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**YOUTUBERS' COMMUNICATIVE
CREATIVE PRACTICES:**
Navigating the platform's limitation on expletives and
swear words

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ABSTRACT

Pipsa Mänttari: YouTubers' creative communicative practices: navigating the platform's limitation on expletives and swearword

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This thesis focuses on what kind of strategies YouTubers use to avoid problematic words, such as swear words, words related sex and self-harm, on YouTube as they might otherwise cause demonetization of their videos. The data was collected from three different YouTube-channels, The Click, EmKay and Shaaba. These channels focus on posts from Reddit and from various different subreddits, which they are reading out loud on their videos. 15 videos were chosen from these channels, 5 per YouTube-channel, and they were analysed at the same time as the problematic words were being collected. How these words were being avoided was also being noted.

Three main strategies were discovered during the analysing process, these were changing the word, bleeping over it and ignoring the word. These strategies were used alongside two sub strategies, blurring and use of emoji. Out of these three YouTubers preferred to change the problematic word to something else, such as fuck to frick. However, YouTubers had their own preferences for the replacement words that reflected their identity.

The hypothesis of this thesis was that YouTubers would form communities of practices and/or discourse communities even if they never meet on the physical plane, which was condition on both of these terms because they did meet the other conditions, which were common goal and interests, shared enterprise and repertoire. However, other studies related to social media have proven that people are able to form these communities even on the virtual places, such as YouTube. The other premise of this thesis was that YouTubers need to establish their identities on YouTube in order to make them noticeable and one way of doing this would be algospeak, which is one form of netspeak that focuses on changing words to make them unrecognizable.

Key words and terms: community of practice, discourse community, algospeak, YouTube, YouTubers, Reddit

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Pipsa Mänttari: YouTubers' creative communicative practices: navigating the platform's limitation on expletives and swearword

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Tämän pro gradututkielman tavoite on selvittää minkälaisia strategioita tubettajat käyttävät videoissaan, kun he haluavat välttää sanoja, jotka ovat YouTuben mielestä haitallisia ja voivat aiheuttaa heidän videoidensa demonetisaation eli he eivät saa näistä videoista mainostuloja, jos niissä esiintyy haitallisia sanoja. Tällaisia sanoja ovat muun muassa, kirosanat, seksiin ja sukupuoleen liittyvät sanat sekä itsensä vahingoittamiseen liittyvät sanat. Tämän pro gradu-tutkielman data on kerätty kolmelta eri tubettajalta, nämä ovat The Click, EmKay ja Shaaba. Nämä tubettajat tekevät videoita, joissa he lukevat ääneen Reddit-foorumien postauksia monista eri subrediteistä. 15 videota valittiin näiltä tubettajilta eli 5 videota kanavaa kohden ja niitä analysoitiin samaan, kun haitallisia sanoja kerättiin. Myös se miten näitä sanoja vältettiin, merkittiin ylös.

Analysoinnin aikana kolme päästrategiaa löydettiin; nämä olivat sanan muuttaminen toiseksi, sanan yli piippaaminen ja sanan huomioimatta jättäminen. Näitä strategioita käytettiin kahden alastrategian, sumentamisen ja emojiiden käytön, rinnalla. Näistä kolmesta päästrategiasta tubettajat suosivat sanan muuttamista toiseksi, esimerkiksi fuck muutettiin frickiksi. Tubettajat eivät kuitenkaan aina käyttäneet samaa korvaus-sanaa vaan suosivat omiaan, jotka usein kuvasivat heidän identiteettiään.

Yksi tämän pro gradun hypoteeseista oli se, että tubettajat muodostaisivat erilaisia keskusteluyhteisöjä, vaikka he eivät koskaan tapaisikaan oikeassa elämässä, mikä oli molempien keskusteluyhteisöjen ehto, sillä tubettajat täyttivät muut ehdot. Nämä ehdot olivat yhteinen tavoite, samat kiinnostuksen kohteet, yhteinen yritys ja viimeisenä samankaltainen sanasto. Monet erilaiset sosiaaliseen mediaan liittyvät tutkimukset ovat kuitenkin osoittaneet, että ihmiset todella pystyvät muodostamaan tällaisia yhteisöjä myös virtuaalisissa yhteisöissä, kuten YouTubessa. Tämän pro gradun toinen hypoteesi oli se, että tubettajien täytyy luoda vahva identiteetti YouTubessa, jotta he saisivat huomiota ja heidän videoitansa katsottaisiin. Yksi tapa erottua muista tubettajista on algonpuhe, joka on yksi nettipuheen muoto, tässä nettipuheessa sanoja vaihdetaan toisiin, jotta erilaiset algoritmit eivät tunnistaisi niitä.

Avainsanat: keskusteluyhteisö, community of practice, discourse community, algonpuhe, YouTube, Tubettajat, Reddit

Tämän julkaisun alkuperäisyys on tarkastettu Turnitin Originality Check -ohjelmalla

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1. Introduction

The topic of this thesis is YouTubers' creative communicative practices: navigating the platform's limitation on expletives and swearwords. This thesis has two main research questions; first are YouTubers able to form communities of practice and/or discourse communities as they are not physically in contact with each other and secondly do they use similar strategies to avoid problematic words that would cause demonetization of their videos on YouTube. The third minor research question is do YouTubers use same algospeak because using same algospeak might indicate some sort of community and/or group identity. Due to YouTube's strict and also sometimes quite inconsistent guidelines regarding language usage on the platform YouTubers are not allowed to say certain words on their videos if they want to monetize these videos. These banned words are often simple swearwords and expletives, such as *shit*, *fuck* and *asshole*, which are according to YouTube considered to be harmful for younger audiences, although many viewers might not mind them as we hear curse words in our daily life and cannot possibly avoid them all. However, there are words, which people might not want their children or themselves to hear in YouTube videos, these words might include words such as *suicide*, *porn*, and *sexual offender*. Excluding these aforementioned words there are many other words and phrases that are not allowed on the platform in monetized content because YouTubers certainly can say them, but then demonetization of the video is expected as they go against guidelines.

YouTube comments that these guidelines exist because young children are able to see and hear videos containing these "bad" words on the platform. Some YouTubers think is just an excuse to police them and their language choices and not to change the existing guidelines because there is an app called YouTube Kids, which as its name implies is for videos aimed for children. YouTubers also have argued that not all videos should be child-friendly in the first place because some of them are clearly aimed for older audiences and not for children, for example videos containing Reddit content. Also, YouTube allows some questionable ads on the platform, which most often contain sexual elements in them, this to YouTubers seems to be quite unfair and double standards as these ads can be more problematic than saying couple swear words in a video. However, there has been no change to these guidelines and children still watch normal YouTube, which in turn has forced YouTubers to come up with different strategies to work around these strict guidelines. These strategies most often are changing the word in question, bleeping over the problematic word or ignoring it completely. Also,

quite often blurring the problematic word is necessary alongside the other strategies. However, this thesis focuses more on the spoken language than the written language and blurring is only mentioned briefly as an additional way of avoiding censorship.

For this thesis I have watched and analysed 15 videos from three different YouTubers, The Click, EmKay and Shaaba. In these videos, YouTubers read Reddit posts out loud from nine different subreddits, which contain words that YouTube does not allow on its platform, this means that they need to be changed. The purpose of this thesis is to explain how this changing is done, meaning what kind of strategies they use because it is already known why this changing is necessary; the YouTube language guidelines are the main reason. The other purpose of this thesis is to see whether there is some pattern in changing, bleeping over or ignoring certain words and do other YouTubers use same strategies with same words as that would indicate a community of practice and/or a discourse community.

This thesis has six main sections. Section 2 is the literature review of studies related to the topic of this thesis, for example what kind of research has been done relating to other social medias and other video viewing and sharing platforms in terms of language usage and why they might be useful to this thesis topic. In section 2 some relevant concepts are explained, such as communities of practice, discourse communities, algospeak and how identity is especially important for YouTubers and why these concepts are necessary in order to understand the language use of YouTubers. Section 3, data and methods, briefly explains what kind of platform YouTube is and why YouTubers need to alter their language in monetized content. Section 3 describes one of the partial datasources for this study, the Reddit forums. I drew my data from a particular genre of YouTube videos where the users read out Reddit posts and comment on them; therefore, a discussion of Reddit language is also relevant to this study. Section 3 also described the data sampling principles and procedures behind my choices of the YouTubers that I used as my datasource and who they are in YouTube community. My data is illustrated in more details in this section, for example subreddits, where the Reddit posts are from are explained. In the methods part of this section how the data was gathered is illustrated with examples.

In section 4 my findings are analysed from various different angles as there are sections dedicated to different strategies YouTubers used and different categories of words, such as swear words and words related to gender and sex. Section 4 also has several tables that show my findings in more detail. How YouTubers have chosen different strategies from each other is explained, for example what type of words they choose to censor the most, were they words

that I expected to be censored, for example swear words and expletives or were they something else entirely. Also, how these word choices might reflect their identity is discussed. After this there is the discussion section of this thesis, section 5, in it how these YouTubers form a community of practice and/or a discourse community is explained with illustrations, for example how YouTubers show their individual identity through their word choices. After this there is the concluding section, where my findings are explained in concise manner.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

In this section some key concepts are introduced and a few previous studies done in linguistic research on YouTube and other social media are reviewed as they are relevant in order to demonstrate how much power different social media platforms have on our language. Section 2.2 is dedicated to different research that has been done on the topic regarding linguistic research on social media in general and why these studies might be relevant to my thesis topic. After this there are sections that will focus on research done specifically on Twitter, YouTube and other video viewing and sharing platforms, especially in the linguistic field as they are most applicable regarding the topic of this thesis. In section 2.5 why identity and algospeak are relevant to my thesis topic YouTubers' creative communicative practices: navigating the platform's limitation on expletives and swearwords is discussed. Section 2.6 will focus on discourse communities and communities of practice, as they are closely linked together, and how these concepts relate to YouTubers' work as commentators. Section 2.7 is the summary of the literature review.

2.2 Linguistic research on social media

There has been much research regarding various social media platforms, which is expected as much of our time is spent on these platforms during the day and social media is also an interesting subject for many different fields, such as linguistic and psychology. This, of course, means that there has been much research about social media that are related to languages in general, for example Zhou (2024) multimodality and creativity in digital writing on Bilibili and Gillen and Merchant's (2013) study on Twitter as a dialogic social and linguistic practice. This is also expected as most social media applications and social media content revolves around language, whether spoken or written. There has not that many studies regarding language use in larger video media sites, such as YouTube and TikTok, most of them have focused on smaller sites, but there was one very interesting study on algospeak on TikTok by Steen et al. (2023) that was quite relevant for my research questions and this thesis in general.

2.2.2 Research on Twitter

Twitter, now known as X, is an American microblogging and social network service. It is one of the world's most popular social media platforms, according to Statista (N.D) Twitter is the fourteenth most visited network as of February 2025 with around 586 million visitors per month. Users of Twitter can share short posts, also known as tweets, photos and videos and like others' tweets. Twitter was bought by Elon Musk in October 2022. I included studies of Twitter in this section because I think that they demonstrate how different social media platforms in general can offer researchers much data to analyze from various different angles, such as the linguistic aspect of social media users, in other words how they use language in social media. Twitter has been researched much as it has an enormous amount of material and data, one of these studies is Gillen and Merchant's (2013) study on Twitter as a dialogic social and linguistic practice. This study, while not directly linked to this thesis, is still relevant because it demonstrates that social media groups online can function as discourse communities and communities of practice, even if these people never met on the physical plane. This study was also interesting because it shows that different social media platforms can be used as data sources in linguistic studies.

Killingsworth and Gilbertson (1992, 159) explains that "Language itself is the social medium par excellence. It not only provides the means by which social interaction is carried beyond the physical level; it also shapes the individual mind in the forms of a culture.". Discourse can be understood as a complex linguistic phenomenon, and it can be analysed from multiple angles. The term "discourse" can be understood in a broad or narrow sense depending on the research tradition in which this term is used. Discourse in a narrow sense is restricted to spoken language alone, i.e. to talk (Schneider, 2014, 1). Schneider (2014, 2) continues that "The focus may be on grammatical features, which are dealt with in discourse grammar, or it may be on aspects of semantic meaning, dealt with in discourse semantics."

While Twitter is a highly different social media platform than YouTube, they still share some similarities and basic functions between them; one is that people can choose who they want to follow, this in turn creates groups of people, who share the same interests as they follow the same person and mostly likely share some important values. This is the same for YouTube, where people who follow the same YouTuber feel that they are part of the same group, for example one YouTuber used as data for this thesis is Shaaba, who is a huge supporter of LGBTQ+ rights and people who follow her are also more likely to be part of LGBTQ+ or share same values as her regarding LGBTQ+. The difference between Twitter and YouTube is that when participating in Twitter, one expects to have a discursive relationship with others

as they enter into a conversation with them and respond, argue, agree or do something else with their message (Gillen & Merchant 2013, 57). This does not happen in YouTube as YouTubers cannot, at least not in their videos, answer to any messages, unless they are live streaming. However, sometimes people interact with each other in YouTube comment section, which could be argued to be similar to answering someone's tweet and through exchanging comments people are essentially participating in communities of practice.

2.2.3 Research on YouTube

YouTube is one of the oldest social media platforms as it was founded in 2005, which makes it almost 20 years old. It is also one of the most popular, according to Statista (N.D) it was in February 2025 the second most popular with 2.5 billion monthly active users, which is probably why it has been thoroughly researched from different angles on various fields. Varga (2022, 296) argues that “some social media influencers attract hundreds of users on social networks such as YouTube eager to watch them talk about the topic and their videos get tens of thousands of views and thousands of likes.”. Because YouTubers can gather much attention, and their videos are interesting to watch therefore their language usage is also interesting to researchers. The studies related to language and linguistics are most relevant to this research, but there has been general research regarding this topic, for example Arthurs et al.'s (2018) which focused on YouTube as a video viewing platform and while it is not directly linked to my thesis topic it provides some general information regarding YouTube. There also have been multiple studies related to linguistics on YouTube, for example Shiryayeva et al. (2019) study argued that YouTube is a discursive entity, Gannon & Prothero (2018) researched how beauty bloggers form a community of practice on YouTube, and Varga (2022) studied discursive identities of Romanian YouTubers.

2.3 General research on YouTube

Arthurs et al. (2018, 3) argues that while many social media platforms have been very short-lived YouTube has thrived, and it has become the second most visited website in the world, and it is one of the icons of popular culture. Today people are able to earn a living making videos on YouTube, a couple decades ago this would not have been possible. Being a recognized YouTuber is one form of being a celebrity, albeit usually a small one, and YouTubers are able to earn money from videos' ad revenue, however, they need to adhere to YouTube's strict guidelines in order to do so. Arthurs et al. (2018, 3-4) also points out that not many YouTubers are able to do this as the number of channels increases every year. Arthurs et al. (2018, 4) explains that “In its initial phase, scholarly work on YouTube focused mainly on the role of the platform in circulating audiovisual cultural materials generated by its users.”. It

was only a little later that interest in the use of language on YouTube gathered researchers' attention and even now there are not that many studies related linguistic aspect of YouTube. This is why the study made by Arthurs et al. (2018) was very good because it offered some general information regarding YouTube and studies made by others.

2.4 Linguistic research on YouTube, TikTok, BiliBili

As mentioned previously there has not been that much linguistic research regarding YouTube specifically, but there are few that are related to my thesis topic and some other studies regarding language usage in other video viewing platforms that are very similar to YouTube. YouTube is primarily studied through the lens of sociolinguistics, which is probably expected since YouTube's purpose is to share videos to viewers, and videos contain different aspects of society, for example culture and language, which are interesting research subjects (Shiryaeva et al., 2019, 2). Shiryaeva et al. (2019, 3) also argue that "We believe that YouTube is definitely a discursive entity, which entails communication happening not only on the platform, but also *about* the platform.". They (2019, 2) continue that many studies view YouTube as a communicative system that allows users to communicate their ideas, information, or any content, in certain ways. This point is relevant for my thesis because it focuses on how YouTubers are able communicate their messages to the viewers despite YouTube's difficult guidelines regarding language used in videos.

The other study was made by Gannon and Prothero (2018) in which they studied the community of practice of beauty bloggers and YouTubers', who focused on beauty products. Gannon and Prothero (2018, 592) were worried whether blogger and YouTuber networks would fit to the category of the community of practice as these people never met in the real world; they were only an online group. However, it was clear that even people, who only met online and did not necessarily communicate with each other could still qualify as communities of practices because they shared repertoire, interests and goals, all which are characteristic of a community of practice and necessary for it to form. This study helps to demonstrate that communities of practice can actually be also formed on online platforms, such as YouTube and that they are equally valid as communities of practices that meet in a physical plane. This point was essential for my thesis as one of the premises was that YouTubers form a community of practice.

The study also related to this thesis topic is Varga's (2022) discursive identities of Romanian YouTubers as I argue that YouTubers have some kind of group identity that causes them to share some words between them. However, it is expected that they have some differences. This study, while highly helpful, only focuses on discursive identities of YouTubers, but does

not actually comment very much on how they use language on YouTube, which is the main point of this thesis as it focuses on how YouTubers avoid using certain words and how they do this. It is expected that YouTubers share similarities with each other as they are a community, but at the same time they have their personal identities that will most likely affect their speech and other strategies, and I am interested to see how these similarities and differences are shown in their videos.

Other studies have focused on other video viewing platforms such as TikTok, Bilibili and Viki. Steen et al. (2023) studied algospeak used on TikTok. TikTok is a video viewing and sharing platform like YouTube, but it mostly focuses on shorter videos, and it has even stricter guidelines regarding language than YouTube and as a result of this TikTokers have started to use algospeak to avoid censorship of their videos. Algospeak generally means replacing misspelling or mispronouncing and abbreviating words (Steen et al., 2023, 1; Ostler, 2023, 185) and it also might happen on YouTube videos, although probably not as often due to it not having as strict guidelines as TikTok. This study had very similar points to my hypothesis that YouTubers use different strategies in order to avoid demonetization of their videos, although I had not considered that YouTubers might use algospeak because their replacement choices might not be in unison, which they need to be in order them to be considered the same algospeak. Of course, they might use algospeak unique to them.

Empirical analysis might yield results that contradict my initial hypothesis and if YouTubers do use same replacements it would indicate use of algospeak, but even if they are not my thesis and Steen et al. (2023) study just demonstrates that monetization does change people's speech and vocabulary; they just began to use words that are not considered as "harmful". This study by Steen et al. (2023) also proved that people can be very creative when they need to avoid saying some words. I think that this study is very relevant for my thesis because the research questions are remarkably similar, and I might find some similar replacements on both platforms, which would prove that algospeak is spreading to new social medias, which would be an interesting point.

One other interesting research done on video viewing platforms is Zhou's (2024) research on Bilibili. The Chinese video platform Bilibili is very similar to YouTube but it has one major difference; Bilibili allows users to post moving comments onto a playing video that are synchronized to the video timeline the video, these are also known as danmu- or danmaku-comments, this function that is not available on YouTube (Zhou, 2024, 371). Zhou (2024, 371) comments that "On *Bilibili*, members can type comments while watching videos and the comments in anonymous form will then be overlaid onto the moving screen, becoming an integral

part of the video for all users.”. This creates an environment of closeness and gives an opportunity for users to communicate with each other differently than on YouTube because they can share inside jokes, emotions and express their feelings more clearly (Zhou, 2024, 371).

This is somewhat similar to YouTubers, who have to be creative about their words during videos as YouTube has some difficult guidelines regarding language. They have their own inside jokes regarding certain words and the viewers know and recognize them, this might be one form of algospeak, which in turn creates a welcome and close community around them. Linguistically speaking this function is an interesting one as people can be creative about their comments and this in turn makes the videos worth researching. While this research is not directly linked to this thesis it shows that people can be very creative with language, whether it is spoken, as YouTubers do in their videos, or written as on Bilibili.

Wang (2022, 54) also studied how danmu-comments, which originally were used on a Japanese video website NicoNico, have social impact on the video viewers as these comments allowed people on Bilibili to form virtual communities. This study affirms the idea that people on a virtual plane are able to form different kinds of communities, which was an essential finding for my thesis as YouTubers do not meet on a physical plane. The danmu interfaces allows Bilibili users to gather together and form a virtual community (Wang, 2022, 55). Wang (2022, p.55) says that “All the registered Bilibili users form a big virtual community. Simultaneously, this community comprises countless ephemeral subcommunities attached to individual videos and relatively long-term subcommunities of interest: for instance, those made up of followers of a certain uploader.”. This is very similar to those, who watch YouTube videos, for example I belong to the big community of YouTube viewers, but simultaneously also belong to many subcommunities, such as those who watch The Click’s videos et cetera. This means that the YouTubers themselves belong to one big community of YouTubers and then to subcommunities of their own channels.

Locher and Messerli (2023) also researched one other video viewing platform. In this study Locher and Messerli (2023, 2) argued that Hallyu fans on video streaming platform Viki form a discourse community because even though they do not lack synchronous interaction, which would have made them a community of practice, they engage with other fans and exhibit mutual engagement. This study was helpful because it demonstrated that people on online communities are indeed able to form discourse communities, although this study focused on fans and not creators, which is my focus. It is essential in today’s society to agree that people often form strong connections and a strong group sense in online communities as there are many social media platforms to interact with and even without synchronous interaction with each

other people connect with each other (Locher & Messerli, 2023, 2). These studies made by Locher and Messerli (20023) and Gannon and Prothero (2018) have slightly different opinions on how communities of practices are formed on online communities, but as mentioned previously as all conditions are met then community is formed and both agree at least that online communities are able to form different linguistically important communities.

2.5 Identity

2.5.1 Identity establish through different means

One key concept that is essential for this thesis is identity; it is quite a complex term and can be explained in various ways. Kiesling (2013, 506) defines identity as “Identity is a state or process of relationship between self and other; identity is how individuals define, create, or think of themselves in terms of their relationships with other individuals and groups, whether these others are real or imagined.” Hyland (2015, 36) explains that identity is said to be created from the text we read and from the linguistic choices we make. However, Clarke and Kredens (2018, 81) argue that identity is a performance. This means that it is not something that people simply are, but rather something we do, and while language is a big part of it, since identity performance is made possible predominantly by language use, it not the only factor of our identity and there are also other important factors. Hyland (2010, 160) also agrees to this view by mentioning that the relationship between language and identity has been a major area of sociolinguistic investigation. This view is supported by the fact that identity is something we actively do by interacting with other people (Hyland, 2010, 181). Benwell and Stokoe (2006, 4) also agrees that identity is a performance, but they also add that identity is a public phenomenon that is interpreted by other people.

Hyland (2015, 36) continues that researchers tend to have different opinions on this matter; according to some identity is a performance and we have unchanging self behind us, existing in the background of our minds, while others think that identity is product of dominant discourses tied to institutional practices. Kiesling (2013, 506) claims that identities are not just constructed, but rather they are being renewed many times during people’s lifetimes and people desire this renewal because it allows them to present stable identities. This of course means that people can change their identities, although it is not always very easy, unless one considers an identity change to be, when people act differently around different people (Kiesling, 2013, 506). Bucholtz (1999, 209) argues that identities are fluid and not frozen, they can change and link us to particular communities. In other words, identities emerge in practice (Bucholtz, 1999, 209).

People also do not have just one identity like many would assume, but rather people have multiple different identities, they vary based on our surroundings, for example one behaves very differently in a home setting than on the job (Jones & Themistocleous, 2022, 123). Jones and Themistocleous (2022, 126) continue that identity can never be entirely individual because we, humans, depend on a range of social expectations and therefore even those who consider themselves to be “outliers” are actually not as unique as they would like to think. Jones and Themistocleous (2022, 126) even argue that some people see identity as a form of identification and its purpose is to indicate the things we identify with. Identity is not some inorganic predispositions of persons, but it is rather something that individuals must create or construct in other ways (Kiesling, 2013, 506).

Although, as Hyland (2015, 36) mentions, while identity may be a performance and can change as times change, it is also at the same time a performance which is re-inscribed in us over time. Jones and Themistocleous (2022, 124) explain that one of the most important equipment we have for performing our social identities are the resources we have in our communicative repertoires, for example codes, register and gender, all of these construct our identities. In social linguistics this means how we talk in different situations, which then forms our identity and is called style (Jones & Themistocleous, 2022, 124). Hyland (2015, 36) continues that “It involves taking on and shaping the discourses and practices of our communities to construct a self both distinctive from and similar to those of its members.”. De Fina (2015, 352) also agrees with this view as they mention that identity is literally in the doing, rather than in the thinking. Narrative and identity are also often regarded as closely connected. Narratives can be seen as a good way to express identity, and narrative analysts have gone so far as to argue that the stories we tell mold us into what we are (De Fina, 2015, 351).

Hyland (2010, 160) argues that “Identity is a person’s relationship to his or her social world, a joint, two-way production and language allows us to create and present a coherent self to others because it ties us into webs of commonsense, interests, and shared meanings.”. Language is part of our identity, and we present ourselves through it, the way we talk and also write is an important part of constructing ourselves, meaning how we want others to see us and what kind of person we are (Hyland, 2010, 181). The way we talk and write are according to Hyland (2010, 181) the most obvious and unselfconscious displays of our engagement with the world as they highlight how deeply they are embedded in interactions and sociality. This way of thinking is interesting because it would mean that the word choices YouTubers make reflect their own personalities and their interactions with others. It is also interesting to see whether their cultural background affects their word choices as the YouTubers used in this

thesis are from different countries, for example do they use words associated with certain parts of the world.

Jones and Themistocleous (2022, 133) also argue that people might in fact be performing their social identities to certain audiences because that particular identity fits to that situation better and will be better received by the audience. This theory is strongly linked to YouTubers because for them it is important to be liked by their audience and certain words or actions might make them more liked or more hated. De Fina (2015, 359) adds that “Discourse identities are related to people’s roles as speakers and refer to discourse positions such as storyteller or audience member.”. YouTubers then would fall to the storyteller category as they do not receive any response to what they say, and because they are basically telling stories to the viewers. Jones and Themistocleous (2022, 67) explain that identity is not something static, but rather something very flexible. Bucholtz (1999, 210) adds to this notion that “identities are rooted in actions rather than categories, the community of practice model can capture the multiplicity of identities at work in specific speech situations more fully than is possible within the speech community framework.”.

All these different definitions of identity are correct, but at the same time they define identity very differently, which makes it hard to understand what identity really is and is language really as important as they make it out to be. Of course, it is known that language is an important factor to express ourselves clearly and freely. However, to this thesis Clarke and Kredens’ (2018, 81) definition of identity is most helpful as data used on this thesis focuses on how YouTubers use creative practices to change how they speak and express themselves on YouTube.

2.5.2 Different identities in different situations

There is also the concept of personal and professional identities. Some scholars consider professional identity to be an identity that is performed inside the workplace context, while others think that professional identity is performed outside of the workplace (Clarke & Kredens, 2018, 83). The concept of professional identity is also true for YouTubers even if some would think otherwise, in fact it might be even more important to them than to others as their whole career depends on how well they are being received by the viewers. Clarke and Kredens (2018, 83) continue that “studies emphasise the emergent nature of professional identity within the institutional context, and therefore examine professional identity construction through the performance of work practice.”. There are also concepts of individual and collective identities, which are symbolised in genres, so that speaking and writing in community-

specific ways can proclaim both individuality and membership of a group and a culture (Hyland, 2015, 36). Hyland (2015, 36) also proclaims that identity must involve proximity and that it depends on something to identify with. Hyland (2010, 160) adds that “This means that it is through our use of community discourses that we claim or resist membership of social groups to define who we are in relation to others. Identity therefore helps characterize both what makes us similar to and different from each other.”. Benwell and Stokoe (2006, 243) claim that people might have different identities on the Internet than they have in the so-called real world; they say that on the Internet identity is playful, creative, impressive and limitless. Some call the identity people can have on the Internet the virtual identity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, 243).

People probably do change their speech and styles to fit certain situations and tasks, and most people would at least pay attention to their speech even if they do not change their speech style (Meyerhoff, 2011, 32). This, paying attention to one’s speech, is especially true for YouTubers because due to YouTube’s guidelines they cannot express themselves freely and must alter their speech. Meyerhoff (2011, 32) also adds people most often speak with the audience in the mind, for example a university professor would not use same words to describe some concept to university students and to kindergarten students. This is also true for YouTubers because speaking to different audiences is what they do as a job, although they never see their audiences, they can speak to them and sometimes receive answers if they stream live, but otherwise they never interact with them in real time. Still, they speak with their audiences in mind, for example The Click often uses words that are pronounced incorrectly because they are “professionally funny” and their audience expects them, although they also use them to avoid demonetization.

And lastly, as Meyerhoff (2011, 32) argues that “the ... idea that different linguistic styles present different personas that the speaker identifies with.”. Meyerhoff (2011, 46) continues that important aspect of this view of people changing their speech styles to fit each situation is that people need to consider the relationships and attitudes between the speakers, in other words this view present the speaker as some kind of thinking agent that has unknow goals regarding the relationship. Conversations can also have different genres, for example, informal chat, business talk and lectures and this in turn means that people can have different acts of identity in specific genres (Coupland, 2007, 113). Coupland (2007, 113) also adds that “genres are typically sustained by particular communities of practice.”. and that “Personal and relational identities can be forged and refined linguistically in subtle ways within a consolidated genre

and community of practice.”. Discourse communities and their members also employ genres to realize communicatively the goals of their communities (Swales, 1990, 308).

2.5.3 Algospeak as a way to avoid censorship and as a sign of group identity

Due to different social media apps’ and websites’ language guidelines content creators have to be careful and occasionally quite creative regarding their word choices. Some social medias consider certain words to be harmful, and they cannot be used on the platform; however, it is hard to determine what kind of language can be considered to be harmful and what kind of language people use is only meant for engagement and clicks (Cohen, 2025, 182). Cohen (2025, 182) also argues that “Content moderation is a sticky subject for nearly every platform. There are usually multiple safety teams under the departments of trust and safety, legal, policy, or moderation and they play incredibly important roles in our user experience, most attempting to maintain a collective reality where we can coexist online.”. There is no answer to previously mentioned question and because of this content creators must just follow these inconsistent guidelines and came up with different replacements for problematic words, which for them might be difficult, but for linguistics very interesting because these replacements often are very creative and can be studied. Social media users and content creators have multiple different strategies to go around these guidelines, for example many use algospeak.

The social media app TikTok is well known for its strict language guidelines and “content aware” algorithm, which in turn causes them to have much moderation on the videos (Cohen, 2025, 199). Content aware algorithm basically means that it filters words used on screen, whether they are spoken or written and decides if they are harmful, this then causes some changes to the problematic words (Cohen, 2025, 199). Cohen (2025, 201) gives a couple of good examples of these changes, for example *lesbian* is changed to *le\$bian*, which the algorithm reads as le-dollar-bean, which does not trigger the algorithm, this happens because it cannot parse the dollar symbol as an S. When it is clear that using the term le\$bian for lesbian is safe to use others will adopt it and it becomes a new word/term used by the community (Cohen, 2025, 201).

Problematic words certainly exist, for example people probably do not want to hear racist slurs or ableist words in their videos, but TikTok also considers words such as *lesbian* and *nipples* to be problematic, which they are not, although it is possible that avoiding these words also has encouraged some new words inventions to use in conversations. Because of these aforementioned issues TikTokers have chosen to use algospeak in their videos in order to talk about certain issues, such as abortion and self-harm. Cohen (2025, 199) explains that the term algospeak was coined by Taylor Lorenz and it basically is a code speak designed to turn

words or phrases into “brand-safe lexicon” that helps users “avoid getting their posts removed or down-ranked by content moderation systems.”. Ostler (2023, 185) also adds that “Algospeak also uses code words or emojis to refer to forbidden topics.”. Simply put algospeak is one form of netspeak that often uses abbreviating, misspelling, or substituting specific words (Steen et al., 2023, 1) Algospeak is also used to combat misinformation about topics such as Covid-19, for example during the pandemic people on TikTok and on YouTube used words like panorama, panini and panda, when they meant the pandemic (Ostler, 2023, 186), which make the context unclear if one does not know the real meaning of the replacement. Algospeak has exceeded a certain level of playfulness that is often used in videos and is now used to combat moderation (Steen et al, 2023, 13).

Cohen (2025, 199) continues that content creators and users of TikTok must have in-group knowledge of the language in order to understand algospeak used in the videos. Also, Steen et al. (2023, 13) argues that algospeak, unlike other netspeaks, which refer to the jargon, abbreviations, and emoticons typically used by frequent Internet users, such as Chatspeak, Leetspeak, or LOLspeak, is a community-based means of communication. The fact that certain groups use specific words and only members of it understand them is probably a marker of group identity, which is why I mention it as it would indicate that the YouTubers I chose have some kind of group identity if they use algospeak in their videos. YouTubers in general use algospeak, but in lesser amount than TikTokers because YouTube has not, at least yet, banned words such as words related to LGBTQ+ issues that TikTok has banned because they are afraid to upset certain vocal minorities (Cohen, 2025, 200). I am interested to see how much algospeak I will find in my data as that would indicate some sort of group identity as only members of certain groups would know what the words mean. Although, this group identity would also apply to the viewers as they must know what YouTubers are saying in order to understand them. And if this is not a marker of group identity it at least would imply that YouTubers form a group of practice and/or a discourse community as members of these communities share repertoire.

2.6 Discourse communities and communities of practices

2.6.1 Discourse community term defined

Discourse community is a term often used by theorists of various different fields, although linguistics sometimes calls it a speech community, but generally they are thought to be the same (Killingsworth & Gilbertson, 1992, 160). The term discourse community is most commonly used or mentioned in research papers instead of other terms as it includes many forms

of text generation, speaking, writing, and graphics and text recognition, listening, recording, and interpreting, while at the same time it is narrow enough to exclude more basic forms of communication, such as electronic or animal signal (Killingsworth & Gilbertson, 1992, 162). In the early 2000s a new term community of practice was often used instead of or alongside discourse community and some scholars thought that it was more adaptable than discourse community.

This is one reason why I use both terms in this thesis and also because these two concepts are fairly similar to each other, although they have minor differences. Porter (1986, 38) defines discourse community as “A "discourse community" is a group of individuals bound by a common interest who communicate through approved channels and whose discourse regulated.”. However, Watts (2008, 41) defines the term discourse community slightly differently than others: “a discourse community as “a set of individuals who can be interpreted as constituting a community on the basis of the ways in which their oral or written discourse practices reveal common interests, goals and beliefs, i.e. on the degree of institutionalisation that their discourse displays.”. The concept of discourse community, while very seductive to some, can be seen as both stable and utopian, but at the same time it conceals the language and the social practices that take place within it and distracts researchers from examining how its internal workings may be recognized and studied (Devitt et al. 2003, 541).

2.6.2 Discourse communities now

Devitt et al. (2003, 541) argue that at that time, 2003, discourse communities were one of the most hotly contested notions in the field of linguistics because many thought that the concept of discourse community was too utopian, hegemonic, and abstract. Devitt et al. (2003, 541) continue “Abstracted from real social situations, discourse communities may appear stable to advocates and critics assuming an imaginary consensus and a shared purpose that do not reflect real experience within communities.”. However, the term is still being used, and it is thought that an individual may belong to several professional, public, or personal discourse communities. The same goes for communities of practices as people usually belong to several different ones at the same time (Eckert & McGonnell-Ginet, 1992, 464). A few simple examples of discourse communities are the members of the same family, co-workers in the same workplace, and researchers in the same field of study. The approved channels can be also called forums; these forums have specific rules for members to follow. The rules are formed by the history of the forum (Porter, 1986, 38). Porter (1986, 39) concludes that “These rules may be more or less apparent, more or less institutionalized, more or less specific to each

community.” Discourse communities can also be firmly established, for example the scientific community, the medical profession and the justice system (Porter, 1986, 38).

Discourse communities can be divided to two different categories, local and global. Killingsworth and Gilbertson (1992, 162) mention that local discourse communities are groups who habitually work together in companies or other groups defined by specific demographic features. Global discourse communities, by contrast are defined exclusively by a commitment to particular kinds of action and discourse, regardless of where and with whom they work (Killingsworth & Gilbertson, 1992, 162). Global discourse communities owe their existence and maintenance to high technology and to international systems of communication (Killingsworth & Gilbertson, 1992, 169). YouTube and YouTubers would fall to global discourse community category as most YouTubers do not work on same physical place, even if they work for the same channel, for example EmKay has members in Australia and America.

While it is not always clear what discourse communities are due to these different definitions, what they do is a little clearer; discourse communities produce and consume discourse, and they prefer certain kinds of discourse over others (Killingsworth & Gilbertson, 1992, 165). Watts (2008, 42) also argues that “If it can be demonstrated that the “interests, goals and beliefs” that the discourse practices reveal are indeed common, then the notion of “discourse community” can be set alongside the more flexible and more fluid notion of “community of practice”.”.

2.6.3 Communities of practices

Communities of practice on the other hand are specific kind of social networks that are characterised by mutual engagement, a jointly negotiated enterprise, and a shared repertoire (Mey-erhoff, 2011, 200). According to Van Herk (2018, 17) communities of practice involve people on a very local level, for example people who work in the same lab and because of this share similarities in their speech. Joneses and Themistocleous’ (2022, 67) definition of a community of practice is slightly different from others because according to them a community of practice is “a group of people who come together because they share a common cause, interest, or mission”. Jones and Themistocleous (2022, 67) continue that “The idea of the community of practice enables us to observe how people make use of the different communicative resources in their repertoires strategically, to index membership in different communities at different times.”.

Concept of communities of practice was also borrowed from another field, the social sciences, into the field of sociolinguistics and it was originally developed as part of a social theory of

learning (Meyerhoff, 2011, 200; Van Herk, 2018, 20). Van Herk (2018, 20) retorts that a community of practice is “defined as a group with mutual engagement in a jointly negotiated enterprise, involving (or leading to) a shared repertoire.”. Mutual engagement means coming together in direct personal contact, a shared repertoire includes speech styles and other social practices, and a jointly negotiated enterprise means that the members of the community are working together towards the same goal or are defining and satisfying some specific enterprise (Meyerhoff, 2011, 200). Van Herk (2018, 20) argues that members of communities of practices do a lot of conscious work to build and maintain their linguistic identities, which is true, at least for YouTubers as they cannot speak like they normally do due to YouTube’s guidelines and need to make an effort to change their speech.

Meyerhoff (2011, 200) mentions that “The requirement for mutual engagement is a stricter measure for membership than is required for either social networks or social classes. The spheres of social engagement that define a community of practice are much narrower than anything an entire social class could participate in.”. Members of communities of practices need to get together in order to engage in their shared practices, which makes it difficult to know whether YouTubers can form communities of practices (Meyerhoff, 2002, 527). Although, as mentioned before some other studies have proved that people in virtual communities are able to form communities of practices. Shared repertoire in more detail means things such as shared ways of pronouncing words, shared jargon or slang, and in-jokes, it also means that people can continue conversations over long periods of time, for example days or weeks without people needing to reorient to the topic (Meyerhoff, 2011, 200). Meyerhoff (2011, 200) also argues that people can have shared repertoire without meeting face-to-face and while shared repertoire is needed for community of practice, people need also to meet other conditions at least somehow. The jointly negotiated enterprise is the most crucial criterion for defining a community of practice because without it, the community of practice would be classified under the category of social networks (Meyerhoff, 201, 200). Van Herk (2018, 20) also adds the idea of brokers, who are people who participate in multiple communities of practices and doing so bring new ideas to other communities. In YouTube these people might be for example, YouTubers, who also do TikTok-videos and bring TikTok algospeak to YouTube, which then becomes the shared repertoire of community of practices.

Some might still argue that YouTubers cannot form discourse communities or communities of practice as people most likely do not meet on physical plane, however YouTubers share same or similar repertoires, as they have to adhere to YouTube’s guidelines regarding language. They have the same goal, have their channel grow and gather more followers because this will

mean more revenue for them. In other words, YouTubers are bound by common interests. And thirdly, they work for the same company, YouTube, although they do not physically meet each other, but that also happens in other workplaces. This means that they meet all necessary criteria and only do not meet in the physical plane. However, as has been established in the earlier sections of this thesis, this condition is not a must, and virtual communities of practices exist.

2.7 Summary

To summarize this literature review, there has been multiple studies and research on social media and on YouTube in particular. Although, it appears that there has not been a study on how YouTubers need to alter their language in order to avoid demonetization of their videos. However, there has been a study on TikTokers' algospeak, a topic that is similar to this thesis topic, which was a useful source, even if the media was different. Also, other studies on social media were very helpful, for example how users of BiliBili are able to comment directly to the video they are watching, which in turn creates an environment of closeness because they can share inside jokes and other comments. This is somewhat similar to how YouTubers replace words, that YouTube does not allow its platform, because they are often very funny, when thinking about the original word, for example one YouTuber uses the word *PDF-file* for *pedophile* and people, who have been watching them for a long time recognises these words. The studies on Twitter and beauty YouTubers were also very informative because they demonstrated that online groups can in fact also form communities of practice and discourse communities even though they never meet face-to-face.

Identity is one essential concept of this thesis, and it turns out that it is quite complex, for example Clarke and Kredens (2018, 83) argue that identity is a performance, it something we do rather than something we are, while De Fina et al. (2015, 352) argue that identity and narrative are closely related to each other and that people essentially tell narratives about themselves. Hyland (2010, 160) agrees to Clarke and Kredens view about identity and how it something we do and how language and identity are linked together. However, Hyland (2015, 36) also argues that people have different views on this matter and the concept of identity can indeed be quite complex. People also can have different identities, for example our professional identity is most likely different than our personal identity. I also included algospeak to identity section because it might be a marker of group identity and even if it is not, it shows that content creators share repertoire.

Discourse community is another essential concept for this thesis. Porter (1986, 38) argues that “Discourse community is a group of individuals bound by a common interest who communicate through approved channels and whose discourse regulated.”. While it is not always clear what discourse communities are, what they do is a little clearer; as Killingsworth & Gilbertson (1992, 165) mention “Discourse communities produce and consume discourse. Discourse communities prefer certain kinds of discourse.”. Communities of practices are closely related to this thesis because YouTubers form a community of practice. Van Herk (2018, 20) argues that a community of practice is “defined as a group with mutual engagement in a jointly negotiated enterprise, involving (or leading to) a shared repertoire.”.

3. Data and methods

3.1 Introduction

The data this thesis uses as a means to explain how YouTubers work around YouTube’s guidelines comes from three different YouTube-channels, The Click, EmKay and Shaaba. These three channels offer an insight into YouTubers’ struggles with YouTube’s guidelines as content creators sometimes need to create quite creative ways to express themselves in the platform. 3.2 section of my data and methods explains shortly what my data is. 3.3 section of data and methods explains what kind of platform YouTube is and why for YouTubers it is important to follow YouTube’s guidelines if they want to avoid demonetization of their videos. In 3.4 section what kind of platform Reddit is briefly explained because while I directly do not use Reddit in my thesis, the videos used as a datasource featured Reddit posts from various subreddits, and to understand these posts it is necessary to explain how Reddit and these subreddits work. 3.5 section comments on how the YouTubers were selected for this thesis, and the three channels will be briefly introduced. 3.6 section is dedicated to the various subreddits that the videos had and why these videos with these particular subreddits were specifically chosen for this thesis. In 3.7 section how the data was gathered from these videos is explained. Section 3.8 is the summary of the data and methods.

3.2 Data

My data is from 15 different YouTube videos made by three different YouTube-channels, The Click, EmKay and Shaaba and all these videos feature Reddit posts from various different subreddits. In these videos YouTubers read out loud posts they have looked up from Reddit. The Reddit post is shown in the video, which means that I, personally, did not go to Reddit and only saw what the YouTuber had recorded. However, as YouTubers show only complete posts it was not necessary to check the original post on Reddit in order to have the text I

needed. Videos range from 25 minutes to 55 minutes, which mean that they are on the relatively long side for a YouTube video. These videos feature posts from nine different subreddits; subreddits with short descriptions can be seen in the tables 1 and 2 below. There are two tables because the short descriptions did not fit well to one table and due to this, I decided to create two tables where the descriptions were more easily seen. There is more detailed description of these subreddits in section 2.6. The data this thesis uses is words and short phrases that have been changed, replaced or ignored in the videos because YouTube does not allow them on its platform on monetized content due to its language guidelines. The purpose of this thesis is to find out what kind of words were changed, what kind of strategies the YouTubers used to do this and is there some similarities or differences between YouTubers on how they avoided these problematic words in their videos.

Table 1) Subreddits part 1

Subreddit	r/Self	r/EntitledParents	r/AmITheAsshole	r/Talesfrom-retail	r/JustNoMILs
Description	Posts about oneself in general	Posts about parents that think they are entitled to whatever they want without consequences	Posts that ask whether they are in the wrong or not	Posts made by those who work in retail or those that have witnesses some questionable behaviour in shops	Posts about unhinged in-laws, mostly mothers-in-law
Number of videos	1	3	4	1	1

Table 2) Subreddits part 2

Subreddit	r/Confessions	r/OffMyChest	r/ProRevenge.	r/NuclearRevenge
Description	Posts about confessing something anonymously	Posts that want to get of something off their chests, can be about almost anything	Posts dealing with revenge stories	Posts dealing with even more extreme revenges than r/ProRevenge
Number of videos	2	1	1	1

I am aware that the number of subreddits is not equal to the number of videos and that some subreddits are featured more often than others. However, as the purpose of this thesis is to find out how YouTubers change their speech because of YouTube's guidelines, the subreddits

are not that important, how they speak and how they change their speech or words is more important than the subreddit they have read the post from. All these subreddits have relatively long posts, at least a couple paragraphs long, around couple hundred words or more, which was an important factor in deciding whether I decided to watch the video or not. Some subreddits have only short posts or pictures, which would not have been helpful for this thesis as I needed text and speech in order to see how YouTubers deal with problematic words. Longer posts meant more text, which in turn meant more speech from the YouTuber as they read these posts aloud in their videos.

Although, it should be mentioned that they also comment their own thoughts and views regarding the post they have read, which means that they also express themselves more freely and do not just read some posts. However, even when speaking freely they need to be careful of their language as YouTube does not allow certain words in its platform. These problematic words and phrases that appear in these videos are used as data in this thesis. Most of them are used to replace words used in the Reddit post, for example *fuck* is often replaced with *frick*. Some of these words and short phrases YouTubers used in their own free speech, which means that they did not appear in the Reddit post, but quite often they were identifiable, for example *shait* instead of *shit*. There might be some cases of using replacements for swear words that I did not notice or did not recognize as I am not Native English speaker, but I imagine that the amount I might have missed is quite insignificant.

3.3 YouTube

YouTube is an American social media and online video sharing and viewing platform owned by Google. YouTube was founded in February 2005 by three PayPal employees, but it was soon, in less than two years, bought by Google, it cost Google \$1.65 billion (Arthurs et al. 2018, 3). Many social media sites have since come and gone, but YouTube's success as one of the most used social media sites has continued and now at the time of the writing of the cited source (2018) it is the second most visited website in the world (Arthurs et al. 2018, 3). In 2024 according to Statista.com (N.D) YouTube was still the second most visited website with around 3.64 billion unique visitors per month. Miller (2007, section 1.1) retorts that "YouTube is so pervasive and so innovative that it was named Invention of the Year by *Time* magazine in 2006. That's not too bad for a site that first came to life only the year before.". Dunna et al. (2022, 1) adds to this that YouTube has around 2 billion active users and 52 million content creators, which is quite a lot for social media platforms, and it clearly is dominating the video sharing and viewing marketplace. YouTube has been successful because its users are able to upload their own videos, which old media would call amateur videos, and not

just relying on professional made videos, which do exist on the platform, however, most videos even today are made by individual users and not by professionals (Arthurs et al. 2018, 5). This was only possible because Web 2.0 allowed users to generate their own content and to share it with others on platforms such as YouTube. It was also much easier to use, and multiple online platforms appeared, this important part of Web 2.0 is called the social web.

YouTube has algorithms that show users certain videos more often than others. Arthurs et al. (2018, 6) argue that “Although Google wants to maintain the distinctiveness of YouTube’s brand as an ‘open’ platform, the hidden working of its algorithm has always influenced what gains most visibility.”. YouTubers earn money through advertisements that are shown in the videos and sometimes they have their own sponsors. Dunna et al. (2022, 2) argue that content creators are becoming more dependent on YouTube as a source of their revenue and this makes the (algorithmic) determinations of what constitutes “advertiser friendly content” in other words, monetizable content, very critical. Arthurs et al. (2018, 7) explains that “YouTube is now characterized as a paradigmatic example of a hybrid commercial environment where user-generated content production is efficiently tied to forms of monetization.”. YouTube has now a special role thanks to an advertising model that facilitates new forms of monetization based on the engagement of users (Arthurs et al., 2018, 7). It is quite fascinating that before YouTube was acquired by Google it did not earn much revenue from advertisements, but after Google bought it, its revenue grew (Miller, 2007, section 1.1).

Today, unlike in YouTube’s early days, it is possible to earn money by making YouTube content. Dunna et al. (2022, 2) argue that becoming a YouTuber or an independent media creator is now a very popular and a viable career option as it is now possible to earn a living through making videos on various topics. However, YouTubers are not allowed to express themselves freely if they want to monetize their videos because YouTube has guidelines regarding the language use in its platform and some words are considered to be harmful for younger audiences. According to Dunna et al. (2022, 3) “Monetization is only possible on content meeting YouTube’s advertiser-friendly content guidelines These guidelines impose further restrictions on the use of profanity, violent, graphic, sexually suggestive, demeaning, tobacco-related, and controversial or sensitive content in videos or their metadata.”.

Demonetization on the other hand, refers to the cases when YouTube’s algorithm removes all or some monetization features from a creator’s video because the YouTuber has violated guidelines, which in turn causes them to lose revenue that YouTubers would otherwise earn

from the videos (Kingsley et al. 2022, 5). One good example of demonetization is that some swear words, words related to sex, such as intimate body parts, even simple words like *boobs* are not allowed if the video is monetized because they are seen inappropriate for the younger audience and if they appear on the video it is possible that the video will be demonetized.

This means that YouTubers have to be careful of their word choices and work around these strict guidelines, which often create some quite creative expressions for the problematic elements. For example, the word *pedophile* is on the forbidden words list and because of this some YouTubers use the word *PDF-file* instead. In the case of *pedophile* its orthographic form is the problem, in other words how its spelled triggers the algorithm and this is why *PDF-file* does not trigger it, even though they sound and look fairly similar. Also, phonologically *PDF-file* sounds very much like *pedophile*, which allows viewers to understand what the YouTuber is talking about without triggering any algorithms. Algorithms see *PDF-file* as a harmless word. One other good example would be *suicide*. *Suicide* is on the forbidden words list because it indicates self-harm or violence; they are topics which are regarded as too sensitive to discuss on YouTube and therefore many words related to them are forbidden, although sometimes it is hard to know what kind of word is related to these topics. One YouTuber used to say *game over*, when they meant *suicide*, but this was quite controversial as life is not a game, where one can start over and now, they use quite often the expression *fell of the flat Earth*, which is a creative way to express *suicide*, although if one does not know what they are talking about then the meaning is lost. This phrase would indicate the use of algospeak, which is understood by members of the same community. There is one list of words forbidden on YouTube, but it was created 6 years ago and multiple redditors mention that it is highly unreliable because it lists words, such as *an area* and *activation*. I did not use this list in this thesis, but there is a direct link for the Reddit page that has it in the appendix on page 82.

3.4 Reddit

Reddit is an American website, it is a social news aggregation, content rating, and forum social network. Panek (2022, 3) claims that “Reddit belonged to a class of websites known as “social news websites.” From the beginning, this was a misnomer: social news websites aggregated links to more than just news stories.”. The users of Reddit are known as Redditors, and these people post content, such as long stories, pictures, memes and other things to various different subreddits. These posts are then upvoted or downvoted by other users. Redditors also can each other awards. Reddit is also one of the most visited websites on the Internet and

in 2024 according to Statista (N.D) the sixth most visited website with 1.03 billion unique visitors per month.

Panek (2022, 3) also adds to why Reddit has been so successful “The constant replenishment of novel content is at the heart of many popular social media platforms’ appeal and, in part, the reason why they displace traditional news outlets in the media diets of some internet users. This replenishment is made possible by registered users’ ability to easily submit new links to Reddit, colloquially known as “posts.””. Panek (2022, 4) continues that also one reason for Reddit’s success is its modularity, which set it apart from other social media sites, such as X, formally known as Twitter, and Facebook, in Reddit all the post are categorized under different topic-based lists also known as subreddits and not as a single list of posts. People are also able to comment on other people’s posts.

3.5 YouTubers

Three different YouTube channels were chosen as a source for the data of this thesis, they were The Click, EmKay and Shaaba. These channels were already familiar to me as I have watched their content for several years and I knew that they focused on different subreddits, which often have problematic words that need to be changed in some ways. There are probably hundreds and maybe even thousands of channels that do this, but I wanted to focus on the channels that I already was familiar with because that meant that I had already seen some of the videos that I chose for this thesis. This meant that I was able to listen and watch them more carefully as I did not need to focus on the stories. These three channels were also chosen on the basis that first they are still active, which means that they upload videos at least once a week and have existed at least a couple years.

Secondly, their channels focus on Reddit stories or on different subreddits that feature longer post, at least a couple paragraphs long, such as r/AmITheAsshole or r/EntitledParents as these longer posts offer better chances encountering words or phrases that YouTube does not allow in its platform if the videos are being monetized. Also, in these kinds of posts it is easier to notice the use of foul or swear words as they are shown in the video if they were only read out loud without text it would be much harder to notice them as I could not always tell what is a problematic word and what is not. This thesis, however, also uses as data, words that are not necessarily on the Reddit post, but they are spoken by the YouTuber if they are recognized as words that have been changed to more YouTube-friendly word, for example *shit* to *shait*. These kinds of words are quite easily recognized as replacements for more problematic words.

Thirdly, they speak English as their mother tongue or as a second language. Fourthly, making YouTube videos is their job and how they earn their living. Making YouTube videos as a job means that they need to follow YouTube guidelines regarding language used on the platform because if they do not follow the guidelines their videos will be demonetized, and they will not receive any ad revenue. YouTubers, who only make videos as a hobby can make videos basically about anything and do not need to alter their language because they are not receiving any ad revenue. Words that YouTube deems to be problematic must be changed, bleeped over or ignored completely. Lastly, their videos are on the longer side, at least 20 minutes because this allows more Reddit posts per video and more possible words or phrases that had needed to be changed from the original Reddit post. These three YouTube channels have all the requirements. For this thesis I analysed 15 videos from nine different subreddits.

3.5.1 The Click

The Click is a Swedish YouTuber, whose real name is Mark Deck. He started his YouTube channel in 2009 under the name Crazyshooting and made videos featuring different games, such as Call of Duty, Minecraft and Amnesia (YouTube.fandom.com, N.D). The Click according to youtube.fandom.com (N.D) soon gathered small, but devoted, community of subscribers, who eagerly waited his next videos. The Click started to focus on his channel more during the corona virus pandemic and since then it has been his fulltime job. Today The Click is mostly known for making videos featuring various subreddits, such as r/AmITheAsshole, r/Holup and r/Facepalm and his videos are much longer than in his early days. Youtube.fandom.com (N.D) mentions that “He became known for his hilarious voice acting skills and his all-round cursed demeanor, which tends to make the viewers feel uncomfortable but laugh at the same time. His content is made for mature audiences.”.

The Click is very fond of plushies and has several plushies made by Makeship, such as the landshark Mango and the Emotional Support Demon. The Click’s introduction phrase is “Well, good evening laddies, lassies, and lassos, and welcome to The Click.” or some variant of this if the video is made, for example in the morning. The phrase, laddies, lassies, and lassos is meant to include all different genders including non-binary people (the lassos). The Click is the second largest YouTube-channel used as a data in this thesis. The Click uploads videos two to three times a week. The Click has around 1,57 million subscribers and about 1389 videos, when this thesis is being written.

3.5.2 EmKay

EmKay is an Australian YouTube channel owned by Slazo media. EmKay uploads videos twice a day, these videos have posts from different subreddits, such as r/Memes, r/Confession, and r/Entitledparents. EmKay's logo was for a long time an OK hand symbol, but it has been for a several years a cartoonish hand making different hand symbols, quite often the peace sign (YouTube.fandom.com, N.D). The original logo was changed in November 2021 because some commenters mentioned that the OK symbol was being used by some controversial groups, mostly the white supremacists (YouTube.fandom.com, N.D). YouTube.fandom.com (N.D) mentions that "The channel was created by Slazo as a side project to his main channel, initially consisting of only him narrating the posts, but has since grown to include other narrators that consist of Robin, Jack, Damien, Zach, and formerly Lexi."

The videos used as a data in this thesis have only videos narrated by Jack and Robin. Jack is an Australian youtuber, who also does some acting. His full name is Jack McGirr, he is also known as Jay Mick. Jack's introduction phrase is "The snack that smiles back.". Robin is an American youtuber, who has worked in many different places, but has been with EmKay for about 5 years. Robin's full name is Robin Nelson, and he is also known as Boobin. He grew up in Spokane, Washington and speaks in an American accent. Robin does not have a catchphrase and most often just starts the video with "Hey, it's me Robin, welcome to EmKay.". Emkay has most subscribers and videos among the YouTubers used as a data. EmKay has around 3,27 million subscribers and about 3779 videos, when this thesis is being written.

3.5.3 Shaaba

The YouTube channel Shaaba is owned by Shaaba Elle Lotun-Raines. Shaaba is a British YouTuber with an Asian background. She is married to her husband Jamie Raines, who also is a YouTuber, he goes by Jammidodger. Shaaba, like her husband Jamie, is bi and often comments on LGBTQ+ issues. Her husband is also a trans man, which also encourages them to engage with these issues and problems. Her videos quite often involve LGBTQ+ Reddit posts. Her husband is mentioned because one video that was chosen as a data sample is co-hosted with him. This is because one year ago, in 2024, they started a podcast called 1800 drama podcast, which is also uploaded on her channel. The podcast is recorded every other week and because of this repeating nature I felt that it was necessary to include one of these podcast episodes. In YouTube the podcast also has a video, and it is made the same way as any other of her videos.

Shaaba most often does videos about the subreddit r/AmITheAsshole but also covers other subreddits from time to time. The podcast also covers r/AmITheAsshole subreddit. She uploads videos at least once a week, sometimes twice a week. Shaaba has around 153 thousand subscribers and about 687 videos, when this thesis is being written. She is the smallest YouTuber used as a data, but it felt important to have YouTubers from different backgrounds because it might affect how they change or work around the words and phrases YouTube does not allow on its platform.

3.6 Subreddits

The videos that I chose for this thesis came from 9 different subreddits. These subreddits were r/NuclearRevenge, r/EntitledParents, r/AmITheAsshole, r/OffMyChest, r/Self, r/JustNoMILs, r/Confessions, r/Talesfromretail, and r/ProRevenge. All these subreddits have relatively long posts, normally the posts have at least several hundred words. Many of the posts featured in the videos were quite long, about 500-700 words and some of them had updates to the original post, which increased the number of words quite a lot. Some subreddits on Reddit only have photographs or memes. For the goal of this thesis, explaining how YouTubers work around the YouTube's guidelines regarding language use, it was necessary to have videos with more text for YouTubers to read because this increased the possibility of having a problematic word or a short phrase in the post.

These subreddits revolve around the self or someone close to oneself. People share their stories and experiences in these subreddits and sometimes they seek advice or comfort from the other Redditors. As these stories can be quite personal, they often occur together with either problematic words, such as swear words or sensitive topics, which often trigger YouTube's algorithm, for example *suicide* is a problematic topic because it deals with self-harm. This was one reason why I chose to watch videos with these subreddits. Also, as I had watched videos featuring posts from these subreddits before writing this thesis I knew that I would find enough data to analyse. All these subreddits are for people, who want to unburden themselves and have someone to listen to them. In the subreddit r/NuclearRevenge people tell their revenge stories that very often are quite extreme, for example in one story a person found out that their partner had cheated them with multiple people and for several years, with even someone close to them. This person then decided to expose his partners wrongdoings and even went as far as to prevent their ex-partner of becoming a teacher. This was possible because their ex-partner had sex in a car with a known sex offender, the act was captured on camera, and they were also very close to a school, which is very problematic for people, who want to be teachers.

In the [r/EntitledParents](#) people share their stories of parents that have behaved in very entitled manner, for example demanding that the child of the entitled parent forgives them for letting the parent's partner hitting the child and sexually abusing them. The subreddit [r/AmITheAsshole](#) is all about people asking other whether they were or not were the asshole in a certain situation or even sometimes would they be the asshole in a certain situation because sometimes the event, which would determine would they be an asshole or not has not yet occurred. One good example post of this subreddit is a post where they ask whether they would be an asshole, for being a lesbian and having their girlfriend around their child because their ex-husband is saying that they would and should hide their sexuality, in other words their gayness, from their child. Clearly, we can see that no they would not be an asshole in this situation, for being who they are and having a girlfriend, but for these people, who ask these questions, it is not always that simple and sometimes people are clearly being an asshole, but want validation for their action and not an actual advice regarding their situation.

The subreddit [r/OffMyChest](#) is very similar to, but also slightly different from the subreddit [r/Confession](#). In [r/OffMyChest](#) people post things they want to get off their chest and feel lighter and sometimes get advice or other comments. For example, in one post a girl said that she was tired of being called a transphobic because she did not want to date transwomen, who still had their male genitalia. In the post she told why she had problem with male genitalia. She said that she physically could not stand the male genitalia, but had no problem dating transwomen, who had had their gender affirming surgery, in other words she was not a transphobe, but people could not see the bigger picture.

The subreddit [r/Self](#) is probably the least clearly defined subreddit out of these nine. In the subreddit people generally post things about oneself, these posts can generally be about anything in life. It is fairly similar to [r/AmITheAsshole](#) and [r/OffMyChest](#), but a bit less specific than those two. For example, in one post somebody told that their girlfriend had cheated on him because she had found him too boring and, and in another post, someone wrote that they had been dumped because he had not slept with her three dates in, and she thought that made him a balless virgin, who would not make a move.

The subreddit [r/JustNoMILs](#) is a subreddit dedicated to those who have problems with their in-laws, specifically with their mothers-in-law as the name of the subreddit is just no mother-in-law. There are sometimes posts about other in-laws, such as creepy father-in-laws or troublesome sister-in-laws, but most post are about their mother-in-law. One typical post in this subreddit is about a daughter-in-law, who thinks that her husband is under the thumb of his mother, in other words her mother-in-law. One good example of this would be influencing the

husband in regard to the baby's name, such as only allowing certain first names or that the baby should have the husband's last name. This is still quite minor inconvenience, although for the daughter-in-law it can be quite troublesome, but some posts can be quite disturbing, for example in some posts mother-in-laws would treat their grandchildren as their own children, such as calling themselves as their mothers and doing other very similar things.

The subreddit r/Confessions is as its name suggests a subreddit about confessions. These confessions can generally be about anything in life, for example in one post a person was confessing that they tried on purpose to drown themselves just because they wanted the hot lifeguard to notice them and give them mouth to mouth resuscitation. This is quite harmless confession, although a bit embarrassing, but some confessions in this subreddit are not as light-hearted as this one. For example, in one post someone confessed stealing money from their job and mentioned that they did this for quite a long time.

The subreddit r/TalesFromRetail is a subreddit, where people who work in retail post their stories. These stories can be, for example about dissatisfied customers, who caused a scene in the store and did something funny or irritating. Sometimes these posts can be unexpectedly wholesome, for example one post in one video that is used as a data in this thesis is about a couple, who both bought a same card for each other separately and told the cashier to not tell the other one because they were at the store at the same time. However, most post in this subreddit or at least in the video I used were not as wholesome.

The subreddit r/ProRevenge is a subreddit, which is quite similar to the subreddit r/NuclearRevenge, but it is maybe a bit less dramatic and serious than the r/NuclearRevenge. It still has post that revolve around revenges against other people, but these posts are not that extreme, although people still go to a certain length to achieve their revenge, hence the term pro in the subreddit name. For example, in one post an employee found out that their boss tried to sleep with his girlfriend, even though they had a wife. The girlfriend of course refused this ridiculous offer, and the boss then made up some lies and got her fired. The employee also found out that the boss had done this before and had taken photographs of his conquests and left them in his office. This employee then took these photographs for the boss' office and sent them to his wife, who then divorced him.

3.7 Methods

The methods I used for gathering data I needed might have been on more simple side, but for my research they were very efficient. First, I selected the three YouTubers-channels I wanted to use. There are hundreds and probably even thousands YouTube channels, who do videos

featuring Reddit content, but in the end, I selected The Click, EmKay and Shaaba because I was already familiar with them. The Click channel has only one YouTuber, The Click. Emkay channel, on the other hand, has four different YouTubers commenting on videos. The videos that I have chosen feature only two YouTubers out of the four, Jack and Robin. The reason for this is that not all members of the channel comment on same subreddits, which means that it would have been very difficult or maybe even impossible to use them all as some members only read memes or shorter Reddit posts, while this thesis used videos that featured longer Reddit posts as data. The Shaaba YouTube channel has only one YouTuber Shaaba, but she does a podcast with her husband Jamie every other week and one selected video was from the podcast.

Secondly, I selected the videos I wanted to use. I selected 15 videos in total, which means five videos per one YouTube channel. Videos from these YouTubers were chosen on the basis of what the topic of the video was. This means what subreddit was being featured in the video because it was important to have videos more focused on longer Reddit posts, in other words stories involving oneself than for example memes or very short stories as these tend to have quite a few words. Not all posts from these subreddits are long, but most of them are and even shorter ones have more text than posts from various subreddits, such as r/Memes or r/MeIRL or r/HoIUp as those often feature memes, short text or photographs that do not necessarily have any text.

As the purpose of thesis was to determine what kind of strategies YouTubers use to work around YouTube's language guidelines it was necessary to have post with more text. All videos had the subreddit in the title or it was implied otherwise, for example one video from EmKay was called insane reddit confessions and these confessions were posted on the subreddit called r/Confessions, which meant that I was able to guess the subreddit from the title of the video. Although, all the videos also had the subreddit name mentioned in the description of the video and I by checking the description I was able to confirm the subreddit. However, it is very possible that if I had gone to the subreddit mentioned in the description of the video, the Reddit post might have already been deleted, or I might have not found it otherwise as the YouTubers do not include direct individual links to Reddit posts, only the link to the subreddit was posted. I, personally, did not look up any of these Reddit posts that were used in the videos. I only saw them on the YouTube videos and therefore cannot be sure if they still exist.

Thirdly, I watched these 15 videos, while at the same time always marking the words that were changed, bleeped over or ignored. I also mentioned in my notes if blurring was involved in some way. This process was fairly easy because all YouTubers had the original Reddit post

in the video. However, how they had placed it varied a little. The Click and EmKay most often had it in the middle of the screen, while Shaaba had it in the upper middle of the screen. Lastly, I organised my notes. Before watching the videos, I had written up the titles of the videos and left space for the possible words that would be changed, bleeped over or ignored. My notes of the words consist of the word or the phrase that was shown in the video, in other words the word or the phrase that was in the original Reddit post, whether it was changed, bleeped over, ignored, was it blurred entirely or some parts of it and how the YouTuber expressed it in the end. I also counted if the same word was expressed the same way multiple times during the video. There is a complete list of these words on pages 79-82 with information. This was a fairly simple way of organizing things, but it also made it very clear how the words were being changed. A few examples of my notes:

Example 1) Reddit post word: Porn, the whole word blurred, expressed as adult films. (The Click)

Example 2) Reddit post word: Shit, censored with a poop emoji (by the YouTuber), expressed as stuff. (Shaaba)

Example 3) Reddit post word: F#ck#ng a##hole, self-censored, expressed as a fricking a-hole. (EmKay, Robin)

When noting down the substitutions, I made sure to reproduce exactly how they had been shown on the video, for example if some parts of them were blurred or even the whole word, I made sure to mention it on notes, a good example of this was *sex offender*, the word *sex* was blurred on the video, while the word *offender* was shown. I made note of this because it shows that YouTube's guidelines regarding the language also show in written language as well and not only in spoken language. It was also interesting to see how much YouTubers, or their editors need to pay attention to language use. I also mentioned if the original Redditor, who wrote the post, had made their own attempts on censoring the words, for example in one video the word *fuck* was censored with #, it was written as *f#ck*. I did the same with words that were bleeped over, for example if the word was *fuck* bleeped over, I made note of it.

I always made a note if the sound used to bleep over the problematic word was recognizable, for example in one video the word *fuck* was bleeped over with *quacking-noises*. I also made a note if there was something else worth of mentioning, in some videos emojis were used to censor words, for example *a poop emoji* was used to censor the word *shit*. While my thesis mainly focuses on the words used in the Reddit post and how YouTubers expresses them, when they are reading the posts, I also made a note if I noticed any censoring in words that

did not appear in the Reddit posts, for example if I recognized that the YouTuber altered their speech to be more YouTube friendly or if they bleeped over the words that were not in the Reddit posts. A good example of this is that one YouTuber used the term *frick up*, when they were speaking freely instead of *fuck up*. This was noticeable because some Reddit post also had the word *fuck*, and they used the word *frick* instead. Of course, it is very possible that I did not notice all attempts of changing their speech patterns to more YouTube-friendly versions as I am non-Native speaker.

3.8 Summary

My data is words and short phrases that were replaced, ignored or bleeped over in YouTube videos. The data this thesis uses comes from 15 different videos made by three different YouTubers, The Click, EmKay and Shaaba. These videos feature posts from nine different subreddits from the social media website called the Reddit. Videos range from 25 minutes to 55 minutes, which means that they are slightly longer than other similar content. As YouTube is one of the largest video viewing and sharing platforms it obviously has various guidelines dealing with different things, one of them being language. Due to these language guidelines YouTubers often need to change, bleep over or ignore certain words and/or phrases as they go against these guidelines, such words might include swear words, words related to sex and gender and other words, for example *suicide*. The subreddits used in the videos that I have chosen for this thesis quite often have long post because people are asking help, sharing their troubles or just want someone to listen their stories, and this means they need to explain their situations sometimes in a great detail. I specifically chose videos that feature these kinds of subreddits because it was easier to see and hear if YouTuber changed what they were reading from the the post.

4. Analysis

4.1. Introduction

In this section I will go through my findings relating to the language YouTubers have to use on YouTube because of YouTube's guidelines regarding the usage of language. 4.2 section briefly explains what kind of language YouTubers generally use if they need to alter their word choices. After some general remarks regarding the language use, I will move to analyse YouTubers individually, first is The Click, then the EmKay-channel and lastly Shaaba. This section is not long because there will be longer explanations in other sections regarding what kind of word choices they have made and possible the reason why they choose to say what they did. 4.3-4.5 sections are dedicated to several issues, for example what kind of words

were changed due to the YouTube's guidelines and what kind of words were used as their replacements. This section is the longest because words were changed more often than I had initially expected. I had thought that bleeping would be more popular than it was in reality. After this there will be a section that will comment on other ways of censorship that were used in the videos. In 4.6 section what kind of words were bleeped over and what kind of words were being ignored is explained. Following subsection will briefly comment on what kind of words were blurred on the Reddit posts and why they probably were being censored. The following section 4.6.5 is dedicated to use of emojis in Shaaba's videos. Section 4.7 comments on how similarly or differently YouTubers deal with troublesome words and phrases. After this there is a concluding section of my findings relating to the language usage in YouTube videos.

4.2. YouTubers

The starting point of this thesis was how restrictive YouTube can be towards YouTubers' language usage and how they are practically policing what they can and cannot say on the platform if they want to monetize their content. After analyzing the 15 videos that I had for this thesis I came to realize that YouTube is even stricter than I had initially thought as it is not enough to change, bleep over or ignore the problematic words, they also have to quite often blur them. This means that YouTube's censorship is quite restrictive for the creators. Not all words that were being censored are what I would consider to be harmful for younger audiences, that should not be on the platform in the first place or watching these YouTubers, whose content is clearly aimed at a more mature audience because they cannot avoid them in their daily life anyway. YouTubers have come up with interesting ways to deal with YouTube's guidelines, sometimes these strategies overlap with each other and sometimes not; a good example of this is using *frick* instead of *fuck*.

Censoring problematic words or sometimes even sentences is most often done by changing the word, which is quite interesting for linguistics because YouTubers sometimes need to be quite creative and this in turn creates amusing word choices. I am not sure if these changes would be considered to be algospeak as not all YouTubers use the same replacements, but it is very possible that they will eventually. The other quite popular choice is to bleep over them, this however, is not as interesting from linguistic point of view, but still important because it shows what kind of words YouTube deems to be problematic and they can be studied. The last option is to ignore the problematic words, which does not happen that often, although some YouTubers do it more than others. There are more details about all of these three strategies in the following sections.

4.2.1 The Click

The Click is the only non-Native English speaker YouTuber included in this thesis as others are either American, British or Australian; this might have affected on how they dealt with problematic words. As a non-Native English speaker The Click might use words that Native English might not, for example they might translate expressions used in their country (Sweden) directly to English resulting in expressions that are not used normally, or they might use words that English speakers know to be offensive. Even the reverse of this could happen, they might censor words that are not offensive, but they might look like they are, for example The Click mentions that they thought that the word *twink* (gay slang word) was offensive because it looked very much like *chink*, which is a slur word that means a person of Chinese descent. As for Native English speakers they might use words and expressions used in their countries as they all are from different English-speaking countries.

The Click changed in general more words than the other two channels did and also blurred more words. They did not bleep over many words, instead they preferred to change them to something else. There might have been other factors affecting their choices than just them being non-Native speaker and wanting to act according to YouTube's guidelines, for example, they did cover more "not that child-friendly" topics than the other two channels did. This, as can be imagined, affects the language used in the post and in the comments; they have more swear words and other words, such as *sex* and *suicide*, that go against YouTube's guidelines, which means that they had to be replaced, bleeped over or ignored.

As The Click had more these kinds of Reddit posts in their videos, they also had to change their speech style more, which for them might have been hard, but for the purpose of this thesis, seeing how YouTube's guidelines affect YouTubers speech style, was very interesting. As The Click had more words that were changed to something else, they offered much data to analyse, and I was able to see exactly how much YouTubers need to alter their language and what kind of word choices they do make. The Click also had certain words that they preferred to use more than others, such as *frick* and *naughty* and they often derived other words from these two words.

4.2.2. EmKay

EmKay-channel had two different YouTubers, Jack and Robin. Ideally, I would have wanted to find five videos commented by the same YouTuber, but because YouTubers on EmKay-channel cover different subreddits it was quite difficult to find videos at the moment, when I was collecting my data with right subreddits that had longer posts and as a result I had to use two YouTubers instead in order to have the required five videos. As EmKay-channel is one of

the slightly older YouTube-channels, which focus on Reddit posts I wanted to include it on my thesis even if it was hard to find right videos for my thesis as they cover more often subreddits with shorter posts. I also thought that it might be interesting to see how YouTubers, who belong to the same channel, might speak differently from each other. These YouTubers had different accents, which might also affect their word choices, they were American and Australian. This also increased the number of different accents used in this thesis.

However, EmKay-channel did not change words as much as I had initially thought, instead they quite often preferred to bleep over the problematic word. I had thought that because they had done this, making videos featuring Reddit content, for quite a while they would prefer to change the words as that can be easier than bleeping over the word as they publish two videos per day and editing the problematic words might take some time to do. Although, they did also change some words, for example swear words, which offered data to analyse. There were some differences between the two EmKay-YouTubers; Jack more often changed the word to something else, while Robin clearly preferred to use the original word that was then later bleeped over. I will most often in my thesis just refer to the EmKay-channel as one entity and not to the individual YouTubers that work on the channels, when I am explaining my findings, but on some occasions, I will make the difference clear because they did use different strategies.

4.2.3 Shaaba

Shaaba was the only woman YouTuber among the YouTubers I had chosen, but I do not think that it had any real effect on her language choices, even though it is said that women and men speak slightly differently from each other, at least she made same word choices as the male YouTubers. She is also British, but again I did not notice any patterns or word choices that could clearly be categorized as British. I think one reason for this is that while she herself is British and speaks on British accent, YouTube is very globalized platform and that affects her speech on there more because YouTubers are quite often influenced by each other. It might be that in her normal everyday life she uses more British words, but on her videos, she uses more general words as her audience is quite global. However, this is just my hypothesis, and I cannot prove it at this point. The influence of other YouTubers can be seen on my data, for example all YouTubers used the word *frick*, when they meant *fuck*. In other words, they use same replacements for swear words. Of course, people also make individual choices that do not occur in other channels, for example Shaaba did use other audios to bleep over the problematic words, such *quacking* and *pooping audio*. They also used emojis as a way to censor things that again others did not do.

The use of different sounds and emojis made Shaaba stand out among these three channels, but there was surprisingly little to analyse even with these differences as she had the least amount of any kind of change in her videos. However, what she had was interesting and I was able to analyse her videos slightly differently than the other two channels' as they did not use these ways of censorship. She also had a few interesting word choices for the replacement words that will be explained in the following sections. While she changed only a few words in her videos, they offered affirmations regarding some word choices made by other YouTubers, for example she and The Click used same replacements for certain swear words and that might be an indication that YouTubers use same kind of algospeak. This means that even if she did not herself offer very much data to analyse she helped to affirm some of my hypotheses regarding the language and word choices made by YouTubers.

4.3. Changing the problematic word to something else

4.3.1 Introduction

One of the many ways to avoid breaking YouTube's guidelines regarding the language usage is simply to change the word that would otherwise cause problems for a monetizable video. These problematic words are quite often swear words, words related to gender and sex and other words that YouTube has deemed to be harmful in some way, for example words related to self-harm. YouTubers change words in varying degree, some more than others, but all do it in some degree because it is often easier to do than bleep over or ignore the word. Table 3 below demonstrates how often YouTubers used these strategies and what was the most used strategy among them.

Table 3) Strategies

Strategy	Changing the word	Bleeping over the word	Ignoring the word
Number of times the strategy was used	The Click 128 EmKay 24 Shaaba 19	The Click 21 EmKay 33 Shaaba 7	The Click 9 EmKay 8 Shaaba 0
The total amount	171	61	17

In the following sections I will go through some of the words that are quite often changed to something else, and I also will explain what might be the reason behind particular replacements and why the word had to be changed if there is a clear reason for the change because sometimes there is not. On pages 79-82 of this thesis there is a word list of all the words that

were changed, bleeped over or ignored with information that did not fit to these sections. In most cases of the words that are bleeped over, changed or ignored what they mean is the problem, for example, swear words represent foul language that some people think young children should not be exposed to, hence they are forbidden on many social media platforms in monetized content. However, with some other words, such as *suicide* and *miscarriage*, in what kind of context they are used matters more than the actual word does. In YouTube words that indicate self-harm are banned and the reason behind this is not clear because many of them are just factual words and nothing else. This does cause some problems for YouTubers because they cannot know what words they can or cannot use.

4.3.2. The replacement for the word fuck

Fuck is one of the most recognized English swear words and that might be the reason why it is being used in many social media posts, such as Reddit posts. Most people probably know that the word *fuck* is a swear word and most likely have used at least one time in their life, at least in English speaking countries and other people probably have heard it being used in movies or tv-series. Therefore, it is by no means an unknown word. It is very unlikely that a teen or a young adult would have not seen or heard it anywhere. As it is a swear word that is considered to be stronger than some others, for example *god damn* or *asshole*, it is not allowed on YouTube video if the video is being monetized because it is seen as obscene language and harmful to kids, in other words it goes against YouTube's guidelines. This means that YouTubers, who have it in their videos, for example if they are reading Reddit posts and the post has the word *fuck* in it or otherwise want to express themselves and use it, have to bleep over it, change it or ignore it in order to have a video that is monetizable. Also, as there are many different variants of the word *fuck*, for example *motherfucker*, *fucking* and *fuck you*, they all have to be changed. This of course is not as simple as it may sound because this means that YouTubers have to be very careful when they are speaking, and they have to make an effort to change how they speak in order to not break these strict guidelines. This is something that we do not need to consider in "real life" that much, although sometimes we have to use words that we might not want to or use words that will not be offensive in any way.

YouTubers have made several clever ways to work around YouTube's guidelines regarding swear words. As they cannot use actual swear words in their videos, they often use words that are not technically considered to be swear words, but many recognize them as such because they have heard them being used this way before or from the context. People for example know that *frick* is often used as a replacement for *fuck*. Even many non-Native speakers know that it is a euphemism for the swear word *fuck*, when the speaker does not or cannot actually

swear because of circumstances. On the table 4, we can see that all YouTubers used in this thesis use the word *frick* instead of *fuck*, even the non-Native English speaker The Click uses it. This shows that the word certainly is used quite often and is well-known. EmKay also sometimes used the word *god*, when they actually meant *fuck*, but this was only in very rare cases and the word *frick* was used more often. Although, only Jack of EmKay-channel uses these replacements as Robin tends to use the original swear word, *fuck*, which is then later bleeped over.

It is interesting how YouTubers have coped with YouTube’s guidelines; they have created their own swear words that everyone knows are swear words in order to be able to express themselves. Although, the word *frick* was not invented by YouTubers, it is much older euphemisms for *fuck*. This just shows that YouTube’s guidelines are sometimes simply quite silly because even if some words are considered to vulgar or obscene in some ways people just find replacements for them, and viewers are able to figure out what they really mean. Just because the word changes that does not mean that the intention of what is being said changes.

Table 4) Words related to the word fuck

	Fuck	Fuck up	Fucked	Fucking	As fuck	Fuck off	Motherfucker	Fuck you
The Click	Frick	Frick up	Messed up, fricked	Fricking, Effing	AF	-	Mothereffer, mofo	Frick you
EmKay	Frick, God	Screw up	-	-	-	-	-	-
Shaaba	Frick	F up	-	Fricking	-	F off	-	F you

4.3.3 Words derived from frick

There are many other words and short phrases derived from the swear word *fuck*, for example *fuck up*, *fucked* and *fucking*, which are not allowed on YouTube as they all are swear words. In many instances The Click used forms derived from the *fuck* replacement *frick*, which changed these words to, *fuck up*, *fucked* and *fucking* to *frick up*, *fricked* and *fricking* as can be seen on the table 4. In other words, the *frick* was used the same way as the swear word *fuck*, when these words were being formed. However, everyone watching these videos knew that he was actually cursing, even though he was using seemingly harmless words.

On the other hand, the other channels did not use the term *frick up*, when they meant *fuck up*, instead the EmKay and in this case Robin, used the word *screw up*, which basically means the same thing, but it is slightly less vulgar, although some might argue that it is still too rude and vulgar for YouTube as it is not that child-friendly. However, as it is on a video it seems to be

okay for YouTubers to say *screw up* on YouTube, at least it was, when this video was made even if it is considered to be a rude phrase. Shaaba used the term *fup*, which is a short form for *fuck up*. The *f* comes from the word *fuck*. This again is a clever way to work around YouTube's guidelines because technically they are following the guidelines and are not cursing, as the word *fuck* is not said. Although in reality everyone above a certain age would know that they are cursing because most would know that *fup* is a short form for *fuck up*.

Shaaba seems to favour these short forms in her videos because other short phrases are also shortened, these are, as we can see on the table 4, *fuck off* and *fuck you*, which she has shortened to *f off* and *f you*. This means that she has used three different short forms, which would indicate that she uses short forms quite often. One reason for this could be that even though they are short forms most viewers know what they mean and what is their full form. This is essential for YouTubers because the viewer experience is very important to them. Also, one other possible reason why she uses them in her videos could be that she herself uses them, for example in text messages as these short forms are sometimes used in them, when one wants to respond quickly as they are quicker time to write. However, this is just my hypothesis and cannot be verified. The Click does not use short forms, for example they use *frick you*, when they mean *fuck you*, which shows that they do favour words and phrases derived for the word *frick*. EmKay also does not use them.

Fucking is also a word that quite often occurs in Reddit posts, especially in those that are on the longer side because they most often deal with one's daily life, problems or questions about life in general and people have a tendency to curse, when something negative occurs in life. Sometimes people also want to make sure that their displeasure is known to the readers of the post as emotions are not always expressed clearly in text forms, such as Reddit posts. My data also does not only include the Reddit posts, but also the comments other Redditors have written under these posts if they were read out loud on the videos. This does increase the chance of encountering the swear word *fucking* because quite often these posts are or can be quite upsetting in many ways, for example they can make people angry because the post is so frustrating, they can make people sad, or some people just like to use swear words to express themselves as many do. As the word *fucking* is a swear word it cannot be used on YouTube videos because that goes against YouTube's guidelines if the video is being monetized as has been mentioned in the previous sections. This means that YouTubers had to come up with a replacement word for it.

The Click uses the word *fricking*, which has been derived from the word *frick*. *Frick* as has been mentioned before is quite often used in YouTube videos as a replacement for the swear

word *fuck* because it is more child-friendly, but also because it is recognizable as replacement for *fuck*. It makes sense that The Click uses *fricking* in their videos because they have used the most, among these three YouTubers, words derived from the word *frick*, while the other two have also used other words as replacements. The other YouTuber, who also uses *fricking* in her videos is Shaaba, which also makes sense because she also used the word *frick* as a replacement for *fuck*. This would indicate that she also uses words derived from the word *frick*, although not often as The Click. However, as I have noted before she also uses short forms for swear words quite often, for example *F you* and *F off*, which full forms are *fuck you* and *fuck off*. The fact that both of these YouTubers do use the word *fricking* would indicate that it is being used by YouTubers as a replacement for the swear *fucking*. In other words, it is al-gospeak.

The word *fucking* is not said out loud in any of the EmKay videos that I have chosen, *fucking* occurs in the posts, but they have bleeped over them. However, as they also use the word *frick*, like The Click and Shaaba, it is very possible that they might use it, as *fricking* is a derivative of the word *frick* if they had to say something instead of bleeping over the word. However, as this does not occur in any of the videos this is only my hypothesis and cannot be proven. The Click also sometimes uses the word *effing* as a replacement for *fucking*, although not as often as the word *fricking*, which possibly means that it is not as popular as *fricking*. Merriam Webster (N.D) mentions that *effing* was first used in 1929; it is used as a euphemism for *fucking* and often used as an intensive. It was used more often as a replacement for *fucking* in early 2000s, but today it is not used as much, although it is still being used. This is probably the reason why The Click uses *fricking* more often than *effing*.

4.3.4 Other short phrases and words

There were three other short phrases or words related to the swear word *fuck* and they were *fucked*, *as fuck* and *motherfucker*, which only occurred in The Click's videos as the other two channels did not have them in any videos that were chosen. The Click changed these three to something else that did not have any problematic elements. For the word *fucked*, they used *messed up* or *fricked*. It was interesting to notice that they continue to use a word derived from the word *frick*. However, they also used the short phrase *messed up*, which can quite easily be seen as a child-friendly replacement for the word *fucked* as it carries the same sentiment but does not contain actual swear words in it. Although, there might be a problem of not realizing that they actually want to curse but cannot due to circumstances if the context, where this phrase is used is unclear as it sounds very ordinary.

As for the phrase as *fuck*, The Click uses, at least in these videos, the acronym or abbreviation of the phrase, which is *AF*. The Click pronounces it letter by letter, in other words, as ei ef. I do not know, why they did not use the word *frick* for this phrase as they used it for many others. However, if I had to make an educated guess the reason might be that they chose to stay loyal to the original Reddit post as in it the acronym was being used. Although, from the context it was clear that this acronym was in fact the phrase *as fuck*. This might be the reason why they did not use the phrase *as frick* and instead used the acronym. The other reason might be that there was no need to change the acronym to something different as it was already YouTube-friendly and does not go against guidelines.

The last word on the table 4 is *motherfucker*, which is a swear word that means according to Merriam-Webster (N.D) an obscene person and it is often used as a generalized term of abuse, also it is quite old slang word from North America as it was first used in 1918. The replacement that The Click used in their videos was *mothereffeffer*, which essentially means the same thing, but is more child-friendly and does not go against YouTube's guidelines. It was interesting to see that they did not use word derived from the word *frick*, but instead used a different word. Although they have used the eff-derivation before in the word *effing*, which was used as a replacement for the swear word *fucking*. This might indicate that this type of derivation, using -eff in the swear word replacements, is also popular among some YouTubers as it has occurred at least in two different words. However, as they were used only by one YouTuber and not by other two, this might be a quite far-fetched theory.

4.3.5 Short phrases related to fuck

There were some other short phrases or idioms related to the word *fuck*, which were slightly longer than those that were mentioned in the previous sections. These phrases and idioms can be seen on the table 5. These phrases were not distributed equally, some YouTubers had more than others, but I decided to put them on the same table because it makes easier to see how YouTubers said the same phrases differently. There were seven short phrases relating to the swear word *fuck*. The Click had four different ones, EmKay also had four different ones, but Shaaba only had two phrases. One phrase that everyone had in one of their videos was *what the fuck* and all of them said this phrase differently. The Click bleeped over the word *fuck*, and I was not sure should I place the phrase here or in the bleeping section, however I decided to place it here because two other channels also used the phrase, and this made it easier to compare them.

EmKay did not bleep over the word, instead they used the idiom *what the hell*, which is more child-friendly than *what the fuck*, even though some could still consider it to be too harmful for very young children. It appeared only once in EmKay's videos, Robin was the one who used the idiom, which was slightly unexpected as they tended to more often use the actual swear word, which then resulted to bleeping over the word. It would have been interesting to see whether Jack would have also used the same idiom, but alas they did not. Shaaba, on the other hand, used the abbreviation of the phrase, which is *WTF*. In the case of *what the fuck* all of them chose to use different replacements, although all these replacements also express the same feelings as the original idiom, even if they are more child friendly.

Shaaba's another short phrase was for *goodness's sake*, which in the original post was written as for *fuckness sake*. It is clear that she used more child-friendly version of the phrase as the original had the word *fuck* in it, which made it not YouTube-friendly. There is not much to say about this sentence as it is fairly ordinary phrase and many use it if they do not want to curse. There were two phrases that only The Click had, and these were *frick around and find out* and *fricked around and found out*, in other words infinite form of the verb and simple past tense of the verb. The original phrases can be seen in the table 5 below, and the only difference is that the word *frick* was replacing the swear word *fuck*. As I have mentioned before in the previous section The Click prefers to use words and phrases derived from the word *frick* and that behaviour is also seen here.

EmKay had two phrases that the other channels did not have. These were *what the actual fuck* and a *fucking asshole* and as we can see on the table 5 below, they were changed to what the hell and a *fricking a-hole*. They were also in videos that Robin commented on. The phrase *what the actual fuck* has been changed quite dramatically as the word *actual* is not in it anymore and *fuck* has been replaced with *hell*, which is much softer word to use and also YouTube-friendly. However, the phrase still carries the same intent as before but is now constructed according to YouTube's guidelines. The other phrase has also been changed as the swear word *fucking* has been replaced with *fricking*, and *asshole* has been shortened to *a-hole*, which is quite popular choice in the YouTube community as we will see in the next section. It was a little surprising to see that Robin used the word *fricking* as they do not use *frick* or any other derivatives of it. All the instances of *frick* had been on Jack's video. However, this shows that *frick* and *fricking* are quite popular and even person, who normally uses the normal swear words uses them. Also, they both, Jack and Robin, used the same replacement for *asshole*, which was of course an *a-hole*. It is interesting to see that EmKay also uses the word *fricking*

in this sentence as they did not use it as a replacement for the single word *fuck* in the previous section. However, this demonstrates that *fricking* indeed is a popular and used word in the YouTube community.

There was one other phrase that appeared in both The Click’s and EmKay’s videos and it was *shut the fuck up* as we can see on the table 5. Both channels also dealt with it differently from each other. The Click again replaced the swear word *fuck* with *frick*, which made the sentence YouTube-friendly. The EmKay on the other hand had two different phrases for the original phrase, these were *shut the hell up*, *hell* replaced the swear word *fuck* and the other was simply *shut up*, which has the same message as the original, but is according to YouTube’s guidelines and does not contain any swear words. Both instances of *shut the fuck up* were on the Robin’s videos and it seems like that even one person can have multiple replacement choices for the same phrase. It was interesting to see that these two channels had different approaches to this phrase, although all three replacements work quite fine as replacements and carry the same message.

Table 5) Short phrases related to the word fuck

Uncensored	What the fuck	For fuck-ness sake	What the actual fuck	Shut the fuck up	Fuck around and find out	Fucked around and found out	Fucking asshole
The Click	What the bleep	-	-	Shut the frick up	Frick around and find out	Fricked around and found out	-
EmKay	What the hell	-	What the hell	Shut the hell up, Shut up	-	-	Fricking a-hole
Shaaba	WTF	For goodness’s sake	-	-	-	-	-

4.3.6 Other swear words

There were other swear words than *fuck* and words derived from it on the YouTube videos that were used as a data in this thesis. Not all YouTubers I had chosen had the same swear words, however I decided to put them all in the same table because that made comparing the same ones, they had much easier even though the result the table has also quite a couple empty spaces. There were three swear words that appeared in at least one of videos that all YouTubers had, they were as can be seen from the table 6 *shit*, *bitch* and *asshole*. Because they are swear words or at least foul words, they needed to be changed to fit YouTube’s

guidelines. As we can see from the table 6 the YouTubers made different choices for the words *shit* and *bitch* but used the same replacement for the *asshole*.

Table 6) Other swear words

Uncensored	Shit/Shits	Shitty	Bitch	Bullshit	Damn	Cunt	Asshole	Jackshit
The Click	Shait or shite, poo	-	Birch	BS	Darn	C-word	Butthole, A-hole	-
EmKay	Smith, Smiths, Crappy person	Smithy	Bich / bix/	-	-	-	A-hole	-
Shaaba	Poop, stuff	-	B with many stars	-	-	C with many stars	A-hole, drama	Jack and poop audio

The Click uses *shait* or *poo* as replacement for the swear word *shit*. *Shait* is quite common slang word for *shit* and according to UrbanDictionary (2003) it has been popular since the movie *Trainspotting*, which began with the phrase "life is nothing but shait". UrbanDictionary might not be the most reliable source, but in this case, I think it is at least mostly in the right. The Click also sometimes used the word *poo*, which is an equivalent to the word *shit*, although it is more juvenile and less strong, which makes it YouTube-friendly. The Click has some tendencies to use a more immature words than the other YouTubers. The reason for this might be that they fit to their personality more than some harsher words because they are “professionally funny”, at least according to them. They have mentioned this phrase, “professionally funny”, multiple times in their videos.

The Emkay-channel has three different ones, which are *smith*, *smiths*, *crappy person*. *Crappy person* is quite clearly situation specific and therefore cannot always be used for *shit* as *shit* can refer to other things than a person. Robin was the one that used the term *crappy person* for *shit*, and all other occasions of *shit* that were in their videos were bleeped over. Jack, however, used the more creative way of working around YouTube’s guidelines as they used the *smith* and *smiths*. It seems that Jack used *smith* for general purposes, and it was not situation specific. The reason they use the word *smith*, like the last name Smith, might be that it is phonologically very similar to the word *shit*, but does not trigger the algorithm. In the case of *shit*, its orthographic form and how it is pronounced is the main problem, but also what it represents, which is swear words, albeit less strong ones. Also, while *smith* and *shit* sound phonologically very similar they do not look the same, which means that viewers need to have some kind of pre-knowledge what the YouTuber means, when they say *smith*, in other words they

share *algospeak*. The Shaaba on the other hand had two different replacements, which were *poop* and *stuff*. *Poop* is more juvenile word than *shit*, although generally they mean the same, but many probably would not use it as a replacement for *shit* in real life, except maybe in front of a small child. *Stuff* might be a better replacement because it is quite neutral word, however if one wants to curse it is not ideal word because of that quality, still it is very YouTube-friendly word.

For the word *bitch* all YouTubers had different replacements, The Click had *birch*, Emkay (Jack) had *bich*, which was pronounced in a similar way to the Scottish word loch, like loch Ness, and Shaaba had the most different one from the original, it was *B with many stars*, she literally said this. *Birch* and *bich* are relatively similar phonologically and orthographically to *bitch*, but *b with many stars* is quite creative way to say *bitch*. It is also much longer way to express same thing, although it is much safer to say on YouTube than *birch* and *bich* because YouTube's algorithm might confuse them to *bitch* as they are phonologically fairly similar. However, for viewers *bich* and *birch* are more easily understood due to these previously mentioned features, and *birch* at least is already considered to be a slang word, which means that it belongs to people's vocabulary. One YouTuber has mentioned in their previous videos that YouTube's algorithm sometimes confuses the word *can't* and *cunt* with each other, especially if the speaker has a thicker accent, which is obviously problematic as *cunt* is a swear word that can cause demonetization of their video, while *can't* is just a negative form of can. This might be one reason why Shaaba choose to say what they said because it would not cause any possible problems for her.

For the swear word *asshole* everyone had the same replacement, although The Click and Shaaba also had a second choice that they sometimes used instead. The replacement was *a-hole*, in other words *ass* was shortened to a simple letter a. The fact that all three channels used this particular replacement would indicate the fact that it is quite popular among the YouTubers at the moment. I also think that many watchers would know what they are referring to when they say *a-hole* as it is very old euphemism for *asshole*. Merriam-Webster (N.D) mentions that its first know use was in 1942, in other words it is already been used over 80 years and it has always had the same meaning. However, I think it had gained more popularity among content creators in recent years due to strict guidelines.

The Click also sometimes used the word *butthole* instead of *asshole*, which basically means the same thing, but is more YouTube and child-friendly word as the *ass* has been replaced with more neutral word *butt*. The fact that The Click used this replacement was interesting because on TikTok even the word *butthole* is on the forbidden words list. Shaaba on the other

hand has recently began to use the word *drama* in her videos because they felt that the word *asshole* does not always work in their videos, which feature posts from the subreddit *r/AmITheAsshole* as the redditors are not always assholes. However, they think that even if they are not assholes, they can cause unnecessary drama, hence they decided to use the word *drama* instead. They also have a podcast and a new subreddit called *1800drama*, which was invented as a result of this realization.

The Click and Shaaba also both had the swear word *cunt* in their videos, but they had different approaches towards it. The Click used the term *c-word*, in other words they shortened *cunt* to the letter *c* and added word as a suffix, while Shaaba used short phrase *c with many stars*, again she literally said this, which is very similar to *b with many stars* that they had used before. On the one hand, both of them chose to shorten *cunt* to the letter *c*, which means that there might not be other way of expressing this word that would not be problematic, but on the other hand how they in the end expressed themselves was very different even if they started in same way.

The Click had two other swear words in their videos, *bullshit* and *damn* as can be seen in the table 6. They shortened *bullshit* to *BS*, pronounced as letters *b* and *s*, which is quite popular way to say *bullshit* if for some reason one cannot use the full word. For *damn* they used *darn*, which is a euphemism for *damn* that has been in use since 1800-1900s according to Merriam-Webster (N.D). Emkay-channel had one other swear word, which was *shitty*, and they replaced it with *smithy*. It appears that they added *-y* ending to *smith* that they had used a replacement for *shit*. In other words, *shit* become *smith* and *shitty* become *smithy*. Shaaba also had one more swear word, and it was *jackshit*, which they changed to *jack* and *a poop audio*. This means that they replaced the problematic word *shit* with *a poop audio*, which could be argued to be quite creative way to work around YouTube's guidelines as they have no problem with audios but have problem with the word itself. The use of *a poop audio* also creates quite a comical effect as you would not expect to hear pooping audio on videos aimed for adults as it is quite juvenile humour.

4.4 Words related to sex and gender

4.4.1 Introduction

Words related to sex and gender are quite often changed, bleeped over or ignored on YouTube videos because many of them go against YouTube's guidelines regarding language use on the platform. Some might say that YouTube has taken a too strict approach regarding these words as some of them are very normal and appear on everyday conversations often, for

example *boob*. Of course, some might use these words in not child-friendly conversations, but in normal use they do not pose any problems or be harmful for young children to hear. However, YouTube seems to think otherwise as content creators need to censor these words in their monetized videos, even the more innocent ones. Some of the words, such as *condom* and *blowjob* that appear on table 7 and table 8 can be seen as more vulgar and sexualized words and parents might want to protect their young children from hearing or seeing them. However, on the other hand, these videos are made for more mature audiences in mind and for them these words most likely would not pose an issue, although some adults might not want to hear them. However, the words YouTubers sometimes use instead of these problematic words can cause laughter as they often are quite silly.

4.4.2 Words derived from the word sex

There are many different words relating to sex and gender. However, only The Click had some of them in their videos that I had chosen for this thesis as the other two YouTubers did not have any words related to sex and gender in their videos that had been changed to something else, although they had a few that were bleeped over. All these words are quite normal and many probably would consider them to be not too vulgar or harmful in any way for YouTube videos. Although for example, some parents might not want their young children to hear or see them, however, The Click's videos were made for more mature audiences. These words would not be an issue for the target audience, that is adults or older teenagers, but they had to be changed because all videos need to be child-friendly even if the video is not aimed for children as that is YouTube's stance on the matter.

The word *sex* and other words derived from it appear quite often on The Click videos as they tend to read subreddit posts that have more adult-like topics. It is a slightly strange that even the word *sex* has to be changed in some way because it does not always refer to the sexual act as it can also mean the sex of certain person or animal. Of course, in English, gender is more often used to refer the sex of a person or an animal, but that does not mean that it is never used to refer the person's sex, but it seems like YouTube cannot see the difference and enforces these guidelines.

For the word *sex* The Click has several different options as can be seen in the table 7; they have at least five different ones. There might be even more, but these are only ones that appeared in the videos that I had chosen. All these options basically mean the same but depending on the context they have slightly different qualities, for example *deed* is very basic word and can mean many things, but in a sexual context and where The Click used it, it means having sex or having done a sexual act. Even though there are five different word options to use,

The Click most often used the word *naughties*, which normally means naughty people or things, but they have changed its meaning to mean sex or other sexual things as can be seen in the table 7. They also sometimes used as replacement *stuff*, *intimacy* or *thing* for the word *sex*, but they were very context depended and were not used as often as *naughties*.

The Click also has derived three different word forms from the word *naughties*, these are *naughtilization*, *naughtilized*, and *naughtily*. In the table 7 there are six different words, but they have used the same word *naughtilized* for two of them, *sexualize* and *sexualized*. Also, the word *sexual* has been changed to *naughty*, in other words it does not have the -al suffix, which makes it stand out from the rest of them as all other words have a suffix added to them. The word *sexually* has also a second replacement, which is *intimately*. It basically means the same, but it does not sound that lewd as sexually. I find it interesting that The Click uses the word *naughty* and other words derived from it because it does sound a little immature, for example parent might say to child that they have been naughty, but probably an adult would not call another adult naughty in the same context. However, it again is very recognizable word and also YouTube-friendly, and it can be quite easily conjugated, which makes it easy to use in spoken language. A quality that is important for YouTubers. However, viewers need to have some kind of knowledge what The Click means, when they say *naughty* as it does not look or sound like the word *sex*, this would imply that viewers and YouTubers share same al-gospeak.

Table 7) Words derived from the word sex

	Sex	Sexualization	Sexual	Sexualize	Sexually	Sexualized
The Click	Naughties, Deed, Stuff, Intimacy, Thing	Naughtilization	Naughty	Naughtilized	Intimately, Naughtily	Naughtilized

4.4.3 Other words related to sex

There were several other words related to sex, seven different ones, that were used in The Click's videos and because of YouTube's guidelines all the words had to be changed as can be seen in the table 8. Some replacements of the changed words work quite well and are sometimes used to mean the same thing, for example *condom* and *protection* can be used to mean the same thing in a sexual context, but some of them do not always work that well.

Even the word *boob* is considered to be too sexual for normal monetized YouTube content and has to be censored in some ways. For many the word *boob*, while it does have a sexual

meaning, is not that problematic as it can also just refer to a body part in other context. It would be understandable if the YouTube only had a problem with showing boobs on videos as that can be sexualized more easily, but the word *boob* itself is not that problematic because it can also mean other things, for example *fool*. YouTube, however, is not very forgiving regarding these issues, which meant that The Click had to change this word, *boob*, to not a real word *bobs*, which does sound a little strange in a Reddit video because many would understand it as there being many people named Bob if they do not have the full context where the word is being used. I said previously that *bob* is not a real word, but it can mean several things, such as *a haircut* or *move up and down*, however I do not think many would say *bobs* in those contexts, unless the verb is on third person, hence not the real word mention. Also, on TikTok it is used to mean boobs, which would imply that it is already an algospeak word on its own.

Table 8) Words related to sex

Uncensored	Boob	Vagina	Penis	Dick	Condom	Anal	Blowjob
The Click	Bobs	Organ	Organ	Peepee	Protection	Stuff	BJ, did it

For the body parts, *vagina* and *penis*, The Click chose to simply refer to them as *organs*, which is correct because that they are if one does not explain things in more explicit manner. However, this can cause some confusion if they appear in the same Reddit post as one would not know, which organ The Click is referring to without seeing the original post and even then, there can be confusion. In other words, if one only is listening and not watching their videos there might be some misunderstandings. The *dick*, which appeared in videos, also refers to the male sex organ, although it is more slang word than *penis*. However, it is also in the forbidden word list, which meant that The Click changed it to *peepee*, which is a child-like way of referring to the *penis*. I am not sure if the name Dick is also considered to be problematic as they phonologically sound exactly the same, but it is possible that YouTube's algorithm can figure that they mean different things and it does not need censored, but as it did not appear in any videos, I do not know the answer. However, I am unsure if YouTube's algorithm is that smart because as I have mentioned earlier it can confuse similar sounding words with each other.

There were two other words related to sex or sexual acts that appeared in the videos; they were *anal* and *blowjob*. It is quite clear that these words would go against YouTube's guidelines as they cannot really mean anything else than sexual acts and they clearly had to be censored in some way. For the word *anal* The Click used the word *stuff*, which can mean many

things as it is a quite neutral word, but of course in sexual context and with correct information it is clear what they mean, when they say *stuff*. Although, to be clear they use word *stuff* in other context as mentioned before it can mean other things too. For *blowjob* they had two different options, *BJ*, which is a shortened form of *blowjob* and *did it*. *BJ* is used more often by younger people and there are several entries of it in the Urban Dictionary, which would imply that it is on many people's lexicon. It can be used in more general context than *did it*, which needs a verb in order to work, and this is probably why The Click has these two separate options.

4.4.4 Words related to other sexual content

There were seven words related to other sexual content and most of them were negative in manner, in fact only two of them could be described to be almost neutral. These two as can be seen from the table 9 below were *porn* and *horny*. Like with other words relating to sex, these words can be seen as problematic because they tend to be quite explicit and not suitable for younger audience even though the videos are aimed for adult watchers. For the word *porn* The Click had several options, *adult films*, *naughties*, *adult addiction*, and they did not particularly stick to one of them but instead used one that fit to the situation the most. Out of these three words, *adult films* is quite neutral and does not necessarily mean *porn*, but depending on the context it can mean that. *Naughties* is probably the most immature one as *naughties* does not in any way refer to *porn*. If one used it in sentence in place of *porn* most probably would not know what they were saying, but for The Click it is quite natural to use it as they use *naughties* and other words derived from it to mean other sexual things. The last one, *adult addiction*, can be only used, when *porn* is accompanied with the word *addiction*, as in *porn addiction*, and The Click did not use it in anywhere else. *Horny* might not be the most problematic word, but again it is not exactly child-friendly either as it is used in sexual context. The Click used the phrase *mood for naughties* instead, which does have the same meaning, even if it is longer way of saying the same thing. However, it is a safe phrase to say on YouTube, although people need to know that *naughties* in this case means *sex* in order to understand what they mean. In other words, The Click is using algospeak here because their viewers do know what they are saying, but the algorithm does not.

Table 9) Words related to other sexual things

Uncensored	Assaulted	Porn	Raped	Horny	Sex of-fender	Sexual assault	Sex crime
The Click	Had some really bad intimate things	Adult films, Naughties, Adult ad-diction	Even worse things	Mood for naughties	Naughty, naughty offender	Forced naughties on person	Naughty crimes

Rest of the words have negative connotations as they generally refer to sex crimes. Regarding these words it is expected that YouTube wants to avoid them in their platform as they only have negative connotations. The first word is *assaulted*, which in sexual and other context means attacking physically or verbally. In here it was used in the physical sense as The Click explained it as *had some really bad intimate things*, which can only mean some bad things happened in sexual sense. It is almost funny that the explanation is more graphic than the actual banned word because if the word *assaulted* had been used instead it would not have been as explicit as this phrase. The word *raped* was replaced with *even worse things*, which in the context meant worse things than being sexually assaulted. The replacement might not be the clearest, but as there really is no good one-word replacement for the word *rape* that would have the same meaning something else had to be said instead and while this might not be the best replacement, it still explains some things for the viewers.

The last three words were *sex offender*, *sexual assault* and *sex crime*, which all have only negative connotations as they are either crimes or criminals. For all three of them The Click has used some form of the word *naughties*, in all of them it has replaced the word sex as can be seen in the table 9. They have replaced the word *sex* with the word *naughty* before, but now it is being associated with something negative and not with positive as it was before. It is still a little juvenile word, but when it is being paired with crime it has become not very funny and cannot really be called childish. Out of these words the word *sexual assault* has been changed the most as it is now *forced naughties on person*, which has the same meaning, although again it is more explicit than the original word and verb is before the noun. The other two also basically mean the same thing, but *sex* has been replaced with *naughty* and the *sex offender* can

also be simply called *naughty* without the *offender* part. It might feel that The Click is making light of very serious crimes as they use quite simple and maybe immature words to describe these crimes, but I think that YouTube is more on the fault as they forbid the use of the word *sex* in monetized content and because of this YouTubers have to think new ways to express these things related to the word *sex* even if they sound ridiculous. Also, The Click had already used this word, *naughty*, before to mean *sex* in positive connotations.

4.5 Other words and phrases

4.5.1 Introduction

There were several words and phrases that could not be categorized as neither swear words or words relating to sex and gender because they are more general in nature or not quite swear words. The EmKay-channel did not have any of these because the ones they had they either ignored or bleeped over and they are mentioned in other sections. This meant that only The Click and Shaaba had some of these other words. These words and phrases have been put into three different tables, table 10 has words The Click used, table 11 has the words Shaaba used and table 12 has the short phrases used by both of them.

4.5.2 The Click

The Click had three words that could not be classified either as swear words or words relating to sex and gender. In the table 10 it can be seen that two of them are related self-harm, these words are *suicidal* and *suicide*. Some people might have not expected that these words are not allowed on YouTube as they are neither swear words or slurs. They simply are factual words that express ending one's life. To many it probably would be more helpful if these words could be used as their replacements do not always carry the same meaning or message. For example, The Click used *very depressed* instead of *suicidal* and while depression certainly has something to do with suicide, they do not always occur together and using this word can be misleading to the viewers. Same thing occurs with *suicide* as The Click uses a phrase of *on the brink of very bad stuff*, which is not correct as it was not an attempted suicide, but an actual thing, meaning the person killed themselves.

However, this is not entirely The Click's fault because they cannot mention the actual thing, *suicide*, in their videos and have to think some other phrases to use. In their earlier videos they have used expressions such *the game overs* and *fell of the flat earth*, which are clever ways of expressing *suicide*, but they have said that they do not like to do that anymore because it makes light of very serious things. This might be why they do not use the word *sewer slide* that is often used on TikTok to mean suicide because it also makes fun of it. Although, it is

clear way of avoiding triggering algorithms as sewer slide does sound phonologically very similar as suicide, but their orthographic forms are different, which means that the algorithms does not recognize it as a harmful content. The third word they had was *shitshow* in where they simply replaced the problematic *shit* with *poo*, which is allowed on the platform. They have used *poo* before to mean *shit* as I have explained int the previous sections.

Table 10) Other words The Click

Uncensored	Suicidal	Suicide	Shitshow
The Click	Very depressed	On the brink of very bad stuff	Pooshow

4.5.3. Shaaba

Shaaba had only two words that did not fit to any of the previous categories as can be seen in table 11; they were *miscarriage* and *moron*. *Miscarriage* is a word that many would not expect to be on the forbidden words list because it is just a factual word, meaning some lost the baby they were carrying. The replacement Shaaba uses is in fact not correct because they use the word *nearly* in it, which would indicate that the baby is safe, when the person has actually lost the baby. But like with The Click they are not entirely at fault as this only has happened because of YouTube’s strict guidelines that do not allow the use of some factual words due to topics they are often used in, such as self-harm or miscarriage. Of course, one could argue that they should have not just used the word *nearly*, but the phrase would have been losing the baby, which might have triggered the YouTube’s algorithm and made the changing words ineffectual. The other word they had was *moron*, which means a person affected with mild intellectual disability and it is now considered to be offensive (Merriam-Webster, N.D), which of course means that it is not allowed on YouTube as YouTube does ban the use of some words that are offensive towards certain groups of people. Shaaba changed *moron* to a more light-hearted noun *silly*, which essentially means the same, but is not offensive and people do not take it as seriously as they would take *moron*.

Table 11) Other words Shaaba

Uncensored	Miscarriage	Moron
Shaaba	Nearly losing the baby	Silly

4.5.4 Other phrases

There were three very short phrases that could not be categorized in any previous categories. The Click had all three of them in their videos, but Shaaba had only one. The phrases The

Click had were as can be seen in the table 12 below, *killing themselves* and *pain in the ass*. Not all of the words were problematic, but for the first phrase the word *killing* had to be replaced with something else as it indicates self-harm and The Click used quite long way of expressing the same thing, which was *doing very bad things to themselves*. But then again there is no short replacement for the word *killing* that would be YouTube-friendly and what they used, *doing very bad things to themselves*, has almost the same meaning, although doing very bad things can mean other things than just *killing*. For the second phrase they only needed to replace *the ass*, which as I have mentioned before is not allowed on YouTube, with *butt*, which is fine. The idiom, both The Click and Shaaba had, was *shit hits the fan*, which basically means that everything begins to go wrong. As mentioned before *shit* is a problematic word and has to be changed. The Click replaced it with more general word *stuff*, which quite does not have the same meaning as *shit*, but people would understand what they wanted to say as the idiom is quite well-known. Shaaba on the other hand, used the word *poop*, which basically means the same as *shit*, but is less explicit. It is a word small children use and that makes it more child-and YouTube-friendly at the same time. This makes me wonder what kind of words YouTube wants to censor as same words basically mean the same thing but maybe have slightly little different connotations.

Table 12) Other phrases

Uncensored	Killing themselves	Pain in the ass	Shit hits the fan
The Click	doing very bad things to themselves	Pain in the butt	Stuff hits the fan
Shaaba	-	-	Poop hits the fan

4.6. Other ways of avoiding censorship

4.6.1 Introduction

YouTubers mostly replace the problematic words, such as swear words and words relating to sex and gender, with other words that sometimes are quite odd or even funny, but there are also other ways to work around YouTube's censorship and strict guidelines. This includes bleeping over the word, ignoring and sometimes also blurring the word. Blurring the word does not always mean that the word is bleeped over, in fact it might appear more with replacing the word, however it does fall under the category of other ways of avoiding censorship and therefore fits to this section better than with replacing the word section. This section briefly explains how and why YouTubers bleep over problematic words, what kind of words

they ignore entirely, what kind of words they blur and how emojis also can be used as a tool to avoid censorship.

4.6.2 Bleeping over the word

Bleeping over the problematic word is quite often used in YouTube's platform because there are quite many words that go against YouTube's guidelines and doing this, bleeping over the word, means that YouTubers do not need to be that careful regarding their language usage. This, of course, means more editing done to their videos because the words still exist, unlike when they replace them with other words. I have made three different tables, table 13, table 14, and table 15, all YouTube-channels have their own table because this made counting the words and demonstrating them easier. These tables demonstrate what kind of words YouTubers often bleep over and how many times one particular word was bleeped over in these fifteen videos. The table 13 has an extra line for the bleeping sound because that YouTuber, Shaaba, sometimes used different audios than the very basic bleeping sound.

The Click had four different words bleeped over in their five videos used in this thesis. They are, as can be seen in the table 13 below, all swear words. The times The Click bleeped over these words was in total 21, which is quite small number considering that there were five videos that lasted about 40-50 minutes in general, this means that per video there was about only four occasions of bleeping. The Click did not use other noises to bleep over these words than the standard bleeping sound. The most often bleeped over word was *shit*, which is a little unexpected as The Click also has two replacements for it that they use; these are *shait* and *poo* as has been mentioned in the previous sections, but for some reasons in these cases they have wanted to use the actual word instead, which then was bleeped over. Same can be said of *fuck* as The Click quite often used the euphemism *frick* instead of fuck. They also were the most frequent user of other words derived from *frick*, although it should be mentioned that were only three occasions of bleeping over *fuck*, and they definitely used the replacement more often.

The opposite happens with *bullshit* as it is bleeped over more often than replaced, it is replaced only twice with *BS* but bleeped over 6 times. This might indicate that The Click does not like to replace this word that often or finds it too troublesome for a reason or other. However, as the data sample is small as it is, there is not enough proof for one way or another. The last word *shitty* is bleeped over two times and it does not appear in any other occasions, which means that it is impossible to know whether The Click has a replacement for it or not. It seems that The Click does not prefer to use bleeping much in their videos and instead prefers to replace the problematic words with other words instead. This choice does reflect The

Click’s personality as they often want to make funny word choices and replacing the word allows them to do that more easily than bleeping.

Table 13) Bleeping over the word The Click

Bleeped over	Fuck	Shitty	Bullshit	Shit
Times	3	2	6	10

Shaaba had the least amount of bleeping over the words in her videos as we can be seen in the table 14 below. She only had six different occasions and four different words or in case of the swear word *fuck* two different derivations of it, which were *fuck* and *fucking*. The reason for this might be that her videos quite often focus on more soft subjects than the other two channels, which feature subreddits and posts that can be quite alarming in many ways. Her videos often feature LGBTQ+ Reddit posts and are overall more relaxing than infuriating. She also reads the post in calmer manner than some YouTubers, which allows her to change her words if needed to. My hypothesis is that this might be one reason why overall her videos do not have that many swear words in them, most of swear words that appear in her videos have been in the original post that she reads on the video, and she does not use them that often herself. She tends to use them, when she is angrier regarding the post, but they might not be on her regular vocabulary. The other reason might be that she also quite frequently changes the problematic word to something else, which does decrease bleeping over the words.

Table 14) Bleeping over the word Shaaba

Bleeped over	Dick	Fuck or another derivation	Bitch	Shit
Times	1	2	2	1
Bleeping sound	Bleep	Quacking	Quacking	Poop audio

The words she has bleeped over are all swear words of varying decree. *Dick* and *shit* are quite mild swear words and many probably would not mind them as they are often used in regular speech and *dick* even is not always a swear word as it can also refer to the male reproduction organ, although some might still have problem with this. However, for YouTube content these words are, as mentioned in previous sections problematic and if they are not changed or ignored, they need to be bleeped over in order to make the video monetizable. For the word *dick* Shaaba has bleeped it over with the very generic bleeping sound and it does not stand out as she continues to read the Reddit post.

For the other three she does use other sounds; for *fuck* and *bitch* she used the noises that duck make, in other words quacking, which does stand out a little, but at the same time, it does fit to the situation because she also uses the duck emoji at the same time. *Duck* is used as one euphemism for the swear word *fuck* and due to this it makes sense to use quacking to bleep over the word, however, there does not seem to be any connection between *bitch* and ducks. Duck and fuck also orthographically look very similar. My hypothesis is that because they are both swear words Shaaba decided to use the same method to cover both of them and maybe because there really is no funny sound or emoji to bleep over the *bitch* that would create the same effect as duck does to the *fuck*. This is purely my hypothesis regarding the choices she has made, and it cannot be proven in any way as there is not enough data. There was one occasion, where Shaaba used a poop audio, explained in earlier sections, to bleep over the word *shit* alongside the poop emoji, which again created a funny atmosphere and showed that censoring can be both creative and fun if it is done right. For some of these words Shaaba also had a replacement word that they used if they did not bleep over the word, for example for *fuck* they often used *frick* and for *shit* *poop*. As the only occasions of *dick* and *bitch* were bleeped over, I do not know if she also has replacements for these words, but it is very likely as for most swear words, she also had a replacement. There also was no real indicator, where she would replace the word or bleep over it. It seems like she does what seems most natural in that particular situation.

The EmKay-channel had the most amount of bleeping in their videos as can be seen in the table 15; the total times of bleeping was 33, which was 13 occasions more than The Click's and 27 occasions more than Shaaba's, which might indicate that bleeping is more usual in their channel. They also had more words bleeped over than the other two, as they had six different words and two other words, *fuck* and *shit* with different derivations. *Shit* and *fuck* were also bleeped over in the two other channels, which might be an indicator of a very problematic word, although The Click choose to bleep *fuck* over only three times and Shaaba two, the same thing happens with *shit*, they bleeped it over much less than EmKay. However, they did use replacements more often, which is probably the reason why they did not bleep over them that often. EmKay bleeped *fuck* over 17 times and *shit* 9 times, which is quite a lot. One reason for this, bleeping over words more often, might be that they do not replace the words as often as The Click and Shaaba and as a result had to bleep over them in order to make the video YouTube-friendly. However, they have also used replacement for these two swear words; they used *frick* and *smith* in their videos, but in lesser amount than the other two channels.

Putting aside *fuck* and *shit*, the other words bleeped over have only one or two occurrences in total and they were all swear words, except *weed*, which is a slang word for the drug marijuana. It makes sense that YouTube does not want to have words related to drugs in their monetized content because that might cause some problems. There might be replacements for the word weed, such as grass and devil's lettuce, which are other slang words meaning marijuana, that would not go against YouTube's guidelines, but it is very possible that EmKay did not want to take the risk, and bleeping might be safer choice in this case. They have also bleeped over the *bitch* once, although they have a few replacement words for it. The fact that they have multiple replacements, for example *bich*, and have bleeped it over only once would be an indicator of preferring to use replacements instead of bleeping over it. *Bitch* might be easier to replace than rest of the word in the table 15 as there are a couple of easy variations of it, *birch* is also popular replacement among YouTubers, speaker needs to only change a couple of letters in order to have a YouTube-friendly word. Again, the problem with *bitch* is its orthographic form and not how it sounds phonologically as *birch* and *bich* both sound very much like *bitch*.

Same cannot be said of *slut*, *pussy*, *dick* and *kill myself*, although I have heard of using *shuut* for *slut*, but it is not as popular as *birch* for example. My hypothesis is that these words have been bleeped over because there is no easy solutions or replacements for them and in that case bleeping over them might just be easier and less time consuming than starting to think about what word might fit here. Especially with *kill myself* because YouTube is very strict regarding topics such as suicide or self-harm that is one reason why The Click is very vague, when they talk about these topics in their videos.

Table 15) Bleeping over the word EmKay

Bleeped over	Fuck or another derivation	Shit or another derivation	Weed	Bitch	Slut	Pussy	Dick	Kill myself
Times	17	9	1	2	1	1	1	1

4.6.3. Ignoring the word

Sometimes in order to follow YouTube's guidelines regarding language usage YouTubers chose to ignore the problematic word entirely. However, this did not happen that often in the videos that I had chosen, which was quite unexpected, only The Click and EmKay had some occasions of ignoring the word. The Click had three different occasions and EmKay had eight different occasions. The Click ignored the words, *fucking*, *ass* and *cum*. These words were

also blurred in the videos, which happens sometimes, but not always with these kinds of problematic words. The Click as previously mentioned often uses the expression of *fricking*, when the word used in the Reddit post has been *fucking*, but in this one occasion they choose to do otherwise. The reason is not clear, but my hypothesis is that there already had been many occasions of swear words in small frame of time and ignoring the word was just easier. Same hypothesis might work for *ass* as well because while they maybe could have used *butt* it is always context depended and for example, one probably would not call someone *butt*, but they could be called an *ass*. The word *cum* does not appear in any videos, where it would have been changed to something and there really is no good replacement for it that would mean the same thing, which probably is the reason why The Click simply chose to ignore it instead and it was clear what the Redditor meant because of the context that the post provided.

The Emkay had eight different occurrences of ignoring the word and out of these eight six involved the swear word *fuck* in some way; there were two *fucks*, two *fuckings*, *one for fucks sake* and *what the fuck*. The EmKay-channel also uses the euphemisms *frick* and *fricking*, but in these four occasions they chose to ignore the words instead. The other two words were *asshole* and *shit*, which EmKay also had replacements for, they even had three different options for *shit*. It is not possible to know why they choose to ignore these specific words as they do have some replacements for them, but the reason might be that because out of these three channels they also use the bleeping most often and doing this, ignoring the word, does help the editors because they do not need to edit videos as much.

4.6.4 Blurring

Blurring is one of the many ways to avoid YouTube's censorship and it is often done alongside with other methods of avoiding censorship that have been mentioned previously. Even though blurring does not directly affect one's speech, which is the focus of this thesis, it is important to point out that changing, ignoring or bleeping over the word is not always enough and blurring is also needed. Blurring is almost always done to the words that need some form of censoring in spoken form. This includes previously stated swear words, words related to sex and gender and other words, such as words that mention self-harm in some form. Sometimes the blurring or censoring the word otherwise has already been done by the Reddit user:

Example 1) Reddit post, self-censored s**ualized, word relating to sex sexualized, expressed as naughtilized (The Click)

Example 2) Reddit post, self-censored b**** and c***, swear words bitch and cunt, expressed as b with many stars and b with many stars (Shaaba)

Example 3) Reddit post, self-censored F#ck#ng a##hole, swear words fucking and asshole, expressed as a fricking a-hole (EmKay, Robin)

However, this is quite a rare occurrence and more often the blurring is done by the YouTuber themselves. Quite often the whole word does not need to be blurred, for example in the word *shitshow* only the *shit* part needs to be blurred as it is the problematic part and *show* part is fine. Although, YouTubers do blur the whole word if they do not know how much is fine. The amount of blurring depends quite much on the YouTuber and on what they are reading. For example, The Click had to blurry much more words as can be seen in the table 16 than Shaaba and EmKay as they read more disturbing Reddit posts than the other two, for example posts dealing with sexual assault or with a lot of swear words that needed to be blurred.

Table 16) Blurring

YouTuber	Blurring done by YouTuber	Blurring done by Redditor
The Click	98	2
EmKay	2	3
Shaaba	1	2

One other reason also might be that as The Click is not Native English speaker, they might not always know or want to be sure that their videos do not include words that would cause demonetization of their videos. There really is no other explanation for the huge difference in blurring than that. While blurring is not the focus of this thesis it is interesting to see the difference between the YouTubers and how it reflects to the other aspects of censorship.

4.6.5 Use of Emoji

There was some use of emojis as one option for censorship, although they were usually accompanied also by either some part of the word or by bleeping over the word. There is a table 17 below that explains the meaning of the emojis used in the videos. They generally did not appear alone. The only YouTuber that had emojis used in their videos was Shaaba, the other two channels did not use them and even Shaaba did not use them in all of their videos and even general the usage was very small. The used emojis were an emoji with moustache and glasses (👨👓), a duck emoji (🦆), a poop or poo emoji (💩) and an eggplant emoji (🍆). Using emojis is very creative way to avoid YouTube's censorship because they do not go against YouTube's guidelines even if they are used in questionable context, but I think that if all problematic words were replaced with emojis the viewing experience would not be enjoyable as they can be quite distracting. However, in small doses they do enhance the viewing experience. This might be one reason why Shaaba did not use them more in their videos.

Shaaba used the emoji with moustache and glasses (🤨) together with noise, *hmmnnn*, which was used to replace the alphabetism *WTF* (what the fuck). She could have used the alphabetism itself as it does not contain any problematic words, but I think that the Reddit post they were reading upset them. In the post someone was changing their baby's dirty diaper in the bar counter at wine tasting event, which is very questionable behaviour and hence the use of the emoji with moustache and glasses (🤨). Duck emoji (🦆) was used in four different occasions, as can be seen in the table 17 below. Two of these occasions were related to the swear word *fuck* or *fucking* and the other two the swear word *bitch*. On all occasions duck noises were also used as a way of bleeping over the word. As mentioned before duck emoji is sometimes used as a slang alternative for fuck and it certainly is a creative way of saying fuck and also YouTube-friendly because one is only using an innocent duck emoji. The poop emoji (💩) was three times, and it was always used with the replacement for *shit*. However, how the word *shit* itself was presented was different in all cases, in one post it was changed to *stuff*, in the other it was replaced with the word *poop* and in the last one *shit* was simple represented with a *poop audio*. In all cases the emoji represented the figurative shit and not the actual excrement. The eggplant emoji (🍆) was used to cover the word *dick* alongside bleeping over the problematic word, which is a slang word for male genitalia.

Table 17) Emojis

Emoji	🤨	🦆	💩	🍆
Explanation	Name disguised face emoji and is often used to when someone may be saying or sharing something risky, and they want to have an illusion of a disguise	Mainly used to mean the animal itself or something associated with it, for example hunting. But it is also used as a slang alternative for fuck	Can mean shit in both literal and figurative senses, but it can also mean passive aggression	Most of then used in sexting and it means male genitalia, in other words penis
Occasions	1	4	3	1

4.7. Similarities and differences between the YouTubers and their strategies

The YouTube-channels that I had chosen for this thesis did indeed use similar strategies, when they dealt with problematic words or phrases. One good example of these similar strategies was changing the problematic words to something else that would not be offensive or go against YouTube's guidelines. Although, the EmKay-channel did not use this strategy as much as the other two channels as they preferred to bleep over the word instead, which was quite unexpected. However, there was a difference between the two EmKay YouTubers and

their strategies regarding these problematic words, one of them, Jack, preferred to change the word while the other, Robin, most often kept the original word that was then later bleeped over.

The videos that I had chosen from EmKay's channel were more often commented by Robin, which meant that they changed words less as that was the strategy that Jack preferred, but they still changed some words, for example *fuck* was changed to *frick*. This particular change also happened on the other two channels as well, which I think demonstrates the fact that *fuck* and other forms derivated from it clearly go against YouTube's guidelines. However, YouTubers had slightly different approaches towards them; The Click used derivated forms of *frick* quite often, but Shaaba, although she used *frick* and *fricking*, did also use short forms for some of the phrases that had *fuck* in them. Also, as previously mentioned EmKay bleeped over most of the short phrases that had the swear word *fuck*, the only ones they did not bleeped over were *what the (actual) fuck* and *shut the fuck up*.

Fuck was not the only swear word that needed to be censored in some way as many other swear words had to be as well. Shaaba and The Click dealt with these other swear words in similar ways, in other words they changed them to something that was YouTube-friendly. EmKay-channels also changed some of them, but most of the changed words had been on the Jack's videos. There was only one swear word that all YouTubers had the same replacement; it was an *asshole*, which was replaced with *a-hole*, although Shaaba and the Click also had some other choices, though they were not used that frequently as an *a-hole*. I think we can assume that an *a-hole* is quite often used as a replacement for an *asshole*, as all four YouTubers had the same replacement. Using an *a-hole* instead of *asshole* is quite clever strategy to work around YouTube's guidelines because most viewers know what they mean as the short form has been around quite a while and even those, who are not familiar with it know what they mean from the context. Also, as all YouTubers used the same replacement, it means that they used same algospeak, although just for one word, but it would indicate that they share vocabulary.

For the other swear words all YouTubers had different replacement, although a couple of them were quite similar to each other, such as the replacement for the swear word *bitch*, The Click used *birch* and EmKay has *bich*, which look and sound quite alike to *bitch*, but does not trigger YouTube's algorithm as has been explained in previous sections. The Click and Shaaba also had similar approaches towards the swear word, *shit* as The Click used *poo* and Shaaba used *poop* instead. These two replacements are very similar to each other and are sometimes used to refer each other. They are also more juvenile words than *shit* as children

often use them or adults use them, when they are speaking to children, which probably explains why they were being used as childish words they do not trigger YouTube's algorithm. All the other replacement for swear words were quite different from each other, although the fact that YouTubers censored similar words would indicate that they are in some ways problematic, maybe because what they represent, which is foul language.

Changing words was expected to some degree, as it was one premise of this thesis, however, I had not expected that many seemingly harmless words would also had to be changed, for example The Click had many words that related to sex and gender in different levels and many of them were changed. One good example of YouTube's inconsistent guidelines is *boob/boobs*, which refers to woman's breast. It is completely normal word; in fact, it is a factual word also used in for example, a medical context and while it does have sexual connotations it is not always used as such. The Click used the replacement *bobs*, when they meant *boobs*, which arguably is quite odd word choice, but it does not go against YouTube's guidelines. One other word, *dick*, piquet my interest as in the context it was used it clearly meant male sex organ, but *dick* is also a name and a pejorative term that basically means a jerk. It is understandable that in sexual and also in pejorative context this word, *dick*, is problematic and therefore needs to be censored in some ways, but what about the name, Dick, would it also considered to be problematic as its orthographic form and how it is pronounced is same as the pejorative term dick. There is no clear answer to this question as the name Dick does not appear in any videos. The problem with Dick does raise questions about YouTube's ability to handle homonyms in right way because while one word can be problematic the other might not, like in the case of Dick.

There were not many idioms that all YouTubers had, there was only one that both Shaaba and The Click had, it was *shit hits the fan*. It would have been interesting to see how YouTubers dealt with similar phrases, but as there was only one it was impossible to see whether they had similar strategies for them. However, it was possible to analyse this one phrase to see whether the YouTubers had used similar or different strategies. As mentioned before The Click used the word *stuff* in place of *shit* and Shaaba used *poop* instead of *shit*. This means that both YouTubers avoided using the word *shit* in their videos as it is a swear word and probably would have triggered the algorithm. This means that they indeed did use similar strategy with this particular word and idiom as the rest of the idiom was kept in its original form.

One of the other popular strategies was bleeping over the problematic word. This strategy was most often used by the EmKay-channel as they did not change as many words as the two

other channels. However, Shaaba and The Click also bleeped over some words, which allowed me to analyse what kind of words were bleeped over. Bleeped over words were almost all swear words, there were a couple non-swear words, but they all appeared on EmKay's videos, which was expected as they are not allowed on YouTube, but what unexpected was that EmKay bleeped over words much more than the other two. Still as these channels bleeped over similar words, such as *fuck*, *bitch* and *shit*, demonstrates the use of same strategy, even if the amount of the use was not the same in all channels.

Also, it interesting that the audio used to bleep over the word was very basic almost in all instances because, for example in EmKay's earlier videos they had used different sounds to bleep over the word, such a gunshot and laughter. Only Shaaba used different sounds to bleep over some words. These were same words that others also bleeped over, which would indicate the fact that the words did not cause this audio change rather others just did not use the same creative means as Shaaba, for example using *quacking noises* to bleep over *fuck*. This probably happened because duck is sometimes used as a euphemism for fuck and ducks quack. Shaaba also used emojis with these other bleeping sounds, for example used the duck emoji with quacking noises. Other did not use emojis in their videos, although using them is certainly quite a creative way of avoiding censorship.

One of the strategies I had initially thought that YouTubers would use quite often was ignoring the problematic word. However, this strategy was not used as often as I had initially thought, which was unexpected because there were only a couple of instances of it being used. Only The Click and EmKay had a few instances of ignoring the word and almost all of them were swear words, although The Click had one word, *cum*, that was related to sex. For the swear words both channels also had replacement for them, but for some reason in these occasions they choose to ignore them instead. However, as there were only a few instances of ignoring the word it appears that this strategy is not very popular among the YouTubers as not all channels even had instances of it. This was a little unexpected as this strategy would have been most efficient one as the YouTuber does not need to edit their videos as much and they also do not need to think about the possible replacement word. However, this strategy also has downsides as the post YouTubers read might become incomprehensible because they might have to leave many words out. This might not be a problem for swear words, as they quite often only add flavour to the text, but for other words, such as words related to sex and gender, this might cause some comprehension issues. YouTubers might have realized this issue and use different strategies instead.

All these strategies mentioned above only involve the spoken language, but one strategy all YouTubers I chose used was blurring, although they used it in different degrees. Shaaba and Emkay used it very little, but The Click used it much more often. Some of the blurring was already done by redditors, however in The Click's case almost all was done by the YouTuber themselves. Blurring is done to the words that need to be changed as these words might violate YouTube's guidelines, but not all YouTubers take it as seriously as The Click. If we compare what kind of forbidden words were used in all Reddit posts read on the videos, we can see that they are very similar, although The Click also had words related to sex and gender that other did not have, but still even considering this fact The Click blurred words more often than the other two.

There are probably multiple reasons for this, such as The Click reading posts that deal with more adult-like topics and post then have more problematic words. However, if the words are that problematic why other the two channels are not blurring them as often. The fact that The Click blurs words more often demonstrates the fear of being demonetized and the reason for this fear might be because their channel was in the past terminated due to not deleting content that YouTube had deemed to be problematic, although this deletion was quickly cancelled as it was done by mistake. Still, I think that the trauma of this incident might be the leading reason for The Click's maybe too enthusiastic blurring as the other two channels do not seem to be that worried about the text on the screen. Of course, for a YouTuber, who makes their living by making videos deletion of their channels is literally life-threatening as they have no other ways earning living.

4.8. Summary

In this section I have gone through all the different strategies used by these three YouTube-channels alongside with the problematic words and phrases that needed to be censored in some manner. There were three major strategies to avoid YouTube's censorship; changing the word that was used most often by The Click and Shaaba, while Emkay used bleeping over the word more often, although they used this strategy only 9 times more than changing the word and ignoring the word that was used least often by all YouTubers. In the table 18 below all the strategies and number of times they were used in the channels can be seen. The table 18 has also three sections for the three categories of word and phrase types that I used in this thesis, for example The Click changed on 81 occasions some type of swear word in their videos. All channels used these three strategies, although in different degrees as can be seen in the table 18.

Table 18) All the strategies and how YouTubers used them

Strategies	Changing the word	Bleeping over the word	Ignoring the word
Swear words and phrases	The Click 81 EmKay 24 Shaaba 16	The Click 20 EmKay 29 Shaaba 7	The Click 8 EmKay 8 Shaaba 0
Words related to sex and gender	The Click 41 EmKay 0 Shaaba 2	The Click 1 EmKay 2 Shaaba 0	The Click 1 EmKay 0 Shaaba 0
Other words and phrases	The Click 6 EmKay 0 Shaaba 1	The Click EmKay 2 Shaaba 0	The Click 0 EmKay 0 Shaaba 0
Number of times the strategy was used	The Click 128 EmKay 24 Shaaba 19	The Click 21 EmKay 33 Shaaba 7	The Click 9 EmKay 8 Shaaba 0
The total amount	171	61	17

The strategy of replacing the word was most interesting from the linguistic point of view as it was possible to analyse the choices made by the YouTubers. Of course, bleeping over the word was also intriguing because it showed what kind of words YouTube deems to be harmful for, especially, younger audiences, but as it did not occur much in The Click and Shaaba’s videos there was not as much data as for changing the word. The same could be said of ignoring the word as it was a strategy that was not used in any channel as the main strategy for avoiding problematic words. There were a couple of sub-strategies used alongside the main ones; these were blurring and use of emoji. Blurring again occurred in all channels, but the Click used it the most and as previously mentioned the most likely reason for this is more adult-like posts. Only Shaaba used emojis in her videos, but they provided an extra strategy to analyse and were amusing to study in linguistic context. The Click provided more data to study than the other two channels and one reason for this was the fact that they videos were generally longer than the other channels. However, even shorter videos might had had more problematic words to study if they had been about more adult-like topics, like The Click’s videos often were, but as EmKay and Shaaba focused on more laid-back topics this did not happen and because of that many sections focused on The Click.

5. Discussion

5.1. Communities of practices and discourse communities on YouTube

My research questions were firstly, do YouTubers form a community of practice or a discourse community or do in fact they form both as these communities often overlap and secondly, do they use same or similar strategies to avoid problematic words and phrases on YouTube. As explained before a community of practice is an aggregate of people who are working towards a common goal (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, 464; Meyerhoff, 2002, 527). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992, 464) continue that how people do things, how they talk, their beliefs, their values and power relations, in other words their practices, emerge in the course of working towards this common goal. A community of practice is also different than a traditional community because it is defined by its membership and by the practices that membership engages in (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, 464). Discourse community on the other hand is a community, which have common interests, and they communicate through approved channels (Porter, 1986, 38). These two communities are quite similar and in the 2000s the term of community of practice was often used alongside the place of discourse community. This is also the approach that I have taken in this thesis.

It was evident from the start that if YouTubers formed communities of practices and/or discourse communities, they would not be traditional because YouTubers are not usually in physical or even visual contact with each other, unless they stream together, but other scholars have shown that physical contact is not necessary condition to form these communities (Locher & Messerli, 2023, 2; Gannon & Prothero, 2018, 595; Wang, 2022, 55). Watts (2008, 41) also mentions that they modified Swales's definition of discourse communities in order to fit it to their hypothesis, which means that it is possible to modify these definitions to make them fit to a modern world that has virtual communities. Watts (2008, 41) retorts that in 1999 they defined a discourse community as "a set of individuals who can be interpreted as constituting a community on the basis of the ways in which their oral or written discourse practices reveal common interests, goals and beliefs, i.e. on the degree of institutionalisation that their discourse displays. The members of the community may or may not be conscious of sharing those discourse practices". Watts (2008, 51) argued in their paper that grammar writers of 18th-century Britain formed either discourse communities or communities of practices because they shared discourse practices. This paper demonstrated that communities of practices and/or discourse communities, whose members never meet with each other have existed for a very long time and that people, who never meet can share vocabulary.

5.2 YouTubers have a shared enterprise

Many scholars (Watts, 2008, 51; Locher & Messerli, 2023; Gannon & Prothero, 2018; Wang, 2022, 55) have proven that people do not necessarily need to be in physical contact in order to have or form communities of practices or discourse communities that share common interests, goals and beliefs. In all of these studies (Watts, 2008; Locher & Messerli, 2023; Gannon & Prothero, 2018; Wang, 2022) this assumption was based on written discourse, but it works in the same manner in spoken discourse also, which indicates that YouTubers, who share similar words and other discourse are indeed forming discourse communities and communities of practices. Watts (2008, 50) argues and many people agree to his view that people are not able to form communities of practices without a shared enterprise, they can have a common enterprise, for example in the case of grammar writers of 18th-century Britain, but that does not mean that they form a community of practice. However, in the case of YouTubers they do share an enterprise in one way because they all “work” for YouTube, they receive their income from YouTube advertisements, although they do have their own channels and careers, which also makes them individuals. Still, how this is different from other companies and their employees, who might not be in contact with each other, but would still form a community of practice because they share and work on the same enterprise. In the previous sections I have also explained how similarly YouTubers work around YouTube’s guidelines and how this is an indicator of shared interests and goals.

My answer to my two research questions is that YouTubers do form both kind of communities, communities of practices and discourse communities, because firstly, they do work towards a common goal, which is making videos that are monetizable and doing so are able to earn living from their videos. Secondly, they have common interests such as making YouTube videos as their job, reading Reddit-posts to inform people about several important topics, for example relationships, and entertain people through their videos. And thirdly, they do share an enterprise in one way, although not in a traditional sense because do not meet on the physical plane, in other words they meet all the requirements except meeting in physical plane ,but other studies have proven that it is not a necessary condition They also share quite much repertoire, although they also have their individual choices for some words, but that was expected because our words define our identity. However, they use same or very similar expressions, which indicates use of algospeak that was one of my minor research questions. Use of algospeak indicates some sense of group identity or community.

5.3 Algospeak

Many sections of this thesis have explained the several strategies how YouTubers avoid getting their videos cancelled or demonetized; these strategies are changing the word, bleeping over the word or ignoring it, because the videos cannot contain words or phrases that YouTube deems to be problematic, for example they are sexual in manner or indicate self-harm. This kind of self-censoring does not only happen in YouTube, but in other social media platforms also, a great example of this is TikTok, which might have even stricter guidelines than YouTube regarding language use, for example on TikTok the word *butt* cannot be said out loud or even written, but on YouTube it is often used as a replacement for the word *ass* as have been mentioned in the earlier sections.

TikTokers and YouTubers both deal with guidelines that restrict their language use, however, while they do employ very similar strategies, they are still slightly different. Steen et al. (2023) researched how TikTokers deal with problematic words, in other words what kind of strategies they employed. The premise of this research paper is very similar to my thesis and research questions, although they focused on different aspects than I. Steen et al. (2023, 1) assumed that TikTokers need to use algospeak on the platform due to TikTok's guidelines, algospeak, which is one form of netspeak essentially means abbreviating, misspelling, or substituting specific words, such as *grape* for *rape* (Steen et al., 2023, 1; Ostler, 2023, 185) and their assumption turned out to be true.

5.4 Social media changes how content creators speak

Coupland (2007, 184) argues that some variationist sociolinguists have been quite hostile to the idea that mass media or rather social media could and in reality, is a regular and an important factor in triggering linguistic change. This thesis has shown that social media and their guidelines affect people's speech and word choices because they cannot speak freely without fear of being demonetized. Some people have even joked that in a couple years we will add the word *unalive* or *unalived*, which means *suicide*, to dictionaries because it is used very often in social media content, where people cannot use the word *suicide*. Of course, this could be a very short-lived phenomena, like Coupland (2007, 184) argues "Mass media do generate some new sociolinguistic resources and these are sometimes used and developed in everyday practice, however short-lived the phenomena might be.". Cohen (2025, 201) is worried that too much moderation in language use will eventually lead to the collapse of language or that the algorithm will learn how these workarounds operate, leading to a never-ending evasive system. Ostler (2023, 183) however likes to see moderation as a linguistically interesting phenomenon as it makes social media users create linguistically interesting words/terms to evade

moderation, which probably is true. At least at the moment how content creators avoid problematic words is very interesting, however, the ending Cohen describes is also very possible because algorithms do learn.

Steen et al. (2023, 7) mentions that many participants of their study had adopted algospeak after they had started doing TikTok-videos, not before, and the reason was to avoid censorship. Steen et al (2023, 7) continue that “Participants largely anticipated how TikTok’s algorithm would read their video content, and used algospeak to primarily evade unjustified algorithmic content moderation while also making sure that target audiences could still find their videos and understand the video’s context.”. Similar things occur on YouTube as YouTubers do need to change some words on their videos, however, it does not occur to the same extent as on TikTok. There has been explanations in the previous sections how some words might actually not need any censorship, but they are still censored even though they are quite normal words, for example *ass* and *shit* because platforms deems them to be harmful for younger audiences, but some certainly need some censoring, for example *sexual assault*, but YouTubers do not need to overly censor themselves and bleeping over the word is enough. I am not sure if TikTokers use bleeping or do they only use algospeak, but on YouTube bleeping is used very often to avoid censorship. It is one of the main strategies to avoid demonetization.

There are multiple differences between YouTube and TikTok, for example, TikTok-videos are very often relatively short while YouTube videos are on the long side. TikTok-videos also have quite often subtitles, which might be one reason why algospeak is used there as algorithms probably notice written text easier than spoken, although TikTokers also use a lot of emojis to indicate things because even the replacement words are being censored, when it is noticed that they are used to replace certain words. YouTube is not that strict, at least yet, and although some YouTubers use emoji to enhance the viewer experience it does not exclude spoken replacements rather, they are just extra, which is very different from TikTok, where they are essential due to TikTok’s guidelines.

While I was analysing my data it became evident that YouTubers do use some algospeak in their videos, but it is not their most often used strategy because while they do often change some words due to guidelines, they are not always in uniform and the ones that are the same, for example *frick* instead of *fuck*, are known slang words and were not invented for the sake of censorship. However, I think that it still can be considered to be some form of algospeak. This is very different from TikTok where people actively need to find replacement, for example the word *corn* or *corn-emoji* for *porn* et cetera because TikTok bans new words often. On

YouTube new banned words do not occur that often as on TikTok and people are already familiar what kind of words they are allowed or not allowed to say on the platform and because of this it might not even be necessary to change their speech if it is already YouTube-friendly, although most need to make some changes. The language used on TikTok is more complex and more creative than the language used on YouTube at the moment, but this just demonstrates that the content creators on platforms like these are able to form communities of practices and discourse communities even if they are not in physical contact with each other and share language with each other.

Steen et al. (2023, 2) mentions that “Although algospeak may in fact function to define social media communities and membership, and though it may as well adopt existing linguistic practices, like Leetspeak or LOLspeak, it significantly differs in its primary intention to use language to circumvent especially algorithmic content moderation.”. Content moderation and demonetization also happens on YouTube as has been mentioned previously, but there have not been similar studies about YouTube regarding this issue, at least I was unable to find any. And while I agree to Steen’s et al. (2023) opinion of algospeak being used as a tool to avoid demonetization and content moderation I do not think that it is just that. Content creators and viewers tend to adopt these algospeak expression to their vocabulary, many YouTubers have expressed in their videos that their vocabulary has changed after they have started doing videos and use them even in normal conversations in the “real world”, although maybe not that often. My point is that TikTok’s algospeak might have started as a way to avoid content moderation, but it has grown in unexpected ways on TikTok and also on YouTube. It might even be possible that in the future these algospeak expression will become new slang words.

5.5 Algospeak and identity

Algospeak also occurs on YouTube, but in lesser amount than on TikTok, at least YouTubers I had chosen did not use same algospeak as TikTokers. However, there were a few examples in my data sample of some algospeak: there were only a few occasions of misspelling of words, The Click had *shait* or *shite*, *birch*, and *bobs* and EmKay had *smith* and *bich* or abbreviating, The Click had *AF* and Shaaba had *F up*, *F off*, *F you* and *WTF*, but there was quite a lot of substituting specific words as has been explained in the earlier sections. Still, I do not think that this necessarily means that YouTubers I chose are specifically using algospeak, rather they use slang words, euphemisms and algospeak all mixed together. However, slang words and euphemisms do have similar connotations as algospeak, they are used to avoid problematic words that would otherwise cause demonetization. It is also very possible that

these slang words and euphemism are in fact algospeak because they are used to avoid demonetization and moderation, which is the original purpose of algospeak. While algospeak exists as a linguistic phenomenon on many social media platforms, such as YouTube, it is strongly linked to TikTok, at least at the moment, where people need to use it much more due to harsh guidelines, this view on the matter was suggested by Lorenz in 2022 (Steen et al., 2023, 1).

Still, I consider the few occasions of algospeak that I witnessed in my data to be significant because even if the YouTubers are not using exactly same algospeak, they have their own versions of certain words, they still use it, and it helps them to establish their own identities. Traditionally algospeak is not used to establish identity or community membership through linguistic modification; rather it is used as a communicative practice in reaction to experiencing content moderation or demonetization on the platform (Steen et al., 2023, 2). However, I think that using same algospeak might be a sign of group identity or being a member of same community of practice. Still, how YouTubers are currently doing things is different from my premise of algospeak being a sign of group identity on YouTube because while they do use same strategies as a means of communicative practice in order to avoid demonetization, they do not use same alternative words, in other words same algospeak, while TikTokers use more often same replacements and same algospeak. This would indicate that TikTokers might have some kind of group identity, but YouTubers do not have at the moment.

However, in YouTube I would consider that YouTubers use these alternative words and phrases to establish their identity more than TikTokers do on TikTok because people there are satisfied using same words and do not try to establish their identity through words. A good example of this that The Click quite often uses replacements that do reflect their personality and identity, such as the word *naughty* for sex related things and saying that *people fell of the flat earth* or *did the game overs*, when they have committed suicide. They use this expression because they have multiple times mentioned that believing in the concept of the flat earth is quite stupid and not correct in the least. I do not think that many would use the same expression as The Click to indicate suicide or self-harm if they do not agree to this view.

In the Steen et al. (2023, 4) study they mention that in TikTok people use *kermit sewer slide* for *commit suicide* and *sewer slide* for *suicide* because the word *suicide* is banned. The fact that many people use the same alternative would in my opinion indicate that people are definitely using the same algospeak, when on YouTube on the other hand people have their own alternatives and only sometimes use the same alternatives, which makes it different than TikTok in that regard. People also use sewer slide on YouTube, although it is not that popular in

my opinion and might it be influence from the TikTokers as some people also do videos on both TikTok and YouTube at the same time. This means that my hypothesis of YouTubers using algospeak as a sign of group identity turned out to be incorrect, however I think they use some algospeak to establish their own personal identities, which means that my hypothesis was not completely incorrect, only the question was.

6. Conclusion

The premise of this thesis was to find out how YouTubers deal with YouTube's strict and sometimes quite inconsistent guidelines. In other words, what kind of strategies they use to avoid words and phrases that would otherwise trigger YouTube's algorithms and cause demonetization of their videos. My hypothesis was that they would employ quite similar strategies and avoid same words and phrases because YouTubers would form a community of practice and/or a discourse community. Strictly speaking a member of a traditional community of practice or discourse community would need to be in a physical contact with other members in order to form a community that would share their discourse and language habits, but this does not happen with YouTubers. However, previous studies showed that virtual communities of practices and discourse communities exist and even if the YouTubers do not directly speak with each other they are still influenced by other YouTubers and also by other internet slang as I was able to find out through my thesis data analysis.

This influence is shown in their choice of replacement words, for example all YouTubers used the word *frick* for the swear word *fuck*. There were some other word choices that could only be explained by being influenced by internet slang and/or by other YouTubers, for example the word *shait* or *shite* The Click uses instead of *shit* is clearly being used because many other people also use it in other various social medias. The other example is *a-hole*, which was used by all three YouTube-channels. The fact that all three YouTube-channels use same replacement demonstrates that YouTubers are able to form communities of practice as they share repertoire, even if not in a traditional manner and that they are most likely also influenced by other internet language in this case probably by algospeak that TikTokers use.

This also demonstrates that YouTubers do not necessarily need to be in contact with each other for a community of practice or a discourse community to form. As they form a community of practice it is natural they use similar words and other ways of communication, in their case referring memes and using internet language. How YouTubers avoid these problematic

words also reflect their personalities because they make different choices regarding the replacement words or other ways of avoiding them, for example The Click used much often more immature words than the other two channels and Shaaba used emojis in her videos. These choices do reflect their personalities and establish their identity. The fact that YouTubers also used same or very similar algospeak is a sign of group identity, even if it is not very strong, because when people share identity features, such as language, they have formed a group.

My data has demonstrated that YouTubers tend to avoid similar topics, in other words swear words, words related to sex and gender and also some other words relating to things, such as self-harm and drugs because they might cause demonetization of their videos. How they avoided these words varied a little, some, in other words EmKay, preferred to bleep over the problematic word and others, Shaaba and The Click, rather changed the word to something else that would be according to YouTube's guidelines. There were three major strategies for avoiding these problematic words, changing the word, bleeping over the word and avoiding the word. All YouTube-channels had their personal preference for their favourite strategy. Changing the word was the most popular one, which was a little unexpected as it takes more effort to do than the other two strategies because first the YouTuber needs to recognize the problematic word and then come up with a replacement that would be YouTube-friendly, which might not be always as easy as it sounds. This strategy, however, provided very much data to study and my findings were interesting even if not all channels offered same amount of data.

The YouTube-channel The Click provided more than the other two channels did. However, Shaaba and EmKay also provided interesting things to study, for example Shaaba's use of emoji was very interesting because other channels did not use emojis in their videos and it also offered a new strategy of avoiding censorship to study, albeit a bit limited as there were only four different emojis used. Emkay, on the other hand, demonstrated that bleeping over the word is still also popular choice in some YouTube-channels, although they also replaced some words. Overall, this thesis has demonstrated how strict YouTube's guidelines can be for YouTubers, who monetize their content and how they affect YouTubers' language choices and speech. It also has shown that monetization changes YouTubers' and other social media influencers vocabulary in real time because they need to avoid demonetization. It might even be that this vocabulary change does not only happen, when they are making videos, but also in their everyday lives, which would be quite dramatic as that would imply that demonetization and content moderation has power to change peoples' speech patterns.

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Appendix

Words and phrases list

Extra information after the word. In brackets the number of times word or phrase was replaced with something else, then if it was bleeped over (also number in brackets if it happened over one time), or if the word was not mentioned in the video, also number in brackets if it happened over one time.

The Click

Words

Porn, (6)

Sex, (8)

Motherfucker, (2)

Shitty, (1), bleeped over (2)

Suicidal, (1)

Shit, (9), bleeped over (8)

Suicide, (2)

Bitch, (4)

Bullshit, (2), bleeped over (7)

Fucked, (3)

Sexual, (1)

Sexual assault, (1)

Horny, (1)

Damn, (1)

Sexcrime, (1)

Fucking, (7), not mentioned

Cunt, (3)
Raped, (1)
Asshole, (41)
Sexualized, (2)
Boobs, (1)
Sexualization, (1)
Sexualize, (1)
Anal, (1)
Ass, not mentioned
Blowjob, (3)
Vagina, (1)
Penis, (1)
Dick, (2)
Cum, not mentioned
Condom, (1)
Sexually, (2)
Masturbate, bleeped over
Shitshow, (1)
Bullshitting, bleeped over
Assaulted, (1)

Phrases

Fuck up, (1)
Fuck around and find out, (2)
Fucked around and found out, (1)
Sex offender, (6)
Killing themselves, (1)
Holy shit, bleeped over
Shut the fuck up, (1)
Pain in the ass, (1)
Shit hits the fan, (1)

Fuck you, (1)

Fuck off, (1)

What the fuck, bleeped over

As fuck, (1)

EmKay

Words

Shit, (3), bleeped over (8), not mentioned

Shits, (2)

Fuck, (5), bleeped over (5), not mentioned (2)

Asshole, (5), not mentioned

Shitty, (1), bleeped over

Bitch, (1), bleeped over (4)

Fucking, bleeped over (9), not mentioned (2)

Fuckup, (1)

Dick, bleeped over

Pussy, bleeped over

Slut shamed, bleeped over

Weed, bleeped over

Phrases

What the actual fuck, (1)

What the fuck, (1), not mentioned

Shut the fuck up, (2)

For fuck's sake, bleeped over, not mentioned

Fucking asshole, (1)

Fucked up, (1)

Kill myself, bleeped over

Shaaba

Words

Fuck, (1), bleeped over

Bitch, (1), bleeped over (2)

Cunt, (1)

Shit, (2)

Fucking, (2)

Miscarriage, (1)

Moron, (1)

Jackshit, bleeped over

Asshole, (4)

Dick, bleeped over

Phrases

Fuck up, (1)

Fuck you, (1)

Fuck off, (1)

What the fuck, (1) bleeped over

For fuck's sake, (1)

Mother fucking Karen, bleeped over

Shit hits the fan, (1)

Link to YouTube's forbidden words list posted on Reddit:

https://www.reddit.com/r/youtubers/comments/db5kgt/tips_tricks_list_of_youtube_demone-tized_words_for/