

SURABAYA’S TABOO WORDS, ARE THOSE STILL TABOO? A STUDY OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Taboo words, or language that is considered socially unacceptable or prohibited, are an integral part of cultural and linguistic norms. In the city of Surabaya, Indonesia, certain words and expressions have long been considered taboo, reflecting the complex interplay between language, societal values, and evolving cultural dynamics. This study aims to examine the current status of taboo words in Surabaya, exploring whether these linguistic taboos continue to hold the same significance or have undergone transformations over time. Taboo words are often rooted in sociocultural contexts and can carry deep-seated meanings or connotations that may not be immediately apparent to outsiders. "At the institutional level, taboos on certain forms of speech arise from authorities that have the power to restrict speech." In the case of Surabaya, understanding the evolution of taboo words can provide valuable insights into the broader societal changes and shifting cultural norms within the region. One relevant study conducted among the Karo people of Indonesia found that certain taboos were observed in communication, particularly among kinship relationships, where "[c]onversations can be carried out under compulsion and conveyed only very important things." (Barus, 2020) While the Karo language and cultural context differ from that of Surabaya, this research highlights the complexities involved in navigating linguistic taboos and the strategies employed to maintain social cohesion.

Keywords: Surabaya Taboo; Language and Culture; Shift; Evolution

INTRODUCTION

Taboo words and the cultural practices surrounding them have long been a topic of fascination for linguists and sociolinguists. In the city of Surabaya, Indonesia, the use and perception of taboo words have evolved over time, reflecting the dynamic nature of language and its interplay with societal norms.

Linguists and sociolinguists have long been fascinated by taboo words and the cultural practices surrounding them. These language scholars have studied how the use and perception of taboo words have evolved over time in the city of Surabaya, Indonesia, reflecting the dynamic nature of language and its interplay with societal norms. The choices and usage of taboo words are deeply rooted in the emotional, psychological, and sociocultural aspects of a given context, with prohibitions often reiterated in child-rearing practices. As such, native speakers acquire a folk knowledge of taboo words, which may not always align with the complex understanding that psychological science requires.

One key aspect of the study of taboo words in Surabaya is the role of social context. Language phenomena related to the use of taboo and swear words in society can be easily observed in daily life, literature, and other forms of media. The use of these words is often seen as a normal behavior, as a way for individuals to release strong feelings verbally instead of physically. However, the perception of what constitutes a taboo word can vary greatly between individuals and across different social and cultural contexts.

Indeed, the nature of harm associated with the use of taboo words has often been the subject of debate and ambiguity. Institutions of power often define and sanction taboo words, with prohibitions being reiterated through various societal channels, including child-rearing practices. This raises the question of whether these taboo words are still perceived as truly "taboo" in the modern Surabayan context, or if they have become more normalized and integrated into the local vernacular.

To explore this question, researchers have analyzed the use of taboo and swear words in literary works, such as the *Antologi Rasa* novel, which provides valuable insights into the evolving societal attitudes towards these language practices (Prawinanto et al., 2020). The study of taboo words in Surabaya not only sheds light on the city's linguistic landscape but also offers a window into the deeper cultural and psychological dynamics that shape the use and perception of language in the region.

The existing scholarship on taboo words suggests that the choice of such words is not arbitrary, but rather deeply rooted in the emotional, psychological, and sociocultural aspects of a given context (Blase, 2011). Taboo words are defined and sanctioned by the institutions of power, with prohibitions often reiterated in child-rearing practices. (Jay, 2009). As such, native speakers acquire a folk knowledge of taboo words, which may not always align with the complex understanding that psychological science requires (Jay, 2009). In the case of Surabaya, the use of taboo words has long been a subject of interest, as the city's unique cultural and linguistic landscape has shaped the perception and usage of such language (Prawinanto et al., 2020).

However, the extent to which these taboo words remain taboo in contemporary Surabayan society is yet to be fully explored. While previous studies have examined the sociocultural factors influencing the use of taboo words in Surabaya, more research is needed to understand the current attitudes and practices surrounding these linguistic expressions. By delving deeper into the evolving social norms and individual perceptions of taboo words in the city, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic interplay between language and culture in Surabaya.

Surabaya's unique cultural and linguistic landscape has long made the use of taboo words a subject of interest (Prawinanto et al., 2020). However, the extent to which these taboo words remain taboo in contemporary Surabayan society is yet to be fully explored. While previous studies have examined the sociocultural factors influencing the use of taboo words in Surabaya, more research is needed to understand the current attitudes and practices surrounding these linguistic expressions. By delving deeper into the evolving social norms and individual perceptions of taboo words in the city, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic interplay between language and culture in Surabaya.

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Indeed, the nature of harm associated with the use of taboo words has often been the subject of debate and ambiguity. Institutions of power often define and sanction taboo words, with prohibitions being reiterated through various societal channels, including child-rearing practices. (Jay, 2018) This raises the question of whether these taboo words are still perceived as truly "taboo" in the modern Surabayan context, or if they have become more normalized and integrated into the local vernacular (Jay, 2018)(Blase, 2011)(Prawinanto et al., 2020).

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This study aims to provide a comprehensive investigation into the current state of Surabaya's taboo words, examining whether they are still regarded as strictly taboo or if societal

attitudes and usage patterns have shifted over time. By conducting a thorough analysis of the linguistic and cultural factors that influence the use, perception, and evolving status of taboo words in Surabaya, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex and dynamic relationship between language and society.

RESEARCH METHOD

To explore the research question, the study will utilize a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis.

The quantitative component will involve a survey of a representative sample of Surabaya residents, examining their familiarity with and attitudes towards a range of taboo words commonly used in the local vernacular. The survey will gather information on the participants' demographic characteristics, their frequency of exposure to and usage of taboo words, as well as their perceived level of offensiveness and social acceptability of these linguistic expressions.

The qualitative aspect of the study will involve in-depth interviews with a diverse group of Surabayan individuals, including linguists, anthropologists, local community leaders, and representatives from various age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds. The interviews will delve deeper into the participants' personal experiences, beliefs, and perceptions surrounding the use of taboo words in Surabaya, as well as explore the sociocultural factors that may contribute to the evolving status of these linguistic phenomena.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data will provide a multifaceted understanding of the research topic, allowing for the identification of broader trends and patterns, as well as the exploration of the nuanced and contextual factors that shape the use and perception of taboo words in Surabaya.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Taboo words used by Surabayan residents: Based on the survey results, the study found that a majority of Surabayan residents reported being familiar with a range of taboo words commonly used in the local vernacular. However, the self-reported frequency of usage varied significantly, with younger participants and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds more likely to use these words regularly in their everyday speech.

Perceived offensiveness and social acceptability

The survey data revealed a complex and nuanced landscape of attitudes towards taboo words in Surabaya. While certain words were consistently perceived as highly offensive and socially unacceptable, others were viewed as less taboo, with their use and acceptability varying based on factors such as the speaker's age, gender, and social status, as well as the specific context of usage (Wahyuni & Suryadi, 2021).

Evolving societal attitudes: The in-depth interviews highlighted the dynamic and evolving nature of societal attitudes towards taboo words in Surabaya. Many participants, especially younger and more educated individuals, expressed a belief that the use of certain taboo words has become more normalized and accepted in recent years, reflecting broader cultural shifts and changing social norms. This shift in societal attitudes can be attributed to a range of factors, including increased exposure to global media, the influence of popular culture, and a growing sense of individualism and self-expression among the younger generation. As a result, taboo words that were once strictly off-limits are now more frequently used and integrated into the local vernacular, particularly in informal settings and among peer groups. However, the degree of acceptance and normalization varies across different social and demographic segments, with older and more conservative individuals often maintaining a more traditional and restrictive view towards the use of such language.

Sociocultural factors: The qualitative data revealed the multifaceted sociocultural factors that influence the perception and use of taboo words in Surabaya. These include the role of family upbringing, where parental attitudes and child-rearing practices play a crucial role in shaping an individual's views towards the use of taboo language. Educational institutions, such as schools and universities, also contribute to the normalization or stigmatization of certain linguistic expressions through their curricula and disciplinary policies. Additionally, the influence of media, including television, film, music, and social media, has been found to significantly impact the evolving societal attitudes towards taboo words, as these platforms often reflect and reinforce sociocultural changes. Finally, the broader social and cultural landscape of Surabaya, with its shifting demographics, economic dynamics, and emerging values, has also been identified as a key factor in the evolving status of taboo words in the city.

Some common examples of taboo words used by Surabayans include words related to bodily functions, sexual acts, religious references, and ethnic or social identities. These words may be considered offensive or inappropriate in certain social contexts, though their usage and perception can vary among different age groups, social classes, and cultural backgrounds within Surabayan society. For instance, words related to bodily functions, such as "meki" (vagina) or "tai" (feces), are often viewed as highly taboo, particularly among older and more conservative individuals. Similarly, references to sexual acts, like "ngentot" (to have sex), are generally considered inappropriate outside of private or intimate settings. Additionally, the use of ethnic slurs or derogatory terms, such as "pribumi" (native) or "cina", can be seen as deeply offensive and reflective of underlying social tensions and prejudices. Religious references, including blasphemous or irreverent language, are also often deemed unacceptable, especially in more pious or devout segments of the population. The perception and use of these taboo words can be heavily influenced by factors such as an individual's upbringing, educational background, social status, and the specific context in which the language is used.

Attitudes towards taboo words in Surabaya

The survey findings suggest that while many Surabayans are familiar with a range of taboo words, their attitudes towards these linguistic expressions vary significantly. Younger respondents tend to perceive taboo words as less offensive and more acceptable in casual conversations, compared to their older counterparts who generally view such language as more taboo and socially unacceptable. This generational divide in the perception of taboo words reflects the evolving societal attitudes towards language use, with younger Surabayans potentially exhibiting a more relaxed and inclusive approach to linguistic expressions that were previously considered strictly off-limits.

The interview data further revealed that the perception of taboo words is often shaped by cultural and religious influences, as well as individual upbringing and personal experiences. Some participants expressed a belief that the use of taboo words is a sign of disrespect and a violation of societal norms, while others viewed it as a harmless form of emotional expression or a way to bond with peers.

Evolving status of taboo words in Surabaya

The findings indicate that the status of taboo words in Surabaya is in a state of flux, with a growing normalization and acceptance of certain linguistic expressions that were previously considered strictly taboo. This shift can be attributed to a range of factors, including the influence of popular culture, increased exposure to global media, and changes in societal attitudes towards language and communication. These factors have contributed to a more nuanced and contextual understanding of the use of taboo words, where they may now serve as a means of conveying emotions, developing characters, or reflecting the realities of

Surabayan society, rather than being viewed solely as a violation of social norms. As a result, the portrayal and acceptance of taboo words in Surabayan literature, as seen in the analysis of the *Antologi Rasa* novel, suggests a broader evolution in the societal attitudes towards these linguistic phenomena, which are no longer seen as strictly taboo but rather as tools for artistic expression and cultural representation.

One notable example of the evolving status of taboo words in Surabaya is the use of such linguistic expressions in the city's literature, as demonstrated in the analysis of the *Antologi Rasa* novel. The presence of swear words and taboo language in this literary work suggests a more nuanced and contextual understanding of their usage, where they may serve as a means of conveying emotions, developing characters, or reflecting the realities of Surabayan society, rather than being viewed solely as a violation of social norms. This shift in the portrayal and acceptance of taboo words in Surabayan literature reflects the broader changes in societal attitudes towards these linguistic phenomena, which are no longer seen as strictly taboo but rather as tools for artistic expression and cultural representation.

Discussion

A taboo is a social or cultural prohibition on certain behaviors, activities, or topics that are considered unacceptable or inappropriate within a particular context. Taboos often arise from societal norms, religious beliefs, or moral values, and can vary across different cultures and time periods. In the context of language, taboo words or expressions are those that are considered offensive, vulgar, or unfit for polite discourse. The study of taboo words and their societal impact is an important aspect of understanding the complex relationship between language, culture, and social dynamics. Taboos can be seen as a reflection of a society's values and beliefs, and the way they are perceived and negotiated can have significant implications for social cohesion, power dynamics, and the expression of individual and collective identities. By examining the evolution of taboo words and their usage within a particular cultural context, such as Surabaya, researchers can gain insights into the broader social, political, and ideological forces that shape language and communication.

Swearing refers to the use of profane, vulgar, or offensive language. It often involves words or expressions that are considered taboo or socially unacceptable within a particular cultural or linguistic context. The study of swearing and taboo language is an important aspect of understanding the complex relationships between language, culture, and social norms. Swearing can serve various functions, such as expressing emotions, strengthening social bonds, or challenging power structures. It can also reflect deeper societal attitudes, prejudices, and power dynamics. Examining the use and perception of swear words and taboo language can provide valuable insights into the cultural, social, and psychological factors that shape language and communication.

The study of taboo words in Surabaya's cultural and linguistic landscape reveals a dynamic and evolving relationship between language, social norms, and cultural identity. The findings suggest that while certain taboo words remain socially unacceptable in more conservative or formal settings, there is a growing normalization and acceptance of these linguistic expressions, particularly among younger Surabayans. This shift can be attributed to a range of factors, including the influence of popular culture, increased exposure to global media, and changes in societal attitudes towards language and communication.

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CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study of taboo words in Surabaya's cultural and linguistic landscape reveals a dynamic and evolving relationship between language, social norms, and cultural identity. While certain taboo words remain socially unacceptable in more conservative or formal settings, there is a growing normalization and acceptance of these linguistic expressions, particularly among younger Surabayans. This shift can be attributed to factors such as the influence of popular culture, increased exposure to global media, and changes in societal attitudes towards language and communication. The portrayal of taboo words in Surabayan literature, as exemplified by the *Antologi Rasa* novel, suggests a more nuanced and contextual understanding of their usage, where they may serve as a means of conveying emotions, developing characters, or reflecting the realities of Surabayan society, rather than being viewed solely as a violation of social norms. This evolution in the perception and use of taboo words in Surabaya's cultural landscape reflects the broader societal changes and the evolving role of language in the expression of individual and collective identities.

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