1999)

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Corpus

- Ca 1.5 million words
- Online fan transcripts
- American TV-series *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007)
- 'Dramedy' (drama/comedy hybrid)
- Corpus stylistic (Wynne 2005) case study

A family drama series set in an idyllic Connecticut town named Stars Hollow, home to Lorelai Gilmore, a 32-year-old single mother and her 16-year-old daughter Rory. Lorelai has made her share of mistakes in life, but she's doing her best to see that Rory doesn't follow in her footsteps. Rory and her best friend Lane Kim are straight A students at the local public high school, but when Rory is accepted into the prestigious Chilton Prep in nearby Hartford, Lorelai must swallow her pride and ask her old-fashioned, old-money parents, Richard and Emily, for financial help with the tuition. They, in turn, ask to be a part of their granddaughter's life. Lorelai is the manager of the quaint Independence Inn with the dream of one day opening her own bed-and-breakfast.

Corpus analysis

- Distribution and use of 'emotive' (Ameka 1992) interjections:
- *Jesus, Christ, geez* (including *oh geez* etc), *hell, damn (it), shit, f***, shoot, yuck, god, oh god, for the love of god, dear god, good god, (oh) thank god, for X's sake (for heaven's sake, for Pete's sake, for God's sake, for goodness sake)*

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The screenshot shows a Microsoft Word window titled 'Document1 - Microsoft Word'. The menu bar includes 'Edit', 'View', 'Format', 'Settings', 'Windows', and 'Help'. The main text area displays a concordance search for the term 'Oh my God'. The search results are listed in a table with line numbers on the left and the corresponding text on the right. The search term 'Oh my God' is highlighted in the original image. The concordance entries include:

Line	Text
1	Oh my God, Really? Oh my God, Really? Oh my God, I don't believe this! Oh my God, I'm going to Chironi! Oh my God, Yeah, and Rory hug
2	LORELA: All my nice things were dirty. RORY: It's 7:16. LORELA: Oh my God, I was gonna wear my blue suit with the floppy skirt. I look so great
3	s how I was supposed to look this morning. Good morning, Jackson. SOOKIE: Oh my God, today was Rory's first day! LORELA: Yes, and I was supposed to
4	side the inn to where Rory is working. The phone is ringing.) LORELA: Hey, Oh my God, you have good handwriting. RORY: Thank you. LORELA: You did
5	re kidding? RICHARD: It's in my office if you'd like to see them. RORY: Oh my God, I totally would. EMILY: I'd like to take a look at those myself.
6	is that? LANE: 12 calories. RORY: Here [gives her a snickers] LANE: Oh my God bless you! [Rory pulls out a big binder] LANE: Man, what's tha
7	n't breathe. LANE: OK, sit down. RORY: No I can't sit down. I'm too -- Oh my God, He kissed me! (Mrs. Kim comes up to the girls.) MRS. KIM: Who
8	LANE: So, anyhow, Rich has this amazing hair. RORY: Really? LANE: Oh my God, it's so perfect. It's thick but it's not too thick, and it's got real
9	EMILY: Oh it is not. (Emily takes a bite and makes a face.) EMILY: Oh my God, it's horrible! What on earth was I thinking? (Cut to the dance.)
10	to her] LANE: Hey, I thought we were meeting at Luke's. RORY: We were? Oh my God, I'm so sorry. I forgot. LANE: Let me guess. You and Lorelai hav
11	hair name before. She likes you. She likes us. So my mind instantly went to "Oh my God, what if we break up, she'll be crushed" and then my next thought wa
12	my God, what if we break up, she'll be crushed" and then my next thought was "Oh my God, what if we break up, I'll be crushed". And then as you know all hell
13	hat if tonight is a disaster and then he won't sell to me anymore. LORELA: Oh my God, you're right. SOOKIE: Yes, see! LORELA: And since all the pr
14	lied to me so I wouldn't have to lie to Mrs. Kim? RORY: Yeah. LORELA: Oh my God you really are my daughter. RORY: I'm sorry. LORELA: I have t
15	LORELA: Hey, you know the rules. No pages before french fries. RORY: Oh my God, it's Lane! LORELA: Oh you're kidding. RORY: Give me your cel
16	Lane? LANE: I'm standing in the yard! I'm standing in the yard! RORY: Oh my God, she let you out! LANE: I can go as far as the sign. RORY: Tha
17	okie. RORY: Maybe I should sic it on Paris when she gets here. LORELA: Oh my God, that's right. You're studying here today. RORY: Any minute actua
18	LORELA: What? MISS PATTY: [to Sookie] I bet this was Rachel. SOOKIE: Oh my God - Rachel's? LORELA: Rachel? Who's Rachel? SOOKIE: Rachel was
19	rst seats in the entire world! SOOKIE: They are, aren't they? LORELA: Oh my God, it's so funny. [to guy next to her] Don't you think this is funny?
20	Lane. LANE: Yeah? RORY: Thanks for coming with me. LANE: Anyhow, Oh my God, there's a pool table. RORY: And a deejay. LANE: It's like a t
21	t: Excuse me sir, do you know where Luke is? LUKE: Very funny. LORELA: Oh my God, Luke, is that you? LUKE: I feel ridiculous. LORELA: That's b
22	u my mother's clothes, which I still haven't gotten back by the way. PARIS: Oh my God, you're right. I hope those weren't the ones Skippy had her puppies o
23	o? SOOKIE: What? LORELA: Sookie! SOOKIE: God, this is amazing! Oh my God, I'm shaking! Max is a wonderful man. It is Max, right? LORELA:
24	!! I get us set up. DEAN: So what's the movie for tonight? LORELA: Oh my god, a classic. RORY: The Joan and Melissa Rivers Story, starring .
25	hower, aren't you? SOOKIE: It was supposed to be a surprise. LORELA: Oh my God, this is amazing, Sookie, even for you. SOOKIE: Wait 'til you see
26	OPEN AT A BAKERY [Lorelai and Rory are taste-testing cakes.] LORELA: Oh my God, here! RORY: Wow. LORELA: With a crunch and a zing and a hm
27	ntenance. Kind of like that robot kid in A.I., only way less mother-obsessed. Oh my God, that kid was so annoying. I would've pushed him out of the car while
28	There's been an accident. I'm fine, but we're at the hospital. LORELA: Oh my God, what happened? MAX: We're coming out of the restaurant and we're
29	nd Mom. EMILY: Yes? LORELA: I should've told you before. EMILY: Oh my God, you didn't! LORELA: What? EMILY: You did! LORELA: I
30	t up? LORELA: You got it. LANE: Rory! [runs towards her] RORY: Oh my God, Lane! [runs towards her] LANE: I'm back! RORY: I see!

At the bottom of the window, there is a search bar with 'Oh my God' entered, and a 'Search term' label. The status bar at the very bottom shows 'Document1 - Microsoft Word'.

LANE: Wow, this is unbelievable. My wedding won't be this big.
RORY: Yeah.
LORELA: This is amazing! People live here?
RORY: This is Madeline's house.
LANE: Is this what your grandparents' house looks like?
RORY: No, I mean it's big, but it's not this Hearst castle.
LANE: I mean there should be a map or a tour guide or Robin Leech or something.
RORY: Hey Lane.
LANE: Yeah?
RORY: Thanks for coming with me.
LANE: Anytime. Oh my God, there's a pool table.
RORY: And a deejay.
LANE: It's like a teenage Sodom and Gomorrah.

'Family-friendly' emotionality

- ≠(Jesus) Christ, shit, f***
- 'Family-friendly' character of the show (funded by the *Family Friendly Programming Forum*)
- Influence of external factors
- Difference to other series/serials (*Sex and the City*, *The Wire*)

Gender-specific emotionality

- Female characters use more exclamatory emotive interjections (1009 occ.) than male characters (239 occ.)
- Mirroring conception of men as less 'emotional' than women
- 'Females are constructed in terms of an **emotional reading** ... they are expected to be bitchy, passionate, jealous, vindictive, affectionate, and so on.' (Burton 2000: 181)

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Gender-specific emotionality

- 'Male' vs 'female' interjections:

Graph not included for copyright reasons

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Construal of character identity

- Use of 'male' interjections by female speakers:
 - Marked female character: Paris Geller (harsh, insensitive, undiplomatic, blunt)
 - *Damn it* and *hell* among three most preferred interjections
 - Opposing a particular kind of sedimentation of gender identity in popular culture
 - Impact?

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Construal of character identity

- Use & non-use of interjections contributes to creation of characters identity:
 - Paris
 - Lorelai and Sookie (best friends) most 'emotional';
 - Rory (Lorelai's daughter) ≠ stronger expletives
 - Richard and Emily (Lorelai's parents): ≠ *geez, yuck*
 - 'Signature' interjections (Emily: *for X's sake*)

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Construal of character relationships

- Similar characters are related by their use & non-use of interjections.
 - Lorelai and Rory (mother-daughter): *oh my god, god*
 - Luke and Jess (uncle-nephew): *geez*
 - Richard and Emily (husband-wife): *for X's sake.*

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Some limitations

- Emotionality yes, but what emotions?
- Use of emotive interjections part of emotional practices but not the only resources;
- Multi-modal context and resources?
- Discursive, localised, dynamic, intersubjective construal of identity?
- Ideally, we need a 'three-pronged' (Bednarek 2008a, b, 2009) approach

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A three-pronged approach

- Extends previous linguistic research that combines both corpus and discourse analysis (Fairclough 2000, Barker & Galasiński 2001: 26, Holmes & Schnurr 2005, Baker 2006, Matthiessen 2006, Mautner 2008)
 - (1) large-scale computerized corpus analysis: macro-level
 - (2) semi-automated small-scale corpus analysis: meso-level
 - (3) manual case studies: micro-level

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A three-pronged approach

- Quantitative intertextual patterns (large-scale corpus analysis),
- Semantic-pragmatic patterning (small-scale corpus analysis),
- Textual development and the localised construal and performativity of identity (manual analysis).

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