Yenni Hasnah

A Study of Taboo Words among Students in the Classroom Interaction

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A Study of Taboo Words among Students in the Classroom Interaction

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ABSTRACT

The realization of the importance of language aspects in a police station investigation has shaped the development of forensic linguistics This research deals with the use of taboo words among students in classroom interaction. It was intended to investigate the types and functions of using taboo words when the students communicated with each other in class. The method used in this study was qualitative research. The data were obtained from the observed and recorded learning activities in the classroom by focusing on the utterances of taboo words used among students. The data collected were analyzed qualitatively including data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion. The findings show that three types of taboo words were realized in the students' interaction, namely: vulgarity, epithets, and profanity. Meanwhile, another type of taboo word (obscenity) did not exist. Then, it was also revealed that there were three functions indicated by students in applying taboo words when they were communicating with each other; to draw attention to themselves, to show contempt, and to be a provocation. In conclusion, not all taboo word categories were realized in the students' classroom interaction.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Sociolinguistics is a study of social structure, social organizations, the relationship between and within groups of people, and social behavior. In a broader sense, sociology studies groups of people in society (family, clan, tribes, and nations), and how they behave and affect each other. Therefore, sociology is the study of the arrangements through which people know, share, and affect one another's lives. This science explains the human ability to use language rules appropriately in different situations. Chaer and Leonie (1995), say that sociolinguistics deals with the detail of actual language use, such as descriptions of patterns of language use or dialect in a particular culture, choices of language use, or certain dialects made.

Language is the most effective means used by humans to communicate. By which people can reveal various ideas in their minds for certain purposes. Language can also form a social group. The group always coexisting is generally called society. Communicative capabilities are the ability to speak or the ability to use language under the functions and situations and norms of language use within the context of the situation and social context.

As a means of communication, language has several functions. Generally, people use language to communicate their intention to others. Especially, language is used by people to convey messages or to send information to make the conversation activities run smoothly.

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In other words, language functions as a means to share information such as recent news, interesting activities, and gossip. Moreover, Chaika (1982) also states that people use language to reveal or conceal personal identity, character, and background without realizing that they are doing so. Therefore, every person has their own to choose the language variation which can confirm one's identity. Some people may prefer to use language that has a strong impact when they are sad or angry. For instance, people use that has a strong impact when they are considered bad language which is inappropriate to use. One way to express their feeling is by producing taboo words. People usually produce taboo words to swear they are the strongest way to express their dissatisfaction. They sometimes emphasize people's real intentions.

In general, the use of language in society must have the principle of politeness in language with the speech partner. This is in line with Allan's opinion (in Rahardi, 2005) which elaborates that for the process of communication between speakers and speech partners can run well and smoothly, speakers and speech partners must prioritize the principle of good cooperation. More than that, he believes that good cooperation is one of the things that can be done by the presence of language politeness with the speech partner. One of the things that people pay attention to is avoiding any prohibitions/taboos in speaking. There are prohibitions and taboos in speaking because of their culture and beliefs. Not all sentences can be spoken in different contexts.

These prohibitions and taboos are referred to as accepted norms and culture. This fact shows that language and culture are two different things that mutually influence each other, not least in the Alas society. The Alas tribe is one of the tribes that inhabit the South East Aceh Regency, Aceh Province. The Tanah Alas area is traversed by many rivers, one of which is Lawe Alas (Alas River). Most of the Alas tribe live in rural areas and live from agriculture and livestock. In daily interaction, the Alas tribe has its language, namely the Alas Language (Cekhok Alas). This language is a language that a family of the Austronesian Klute tribe in the South Aceh district and also uses a language that is almost the same as the Alas tribal language. This language has many similarities in vocabulary with the Karo language spoken by the Karo people in North Sumatra Province. The language used by the Alas people is influenced by the cultured and mindset Alas community. This is in line with the opinion of Chaer and Leonie (2010) who states that language is part of the culture. Language and culture are two systems inherent in humans that influence each other.

Taboo or abstinence is a strong social prohibition against words, objects, actions, or people that are considered undesirable by a group, culture, or society. According to Ullman (1970) said "The meaning of taboo branches off into two" opposite directions. One the other hand it means to sacred, consecrate: but one other hand it means uncanny, dangerous, forbidden and unclean". While Akmajin (1998), states that taboos are words that cannot deserve to be said in society, and the use of taboo words should be avoided or at least we do not use in associated with society. A person will adapt the way they speak to their social situation. An individual, for example, will speak differently to a child than he or she would like to a college professor.

Taboo terms were firstly introduced by Captain Cook in the late 18th century when he was sent to Tahiti. According to Allan and Burridge (2006), taboo or known as *tabu* is a Tongan term that denotes a person, object, or act that is dangerous and therefore must be avoided. In every culture, there are both taboo acts which are things that are not supposed to do and taboo words which are things that are not supposed to say. Both are related to each other because some taboo acts have corresponding taboo words, while others do not (Fairman, 2009). The example, in this case, is the act of incest which is known as taboo so is the *mother**ker* which denotes incest activity. However, other words are considered

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taboo while the action they denote is not considered taboo. When people talk about sex it is often considered taboo while the act itself is not forbidden if it is done by the appropriate person in a suitable place and time. Therefore, words that are related to or linked to taboo acts will automatically become taboo words (Allan and Burridge, 2006).

The existence of taboo words can be seen in various sources as in the movie, song lyrics, and television shows. The existence of various taboo words in those sources is caused by the fact some people believe that employing taboo words is an appropriate way to express a strong feeling and emotion, especially in the form of swearing. Taboo words in the form of swearing are not only uttered to express anger and emotive feeling but also uttered express friendliness, familiarity, or identity among communities. There were some previous studies related to this research. Firstly, the study conducted by Nicolau (2016) revealed that the most frequently used swear words were related to intellectual based terms and religions; anger was the primary reason for the young learners to swear to someone; the use of acronyms was commonly explored to tone down the offensiveness of the swear words, and moms were the highest contributors for the young learners to learn how to swear. Another research done by Wiwin & Aziz (2019) found that taboo words related to sex, the natural function of the human body, sexual activity, misconduct, deficiency, and animals. Then, the study by Wibowo (2008) concluded that there were three general types of taboo words; obscenity, profanity, and vulgarity.

There is an assumption that taboo words are mostly spoken by lower-class educational backgrounds because it is believed that educational background influences the way people speak. The way people speak is an indicator of their social background. On the other hand, this assumption is somehow incorrect because people with good educational backgrounds sometimes still use obscene and offensive language in their conversations. When people say taboo words whether they are educated or uneducated, there must be a reason behind it. Some people don't just say taboo words because they want to. Sometimes they say taboo words for a specific purpose such as attracting other people's attention or showing their disdain. Swearing is in most people's repertoire. Unlike language in general, it is not usual sense but is drawn from peers, parents, or the media. The use of swearing often occurs in the interaction between students resulting in a commotion and disrupting the student learning process.

Concerning the previous research, it seemed that the present study tended to make an almost similar case but they are certainly quite different. Similarly, the three researchers above and the current researcher had the same focus, namely locally taboo words in classroom interaction. But, in this study, the researchers analyzed the locally taboo word in classroom interaction. The similarity between this research and the relevant studies above was to investigate the types of taboo words and the functions of using such words. On the other hand, they had the different participants and the places as the difference between this research and relevant study. Thus, the researchers were interested in analyzing taboo words, especially the types and functions of taboo words used by the students in classroom interaction. Then, the research entitled "Locally Taboo Words in The Classroom Interaction: A case Study of Intermediate Students".

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II. METHOD

This research was conducted by applying the descriptive qualitative method since the researchers wanted to get the description of the words considered taboo words. According to Vanderstoep and Johnson (2009), this method focuses on cultural, social, and personal identity and its goal is more descriptive than predictive. Although this research employed a qualitative method, the researchers also used the quantitative method to support the interpretation of data. Again, Vanderstoep and Johnson (2009) state that the quantitative method brings statistical work to a certain phenomenon under study. Therefore, by providing statistical work in the form of a percentage, the researchers could easily describe the phenomenon that they wanted to investigate by giving fixed percentages to make a clear explanation.

These data of the research were taboo words in the classroom interaction amounting to 52 utterances. Those were gotten from the interactions among students in the classroom. This research used observation and interview techniques to collect data. Observation is a data collection method in which researcher records information they witnessed during the study (Gulo, 2002). In this observation, the researchers used the non-participant type, namely the researchers only observed the situation directly on the use of taboo language during interactions in the classroom, but the researchers were not active and did not participate directly (Usman, 1995). Then, an interview is a conversation with a specific purpose. The conversation was carried out by two parties, namely the interviewer who asked the question and the interviewee who answered the question (Meleong, 2010). The main characteristic of the interview is face-to-face direct contact between the information seeker and the resource person. Through this interview, the researchers explored the data, information, and information framework of the research subject. The interview technique was carried out through free-guided; the questions asked were not fixed on the interview guide and could be deepened or developed according to the existing situation and conditions.

The steps taken by researchers in data collection were as follows: (1) determining the meeting schedule to conduct the research, (2) observing and recording the learning activities in the classroom by focusing on the use of taboo words, and (3) conducting unstructured interviews about what for the student's used taboo words, (4) transcribing the recorded data into the written form, and (5) tabulating and categorizing the data collected to be analyzed.

After collecting the data, those were analyzed by using the model of Miles, Hubermann, and Saldana (2014) involving: (a) data collection, (b) data condensation, (c) data display, and (d) conclusion. To keep the trustworthiness of this research, several ways were attempted to improve the validity of data research so that it could be accounted for and verified. Moleong (2005) categorizes that in the qualitative study, there are four types of validity criteria, namely: credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After collecting and analyzing the data on the use of taboo words by the student in the learning interaction, the researches arrived at the research findings as an answer to the research problems: 1) What were the types of taboo words used by the students in the classroom interaction? 2) What did the students use taboo words in the classroom interaction for?

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1. Types of Taboo Words

Looking at the research data found, the four types of taboo words as proposed by Batistella (2005) were not realized fully by students in the learning interactions. There were only three categories realized, namely epithets, profanity, and vulgarity. Meanwhile, the last type of obscenity was not used. Furthermore, the table below described the occurrences and percentages of taboo words.

Table 1. The Occurrences and Percentages of Types of Taboo Words

No	Type of Taboo Words	Occurrences	Percentages
1	Vulgarity	32	62 %
2	Epithets	14	27 %
3	Profanity	6	11 %
4	Obscenity	0	0
	Total	52	100%

As displayed in the table above, there were three types of taboo words used by students when interacting with among them in class as stated by Batistella (2005). The most dominant type of taboo words was vulgarity at 32 occurrences with the percentage at 62 %. Secondly was epithets type of taboo words at 14 occurrences with the percentage 27 %. Thirdly, it was followed by profanity with 6 occurrences with a percentage of 11 %. Then, the last, obscenity was not found in the student learning interaction.

a. Vulgarity

Vulgarity, in the sense of vulgar speech, can refer to offensive or obscene language. The most associated word with verbal vulgar form is “condemn”. One can see that what is considered taboo or obscene revolves around several dimensions of human experience and that there is a logic behind the use of profanity. One of the most common vulgar terms used in the English language is “fuck”. This type of taboo word is according to the research data below:

Data 1

MA : ***Amek mu*** *ano nakhen sok* ***tual*** *kau, de pang* ***mekhadu*** *kite maso main amek* (your mother, you pretend to be a hero, if you are really brave, let’s have duel, we don’t have to bring mom)

SP : *Main* ***amek*** *kae gat, biakh kau sebut* (if I bring my mother, why really, you really are coward)

In the conversation above, it presented that MA uttered the words *amek mu, tual, and mekhadu* and SP responds with the word *amek* which is an example of the taboo word vulgarity, the words *amek mu, tual, mekhadu* here is a sign that in the conversation there is a taboo words, the words is called taboo because the word *amek mu, tual, mekhadu* above

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was spoken with the intention of offending the interlocutor, the taboo word *amek mu, tual, mekhadu* from the above understanding is part of offensive because these words are used to offend the other person.

Data 2

DP : ***Padel*** *ne da kau edi pe malet kau* ***ukhok*** *(*you idiot, that's all you can't do)
SR : ***Tual*** *kau hano, sementang kau* ***ukhok*** (you are arrongant, you an just be arrogant)

From the conversation above it indicated that DP said the word *padel, ukhok* when talking to SR who responded with the word *tual, ukhok*, which words are examples of taboo words of the type of vulgarity, these words become taboo because they offend the person they are talking to, from the explanation above these taboo words are offensive because provoke the emotions of the interlocutor.

b. Epithets

Epithets are characterized by the existence of several type of slur, such as *bitch* and *fag*. Other references that are included as epithet are connected to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, one's appearance, and disabilities such as *n*gg*r, m*dg*t* and *r*t*rd, mother**ker, t*t-man* (Batistella, 2005). This is done to attract attention, provoke others and make the person angry. This type of taboo word was in line to the research data below:

Data 3

MYD : *Nakde bage* ***laye*** *da, dak wayang* ***macem*** *ne pekhasat laye* (kind of sickness), what you did was really bad)
OJP : *Namunse kau hamin* ***simejilene pekhasatmu*** *nu* (like You have done well)

Referring to the data above, it displayed that MYD delivered the word *laye, macem* and OJP responded with the word *simejilene pekhaatmu* which is an example of taboo words from the type of epithet which is marked by the pronunciation of the word *tual, macem* with one's appearance or behavior, such as the word *macem* which means someone's bad attitude and *tual* means someone's arrogant attitude.

Data 4

MR : ***Kobo*** *gesekh be kau, kau gan kau kin hamin nulis* (buffalo, slide first I also want to write not only you)
NN : *biase pelin* ***mecekhok*** *maso* ***tual*** *kau hano* (it is normal when you talk, you don't have to be good at it)

The data above were classified into the epithet type of taboo words. This was emphasized by the pronunciation of the word *kobo* which was a marker of giving nickname to the interlocutor which is the definition of the taboo word epithet type itself.

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c. Profanity

Profanity or level is a language expression that is socially offensive, or demeaning to others, culturally swearing is very disrespectful, rude or offensive, swearing sometimes also refers to a sacred term, which implies something worthy of respect, but is used to remove the sanctity of the speech or cause religious blasphemy. This type of taboo word is according to the research data below:

Data 5

DA : *Pahe kin kau **anak tekhuh galuh** dak wayang petendelne jadi jeme* (It's true that children get it, tubborn can't be advised)

DSD : ***Takal utok** me kau da **anak tekhuh galuh** gat kau tuduh aku, malet **sadakh dikhi** kau no* (The head of your brain is an acquired child, thoe of you who have it even say that other people don't know yourself)

The conversation above is an example of profanity. It can be seen in the conversation between DA and DSD that there is the pronunciation of the word *anak tekhuh galuh, takal utok, sadakh dikhi* which is a word that offends and demeans the interlocutor with the words he said before.

Data 6

NA : *Kau no go pas bage pas **bage tebe magan pecal** sangup pelin **japjapen** dak pot kop he* (Really, you're like a Christian eating pecel, you can't be quiet, you've been talking about it, yo're not tired)

FH : ***Takal me,** malet **tebe** bage aku de jilene khupene kau toh, de bage kau no cocok jadi **tebe*** (your head, there is no chistian as beautiful as me, but like you there must be)

The conversation above show the use of profanity taboo words which are marked by the pronunciation of the words *bage tebe magan pecal, japjapen, takal me, tebe,* in which these words are used to offend and humiliate the interlocutor through the pronunciation of these words.

2. Functions Taboo Words

Taboo words are the variation of language used by people in their daily life. Though taboo words are words that should be avoided in open conversation of polite and formal context, this type of word, as with others type of words used by people to communicate, has its own functions. Taboo words are usually uttered because there is a reason behind them. According to Wardhaugh (2006), taboo words are disregarded in particular occasion because they have several functions such as to draw attention to oneself, to show contempt, to be provocation, and to mock authority. To give a clear explanation of the function of taboo words, below is a brief description of the function completed by examples in conversations.

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a. To Draw Attention to One Self

Sometimes people utter taboo words in order to get attention from the listener. Mc Edward (in Mc Guire 1973) explains that the speakers should gain the interest though the use of strong, powerful language whose connotation can stimulate an instant reaction from the audience. Therefore, people use taboo words which are believed to have power in gaining listener's attention because of its strong connotation. The explanation below is the example of taboo which functions to draw attention to one self.

Data 7

MF : *Kae ge ken cekhok* ***jeme gile****, iri ye bamu makane gedi cekhok ne* ***padel*** *kau de kau ge ken* ***cekhok*** *ne* (Don't listen to what a crazy person says, he is jealous of you, if you listen to what he syas it means you are stupid)

MA : *Uye* ***padel*** *da malet taboh gedi* ***pecekhok*** *ne* (It's not that I'm stupid, his words are not good to hear)

Data 7 above show that there was a diversion of someone' attention that is carried out by NF towards MA where there is the pronunciation of the word *jeme gile, padel, cekhok* which is a sign of diverting the interlocutor's attention to what he was initially worried about.

b. To Show Contempt

The use of taboo in conversation between two people can also mean to show contempt. According to *Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary* (1995) contempt means the impression in which a person or may be something is totally useless and cannot be regarded. In other words, when someone tries to show contempt by using taboo words, he or she will insult the addressee by uttering words that can offend their pride.

Data 8

MW : ***Padel*** *kin kau maso khut acara di ninte khut ge kau edi me* ***jeme sengel*** *payah mecekhok* ***nengneng*** (you idiot, I warned you not to join the event, but it turns out that you are also really having a hard time talking to people who don't understand the language, it's hard to say)

SW : *Malet aku khut i,* ***manyahi*** *dikhi amin* ***jeme padel*** *amin pot khut di kau toh* (I really didn't go, it would only make it difficult for me, only stupid people would come)

Conversation data 8 clearly shows that the words that MW said were insults thrown a SW in the form of pronouncing taboo words in the form of *padel, jeme sengel, nengneng* which was answered with the pronunciation of the word *mayahi, jeme padel* which was no less also angered the interlocutor.

c. To Be Provocative

When a person utters taboo words, he or she may have an intention to provoke a certain response such as offense or anger from others. Verbal obscenity can be the most efficient symbolic process offered to protest intended to provoke a chaotic reaction. Taboo words are considered successful when the response is suitable with the speaker's expectation.

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Data 9

SPA : *Go kusebut da **begu** maso ikuti iye ningku malet kau ge **sengel*** (devil, I warned you but you didn't hear you idiot)

MG : *Kau pe bage **laye** da, kau **mengasi** aku uye ge kau tolong aku* (you too, you can only get mad at me instead of you helping)

Data 9 shows the anger felt by MG for SPA's words to himself, here it was clear that SPA has succeeded in provoking emotions from the interlocutor for the insults he uttered the word *begu, sengel* which became the reason for MG's anger and he responded back angrily and said the word *laye, mengasi* for his anger over the previous conversation.

Regarding the research finding, there were some points to discuss. The first finding indicated that there were there kinds of taboo words on student's speech performances. The second research finding was the reasons of using taboo words in the classroom interaction. Based on the first finding, there three categories that realized were epithets, profanity, and vulgarity. Epithets are a rhetorical device used to describe a place, thing or person by giving a nickname or naming the thing described. Some source also define epithet as "descriptive nickname", "descriptive title", and "byname", which are essentially the same thing, namely the epithets. Epithets are characterized by the existence of several type of slur such as bitch and fag. Other references that are included as epithet are connected to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, one's appearance, and disabilities such as n*gg*r, m*dg*t and r*t*rd, mother**ker, t*t-man (Batistella, 2005). Jay (in Doyle 2006) defines epithet as a short but strong blast of passionate language which is triggered by frustration or anger such as son of b**ch.

Vulgarity is reference especially to words or expressions that contain sexual anatomy and excretory function in a rough manner (Batistella, 2005). In others words, vulgarity demonstrates the raw expression of street language (Jay, in Doyle, 2009). Moreover, Jay (in Mercury, 1995) asserts that vulgarity is used to humiliate or bring down the thing or individual referred to or described. To words that belong to this type are such as a*s, t*t, c**k, d**k, and c**t.

The last type is Profanity can be categorized as religious cursing because it usually includes the foul-mouthed use of what is considered to be sacred. Being more detail, Jay in Doyle (2006) describes profanity as the expression involving the use of religious terms in a profane, secular or uncaring manner. The aim of the speaker is not vilifying God or anything connected with religion but it may be used to express emotional response to certain motives. The words that belong to this type are J*s*s Chr*st, h**l, d**n, god**n.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The research findings led the researchers to draw some conclusions as follows: (1) the three types of taboo words as proposed by Batistela (2005) were manifested in communication among students with the most dominant taboo words belonging to vulgarity (60 %), followed by epithets (46.6 %), and profanity (40 %). Then, the functions behind the use of taboo words by students in the class included drawing attention to oneself, showing contempt to insult or mock, and provocating was used to provoke someone or provoke anger.

Concerning the conclusion above, the researchers offered some suggestions, as follows: (1) For English teachers, they should study in depth the factors that cause the use of taboo words in the classroom so that they will be wiser in responding to this if it happens

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later in their class and they must convince students that the use of language in class is in the form of polite language to create a good classroom atmosphere. (2) For the students, in communication be more careful in speaking and be more careful in choosing the words to be spoken to suit the situation and conditions of the place of conversation. Besides, being polite so as not to cause trouble or make the other person feel offended, so that communication can run smoothly fluent. (3) For the readers and other researchers, this research should be used as a reference to make relevant research and hopefully this research will inspire and motivate them to conduct a deeper analysis of the use of taboo words by students in class.

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