

## “I am a dog”, Verbal Taboo to Convince

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### ABSTRACT

*In daily and informal situation, individuals use language to connect one another. This research is on taboo words used by people of Padang Bolak Language (PBL) in daily communication. This research is a qualitative descriptive where the research problem is what, how, and why taboo words appear and are used in daily conversation of PBL. The data was taken by recording technique and taking notes on the conversations of residents at the location in Poken Salasa Village, Portibi District, Padang Lawas Regency, North Sumatera Province. From 45 data, the frequent taboo word is anjing (7 times), kafir (13 times), bujang/bujak/bujas (19 times), haram (3 times), and murtad (3 times). The reasons of speaker using taboo words are various. The speaker utters dog to take an oath, to trust or to make others believe. The word kafir is the speaker's way to take an oath and to convince others. The word bujang/bujak/bujas is used only among the intimate fellowship. Speaker's expression of haram appears when he disagrees, be opposite to something, and doesn't expect to one condition. Then murtad is uttered by speaker when he wants to trust other, makes an oath to support his statement. The next research is expected to expose the more reasons of using taboo words in psychological perspectives.*

### KEYWORDS

*Taboo; swearwords; Pada Bolak Language (PBL); daily conversation*

## INTRODUCTION

Interaction of human as social beings make them own a role as a member of society in which, there are certain norms that must be obeyed one another. These norms include behavior norms or how to behave. As people communicate, of course, language norms are also important to obey social life.

In conveying ideas, people are obliged to give attention to the situation or condition in which they are. Misused language in communication, the people around probably have misunderstandings, eventually, the conflict can occur then. By respecting to language norms. In communication, people are hoped to give attentions in choosing words they use. Violating of language norms, however, in certain societies happens in various reasons; for instance, the language habit, style in speaking, or even cultures among speakers.

The culture differences, as a main point, affect the way of people speaking in their daily life. Some words they use can be semantically or pragmatically different one another compared to other culture. For example, in Batak language, the speakers of Batak language often say 'bagudung' means *mouse* to mock someone for stupidity, laziness, or disfavor. The word 'bagudung' or *mouse* is meaningless in other culture or mouse is interpreted as an animal only. Another example is 'bunting' (English: pregnant) will be rude utterance if only this word is used in society of Javanese, Indonesia. The word 'bunting' labels a woman since she

is pregnant by an accident before legal marriage (unmarried). The word, however, for people of Betawi, is a term commonly used to refer to women who are pregnant (Husda, 2021). Taboo literally means as a social or religious custom which is prohibited and forbidden discussions of a certain place, person, or thing. Historically, the word taboo was firstly introduced by an English researcher, Captain James Cook, in 1777 (Ullman, 2007). 'Taboo' is taken from the word 'tapu' which means 'not allowed'. This word is used in Tonga, Polynesian Islands. Since it was firstly introduced, the taboo concept has not changed. However, the spread of the taboo concept outside the Polynesian islands broadens the understanding of this concept. The expansion is in the form of sanctions for violations of taboo matters.

The word taboo is commonly defined as a prohibition in which taboo can spread out in human culture and religion (Humaeni, 2015). The ideas in taboo are somehow correlated to the sacred or even dirty. The term of taboo or swearwords are interchangeably used to make description of the lexicon of impolite language. Taboo appears from the human value systems limitation. Vogel states that taboo utterances include: 1) unclean or scared character of persons/things; 2) variety of the prohibition that appears from the character before; and 3) the sanctity (or uncleanness) which results from a violation of the prohibition (Vogel, 2014).

According to Afini in her research, taboo is defined as a social prohibition for things, actions, or words. It is also referred to people who are considered unwished by a group, culture and society. Therefore, taboo violates anything to do and to speak because it is unacceptable and sometimes is offensive (Affini, 2017). Then taboo is probably cause embarrassment, disrepute, and feeling of uncomfortable and abusive treatment through society. And the concept of taboo is not only related to words, but it can be in actions as well. The words categorized as taboo are people expressions of reprobation for ones' speech and action. Taboo words result bad effect since they have disobeyed morality and values in society.

People use taboo words for some intentions or purposes (Clark, 2006), he elaborates that taboo words are used; 1) drawing attention to oneself; 2) having power in gaining a listener's attention; 3) showing contempt; 4) provoking; and 5) mocking an authority. On the other side, Husda in their research supports and adds the functions of taboo words as the findings of Clark's work. There are five major social functions of using taboo words; 1) to draw attention to someone; 2) to show contempt; 3) to provoke; 4) to mock authority; and 5) to give a sense of humor (Husda, 2021). There is a perspective in the research about the contexts of using taboo words in which taboo they are prohibited or forbidden to say and even to hear. Furthermore, taboo words may bring some terms and conditions that they may not solely give the feeling of hatred in hate speech from the speakers or show power and catharsis, but also give neutral conditions such as humorous effects and intimacy as long as the meanings conveyed and do not offend to people as the targets.

Then the reasons for using or not using taboo words depending on the purpose of the speaker's conversation. Swearing or taboos are like using the horn on your car (Jay, 2009), which can be used to signify a number of emotions (e.g., anger, frustration, joy, surprise). As a professor of psychology at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Timothy Jay in 1996 categorized taboo words into seven items, namely: 1) Cursing; 2) Profanity; 3) Blasphemy; 4) Obscenity; 5) Sexual Harassment; 6) Vulgar Language; and 7) Name-Calling and Insult.

Meanwhile, Alan and Burrige in their book entitled *Forbidden Words* reveal that taboo is a proscription of human behavior that affects them in life every time. Taboos that they consider in the course of their book include: 1) bodies and their effluvia (e.g., sweat, snot,

feces, menstrual fluid, etc.); 2) the organs and acts of sex, micturition and defecation; 3) diseases, death and killing (including hunting and fishing); 4) naming, addressing, touching and viewing persons and sacred beings, objects and places; 5) food gathering, preparation and consumption (Allan, 2006).

According to Timothy Jay, the terms of taboo words or swear words are described interchangeably to offensive emotional language (Jay, 2009). Accordingly, the use of taboo words and swearwords is seen as a common attitude to language in informal conversation. For instance, people often use taboo words and swearwords in the traditional market. People use them to show a close/intimate relationship with others and it is also used when people express strong feelings like expressing anger. A word or phrase that is generally considered blasphemous, obscene, vulgar, or otherwise offensive are also defined as taboo. And the term of swearword is also known similarly to tabu, such as *obscene word*, *bad word*, *dirty word*, and *four-letter word* (e.g., *damn*, *fuck*, *shit*, etc.). Meanwhile, swearwords are a category of taboo words that is used to express feelings (Fajri Megika, 2018). It can be concluded that a taboo is a “ban or inhibition resulting from social custom or aversion” while swearword is usually used when people are angry defines as a word considered to be rude or offensive.

The frequent question is why people utter taboo words in their speaking. In daily conversation, people use taboo and swearwords in their dialog in some reasons. The reasons for using or not using the words, of course, depend on the speakers’ conversational goals. Swearing, which is similar to taboo, is like using the horn when driving our car (Jay, 2009). It is used to signify a number of emotions (e.g., anger, frustration, joy, surprise). Speakers’ control over swearing ranges from the spontaneous forms (e.g., habitual, epithets), over which we seem to have little control, to the reflective forms (e.g., new obscene joke), where we take time to think about what to say (van Lancker & Kreiman, 1987). Taboo words can be used to achieve a variety of personal and interpersonal outcomes that may be positive, negative, or inconsequential in terms of their impact on others, even though some argue that all taboo word uses are harmful. The people, however, utter taboo words not only in daily conversation but in TV talk show as well. The research done by Arini found that the people’s reasons use taboo words in talk show television are the expressions of anger and annoyance, sarcasm expressions, and insulting to someone (Arini AR, 2015).

Many researches have been done and discussed what the reasons of using taboo or swearing words. Research of Bastistella showed that using taboo words is showing power breaking the norms and rules and the taboo probably uses as catharsis which is to provide harmless verbal substitute when someone gets extremely angry (Bastistella, 2005). Another research also found that taboo words refer to something humorous where speakers create intimacy among them. It occurs as long as the speakers have the same understanding and do not intend negatively as taboo words can be expressed to establish identity or status through speech and even to relieve negative stress.

From explanations above, it is clear that taboo and swearing words are forbidden in the religious context. Someone doing them will get punishment from the community or sin (punishment from Go – religious context). Nevertheless, people speaking PBL, in fact, are Moslem who should speak by avoiding such kind of taboo words instead of using them regularly.

In accordance with the explanation above, there is a language phenomenon that occurs in one of local languages in North Sumatera. The language is Padang Bolak language (PBL) used in the Regency of North Padang Lawas and Padang Lawas, Province of North Sumatera. When the people make daily conversation in informal situation, they often utter the word such as *anjing* (dog), *kafir* (infidel), *haram* (forbidden), *murtad* (apostate or

converting religion) in their sentence, *bujang/bujak/bujas* (vagina). They can be seen from examples as follows;

- (1) Si **anjing** ma au! Sajuta maia arga ni henpon i. (*I am a **dog!** The mobile phone is only 1 million rupiahs.*)
- (2) Matcit uluku, **haram!** (*I have a headache, **haram!***)
- (3) Ahado sigaretmi kretek, galan? **Bujak**, sadia mai? (*What is your cigarette, Galan? It's **vagina**, how much is that?*)
- (4) Mabingung wasit i, **kafir** boh! (*The referee is confused, it is **infidel!***)
- (5) Nara au kehe bia langa? **murtad** au jadi! (*I don't want to go, what's going on? I will be an **apostate!***)

Taboo words or swearing generally appear due to the reasons above with the target of swearing at other people. A phenomenon here appears, however, in the example of PBL above in which the taboo words are actually uttered by the speaker to himself and not to others. Then people hearing these words are not angry as well. Hereby, the meanings of taboo words and swearing are no longer in line with the theory and findings of previous research.

Therefore, this study will try to collect examples of taboo or cursing words that appear in the daily conversation of native PBL speakers. The taboo and cursing words are then classified and analyzed based on the patterns. This study tries to analyze the reasons for the emergence of these words, and the novelty of this research is in finding other classifications of taboo and swearing words.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a qualitative descriptive where the research problem is what, how, and why taboo words appear and are used in daily conversation of PBL. The data was taken by recording technique and taking notes on the conversations of residents at the location in Poken Salasa Village, Portibi District, Padang Lawas Regency, North Sumatera Province. The data was taken from traditional coffee shop in order to maintain its original and natural conversation. Primary data is from Mr. Parlaungan (34 years), Mr. Ikhwan Harahap (41 years) and secondary data is from Mr. Bustanul Arifin Harahap (39 years). They all live in the village of research location. The researchers use their understanding of PBL as the intuitive data for giving more explanations.

Then the research problem is concluded by categorizing the types of taboo words that appear according to the categorizations of Jay's theory (1996). The scheme of this research is collecting data then displaying them, and finally giving conclusions (Miles, 2014). It is done to show the reasons of speakers' utterances and in what condition that the taboo and swearing words appear.

The approach of the research is socio-semantics (sociolinguistics and semantics). This approach tries to find the meaning and perspective of the use of taboo and swearing words in society from the local language.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The recording of daily conversation in traditional coffee shop was taken at morning, afternoon, and evening. Total data is 45 sentences with in duration of conversation at morning is 42 minutes 32 seconds, at afternoon is 87 minutes 51 seconds, and at evening is 12 minutes 02 seconds. Having collected the data, taboo words were classified as table below.

**Table 1.** Taboo Words

Data Code	Taboo Words	English Word	Explanations
Data 1	Anjing	Dog	Kind of animal
Data 2	Kafir	Infidel	Rejecting a specific religion or non-Muslim
Data 3	Bujang	Vagina	Female genitalia, sex organ of woman
Data 4	Bujak	Vagina	Female genitalia, sex organ of woman
Data 5	Bujas	Vagina	Female genitalia, sex organ of woman
Data 6	Haram	Haram	Sin, something that is forbidden by Islam
Data 7	Murtad	Apostate	A person who converts his religion from Islam

Table 1 shows the classification of taboo words after being classified from 45 sentences recorded which are indicated as taboo words. The conversation includes the utterances from primary and secondary data. The words in table 1 are taboo words only, then they will be analyzed along with the complete sentences when the words uttered.

### Anjing

*Anjing* in data 1 is translated ‘dog’ and it is semantically kind of animals. For people in PBL, most of them are Moslems, dog is forbidden animal as a pet. Dog and pig are prohibited in their environment; hence their names appear to be taboo and swearing words. The sentence examples;

- (6) **Anjing** au dobur mai tu dinding au. (*I am a **dog**, I hit the wall.*)
- (7) Illallah, paunduk, **anjing** ulu tu dinding i. (*Oh my God, I am a **dog**, I lowered my head on the wall.*)
- (8) Si **anjing** ma au, adope, **anjing** ma au di dalam on, opat pulu ribu ma na sa kong huinum dison. (*I am a **dog**, well, I will be a dog on this street, it costs forty thousand rupiahs for the drink here.*)
- (9) Natuari marsuo au dohot anakboru najogian, **anjing** au bo. (*Yesterday, I met a beautiful girl, I am a **dog**.*)
- (10) Adope anggia, mahudokkon, anggo na opat puluh ribu na huinum na sa kong i, **anjingma** au didalan on, na podo porcaya ho? (*Don't you believe, I've said, if it isn't forty thousand rupiahs the price of the drink, I will be a **dog** on this street, don't you believe?*)

The pattern of the sentences of 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 above are clearly seen that the word *dog* is pointed to the speaker himself (I am a dog). *Dog* as an animal is chosen to prove his sentence, and speaker seems to take an oath, it can be seen in sentence 7. In sentence 9, speaker states that he met a beautiful girl then he wants to make listener trusts for what he is saying about. In sentence 10, he attracts attentions of listeners that he is ready to be cursed as a dog if he lies and it is seen (I will be a **dog** on this street). The data concludes that *dog* here is functioned to take an oath, to trust or to make others believe.

### Kafir

The word ‘kafir’ in data 2 means *infidel*, a person who disbelieves and someone who closes and refuses to believe in Allah and His Messenger. Most people of PBL are Moslem and kafir is a taboo word in Islam. The examples of sentence uttered from the location of research are;

- (11) Nacopatma anggia si Doli on, **kafir** au bo. (*Doli is very quick, I'm an **infidel**.*)
- (12) Dilehen ia limapuluh ribu, satonga ari do hamu nia, **kafir** au. (*He gave me fifty thousand rupiahs, he said only a half day working, I'm an **infidel**.*)
- (13) Nahusangka opat liter maia abis minyak ni i ba, **kafir**. (*I think only 4 liters I consumed, it's **infidel**.*)

- (14) Nagiot manyerfen do ia, disompatkon ia ma mandongkonna, **kafir**. (*He wants to serve the ball, but he takes a time to say something, it's infidel.*)
- (15) Mulai ari aha on tusi muse, tolu ari ma iba libur, **kafir**. (*From that day we started, I have three days off, it's infidel.*)

The word *kafir* is translated as *infidel* which literally means 'unfaithful'. *Kafir* is a term used in Islam religion for people accused of unbelief in the central tenets of Islam, for example another religion members (not Moslem), or for the irreligious (atheism). Sentence 11 and 12 show that speaker saying 'infidel' to himself. He is ready to be *infidel* or *kafir* if only he lies for what is he saying. However, the pattern for sentence 13, 14, 15 show that *kafir* stands alone without subject after *kafir*. Semantically, speaker in sentence 13, 14, 15 seems to convince listeners for what he is saying. The word *kafir* here is concluded as speaker's way to take an oath and to convince others.

### **Bujang/Bujak/Bujas**

Data 3 in table 1 is joined as one explanation because the word *bujang/bujak/bujas* semantically have the same meaning, yet differing in pronunciation and using in sentences. The *bujang/bujak/bujas* is translated to be vagina (female genitalia, sex organ of woman). This word is broadly used in other languages as taboo or swearing word. People of PBL frequently used *bujang/bujak/bujas* a lot in their speaking. According to 45 data, there are 19 sentences use *bujang/bujak/bujas* word. The following sentences are the examples;

- (16) Tai anggo moda dohot ia, habis mangan pe kotu sabatang sigaret pe di opul ia dei oh... **bujang** ni i. (*But if he joins, after lunch at noon, he will smoke a cigarette, oh... he is vagina.*)
- (17) Leng diingot ia, **bujang**. (*He still remembers, it's vagina.*)
- (18) **Bujang**, polama na copat tallus bola i. (*It's vagina, it makes the light bulb is broken.*)
- (19) Dijolo bagas nia do **bujang** iba da. (*I am in front of his house, it's vagina.*)
- (20) Ido pasarannai, **bujasmu**, untungma. (*It is the fixed price, your vagina, fortunately.*)
- (21) Sadia do ukuran ni i? **Bujasmu**, ginjang dei ate. (*What is size? Your vagina, it is tall.*)
- (22) Masego on, **bujasmu**, hahaha... (*It is broken, you vagina, hahaha.*)
- (23) Nanggo adong karejoku di kobun an, jam sappulu ma habisna, habis i baru karejo, **bujasmu**, natabo be na karejoi. (*I had no work in the garden, at 10 A.M. I started working, your vagina, I like this job.*)
- (24) Nadongbe, asi na tarpodom? **bujak**, **kafir** au, bisa sala lakka on. (*Nothing, why can't sleep? it's vagina, infidel, I can wrong way.*)
- (25) **Bujak**, dison do nakkin hubaen. (*It's vagina, I put it here just now.*)

The word *bujang/bujak/bujas* semantically means 'vagina', of course, it is a taboo word in all language. Sentence 16 – 25 express the statements and normal sentences in their dialog. There are no rules in about the position of that taboo word, in front (Sentence 18, 21, and 25), in the middle (Sentence 19, 20, 22, 23, and 24), in the end (Sentence 16, and 17). The word *bujang/bujak/bujas* appears without purpose instead of showing expression to his colleague.

Having analyzed the sentences, the researchers found that the word *bujang/bujak/bujas* is used only among the intimate fellowship since the words produced in the same age conversation. Other conclusion can be drawn when word *bujas* is always followed by *mu* (means your). For instance, *bujasmu*, there are no patterns of *bujangmu*, *bujakmu*.

### **Haram**

The next data is the word 'haram' and literally meant as 'forbidden'.

- (26) Anggo i nadong mattak nai, **haram** bo. (*It is unstoppable, haram.*)

- (27) Nara au marmasinda muda saratus ribu gajiku sadari, **haram** bo, hutolak. (*I don't want to work using machine if my salary a hundred thousand rupiahs each day, **haram**, I refuse it.*)
- (28) I dokkon ia, au dapot au tolu ribu nasongoni, jalaki udama na tolu ribu i, **haram** bo. (*He said that he found people working with three thousand rupiahs, then I say, if it's so, just use those men uncle, **haram**.*)

The word *haram* in Sentence 26 – 28 indicate that speaker is annoyed. Sentence 26 expresses unexpected situation, sentence 27 is speaker's disagreement, and sentence 28 is different opinion. Speaker's expression of *haram* appears when he disagrees, be opposite to something, and doesn't expect to one condition.

### Murtad

The last data is *murtad* which is not much in use of PBL. *Murtad* means a person who converts his religion from Islam. The word *murtad* is derived from *irtidaad* in Arabic language means 'to turn back'. People speaking PBL who mostly Moslem use this word in daily conversation and below are the data;

- (29) **Murtad** ma au bia de, nadong huida i. (*I will be an **apostate**; I don't see it.*)
- (30) **Murtad** jadi ma au, inda au mambuat i. (*I want to be an **apostate**; I didn't take it.*)

From sentence 29 and 30, it is clearly seen that speaker wants to trust other, makes an oath to support his statement. Sentence 29, the speaker says that he doesn't see and 30 that he didn't take it, shown us that the word *murtad* is used as an expression of convincing. This word is chosen because of religious aspect similar to *anjing* and *haram* words.

So, from the explanation above, it will be classified to be some categories. According to (Jay, 1996) taboo words were categorized into seven items, and table 2 shows the comparisons between Jay's theory and research findings.

**Table 2.** Comparison of Theory and Findings

Taboo Word Cate- gorizations (Jay, 1996)	Taboo Word in PBL (Findings)	Reasons in Using Taboo Words
Cursing	-	-
Profanity	kafir, haram, murtad	taking an oath, convincing/trusting others
Blasphemy	-	-
Obscenity	bujang/bujak/bujas	intimating fellowship
Sexual Harassment	-	-
Vulgar Language	anjing	taking an oath, convincing/trusting others
Name-Calling and Insult	-	-

### CONCLUSION

The researchers conclude that people of PBL frequently use the restricted taboo words such as; *anjing*, *kafir*, *bujang/bujak/bujas*, *haram*, and *murtad* in informal situation. From 45 data, the frequent taboo word is *anjing* (7 times), *kafir* (13 times), *bujang/bujak/bujas* (19 times), *haram* (3 times), and *murtad* (3 times).

The reasons of speaker using taboo words are various. The speaker utters *dog* to take an oath, to trust or to make others believe. The word *kafir* is concluded as speaker's way to take an oath and to convince others. The word *bujang/bujak/bujas* is used only among the intimate fellowship since the words produced in the same age conversation. When speaker utters word *bujas*, it is always followed by *mu* (means your), for example *bujasmu*, there are no patterns of *bujangmu*, *bujakmu*. Speaker's expression of *haram* appears when he

disagrees, be opposite to something, and doesn't expect to one condition. Then the last *murtad* is uttered by speaker when he wants to trust other, makes an oath to support his statement.

The next research is expected to expose the more reasons of using taboo words in psychological perspectives. It is important to make research to answer why people curse and find the reason why they choose a taboo word. The next research is expected to link the psychiatrists, psychologists, neurologists, speech pathologists and linguists to have coherent theory to explain the taboo word reasons. The same proposal stated by Jay, and it calls The Neuro-Psycho-Social (NPS) theory (Jay, 2009). By the research in different disciplines, it will unite them to explain and describe the psychological, neurological, cultural and linguistic factors underlying this phenomenon.

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