TABOO LANGUAGE ON INDONESIAN YOUNG ADULTS' INSTAGRAM: THE ANALYSIS OF ITS TYPES AND FUNCTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become an integral part of people's life. Not only adults, but also teenagers are active users of social media sites on which they share everyday activities, happenings, feelings, thoughts, and feelings and maintain their social link. In other words, people 'interact' and 'communicate' through social media. Compared to offline communication, interaction on social media has its own characteristics (Wang et al, 2014). Its special characteristics include the use of curse and taboo words by the account's owners. To address this specialty of taboo words on social media, this paper examines the use of taboo words on social media. In particular, this study aims to, firstly, identify the types of English taboo words produced by Indonesian young adult Instagram users on their Instagram accounts. Secondly, it attempts to reveal the communicative functions of their captions and comments from the similar account in the social media. Wardaugh's (2006) taboo word classification and Jay's (1999) functions of taboo words are used for the analysis of the data. The result of this study which involves four different accounts of Instagram belonging to four different users shows that six categories of taboo words, namely sex, death, excretion, bodily functions, religious matter, and animal are identified in their postings. An addition to that, from the 63 occurrences of taboo words, it is figured out that they mainly serve the functions of demonstrating various emotional situations, stating humor, talking about sexual matters as well as a means of expressing insults.

Keywords: *taboo words, type, communicative functions, Instagram*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the use of taboo words is not only in oral, but also in written language such as in social media. This is partially due to the technological developments through which people can interact and communicate with each other at ease. One of the interesting phenomena in the social media-based communication is the occurrence of taboo words. Instagram appears to be a social media instance where the phenomenon might take place. This social media is characterized by the features which allow its users to write a collection of words or sentences into a caption with also uploading some photos to give a better contextual understanding about what they write in the caption. Furthermore, they can also give a comment that becomes a short-written conversation below the photo and captions in Instagram.

To give a definition of taboo words, Diez (n.d., as cited in Fakuade, 2013:119) states that taboo words are words that are considered 'bad' by people and be better avoided because of its vulgarity as they refer to sex, religion, and acts that can harm people. Consequently, taboo words should not be completely uttered or at least be prevented in a polite situation because it can lead to punishment or public shame. Another linguist who defines taboo words as the words that should be avoided is Mbaya (2002) who characterizes taboo words by their impropriety, appalling character, and lack of morality which are supposed to be avoided. Moreover, Laksana (2009, as cited in Triana: 2015:16) supports Mbaya's idea by saying that taboo words should be avoided because it might be dangerous or even defame people's reputation.

Among the vast number of words that are said to be 'taboo", Ningjue (2010) and Wardaugh (2006) have attempted to categorize and classify taboo words into several types. They are (1) epithets: a type of insult that refers to race, gender, ethnic, or sexuality; (2) profanity: a compilation of 'bad' or 'dirty' language related to religion terms; (3) obscenity: words that are not appropriate refer to sexuality and excretion; (4) cursing: the usage of 'indecent words and phrases' that give other people harms in the future; and finally (5) sexual harassment: words or dirty jokes that are connected with sexual activities, sexual preferences, and refers to body parts. A quite similar classification is made by Wardaugh (2006:239) who categorizes taboo words by its six subjects which are sex, death, excretion, bodily functions, religious matters, and animal. The first, i.e. sex category, refers taboo words of sex defined as the state of being male or female and meaning of physical activity among two people while touching each other's sexual organs that may include sexual intercourse (Oxford dictionary, 2010). Two examples of taboo words which are related to sex are *fuck* and *suck*. The second refers to the end of life of somebody who is dying or being killed. The use of this word is actually sensitive because it can only be used to refer on people who have ended their life. In the other hand, people utter the word death to express their anger or sadness that becomes an offensive word which is inappropriate to use because it will make other people scared or even sad when hearing the word. The example of taboo words which are related to death are *damn* and

hell. The next category is taboo words of excretion. The word excretion comes from the word excrete that means an action of passing or pushing out solid or liquid waste from our body (Oxford: 2010). Some people produce some words that are believed to be inappropriate or taboo that are connected to the word excretion, such as *shit* and *piss.* The fourth category relates to bodily function which refers to an action of a person that has a purpose to perform the function of human body parts (Oxford: 2010). There are some appropriate ways to use words that connect with bodily functions such as *eating breakfast*, *using the toilet*, or even *sex*, providing that they are used by appropriate people and in an appropriate context. In the other hand, the use of words that is related to bodily functions can also be inappropriate to use like the word *ass*, *asshole*, *dick*, and *tit.*

The next category is more related to religious matters such as the word *God*, *Christ* or *Jesus Christ*, and *holy.* To some religions, the word *God* has a meaning of spirit that is worshipped and people believe that *God* who have created the universe (Oxford, 2010). When people use the word *God* in some appropriate situations such as in religious rites, and in giving a pray and thanks for His bless, e.g. *"good luck and **God** bless you"* and "*she is the **goddess** of the sea",* the word denotes its basic and appropriate meaning. On the other hand, the word *God* may be uttered inappropriate situations as for emphasizing a feeling of surprise which some people find it offensive and will be considered as a joke to God, for example "*Dimsbud already dead, the yeezus**GOD** a.k.a Kanye has taken over his mind&body*" (@dimsbud to @hanimediato @allfrida, 2017). Finally, there some taboo words that are related to animal such as *cow* and *pussy.* The word *cow,* for example, has the basic meaning of a large animal that is kept on producing milk or beef (Oxford, 2010). It is used as an offensive word to mock a woman which is considered as taboo because it is not polite to portray a woman as a cow, it will hurt the woman's feeling. The word *cow* also associates to a prostitute that attached to a pimp (Dalzell & Victor, 2008).

Taboo words are usually uttered because of particular reasons that motivate people to use them. In accordance to Jay (2000), factors encourage people across societies such as showing emotional states, expressing humor, referring to sexuality, and insulting other people. The use of taboo words can reflects the emotional situations that the speaker experiences because taboo words are emotionally powerful (Ningjue, 2010:8). According to Jay (2000:84), people have desire to show their feelings, relieve their anger, as well as establishing their personal identities and status through taboo words. In the other hand, it will be better for people's physical and psychological health by releasing anger through taboo words. This is in line with Hayahawa (1990, in Ningjue: 2010:8-9) who says that people utter these forbidden words to be an alternative that is harmless rather than going berserk such as smashing furniture. Moreover, the negative emotions such as anger, dissatisfaction, and depression in a healthier way. On the other hand, people sometimes use words that are prohibited to achieve humorous effect. People speak out taboo words as curse words to make joke that insult or "hurt" others because it creates an emotional impact for the listeners more than non-curse words can do (Jay: 2000:181). In a particular context, humorous effect can be achieved by using taboo words that connect with sexuality. Sexual joke comes from sexuality as the main topic that is produce to obscene (Jay: 2000:183). Moreover, people sometimes use taboo words to speak about sex. In accordance to Jay (2000:176), sexual taboo refers to sex activity, body parts, attraction, and names for people involved in acts. The term of sexual taboo also depends on the culture of certain groups because different groups use different sexual term. There are some references from homosexual culture like *'rimming'* is meaning as an activity that involves anilingus or homosexual people call the genitalia by *'basket'* (Farrell: 1972, in Jay: 2000:177). As a result of the functions of taboo words above, the use of taboo words can create harm effect that insult other people. There are some types of insult stated by Jay (2000:154) which are gender-related insult that refers to body parts (e.g. *cunt*), unintelligence (*e.g. moron*), social deviance (*e.g. bastard*), and sexual deviance (*e.g. motherfucker*). Therefore, generally people use taboo words when they are in emotional situations, to achieve humorous effect, to talk about sex, and to insult other.

METHODOLOGY

The conduct of the recent study involved four Indonesian young adults between 18-29 years old who were actively using Instagram and using English taboo words in their captions and the comments posted by their friends. The researchers used convenience sample strategy to select the subjects of this research which helped them to find participants easier. Convenience sample strategy is the technique of choosing the subjects of the most accessible subjects to get better knowledge about their educational background (Marshall: 1996:523).

The collected data from the participants were in the form of utterances posted by Indonesian young adult in their Instagram accounts which were taken from their captions and comments to their friends. Specifically, the data analyzed were English taboo words that were posted in the last twenty four

months. Two main instruments, namely Wardaugh's (2006) taboo classification, and Jay's (2000) theory on motives of using taboo words were used. The data collection included several stages as observing the potential Instagram accounts, informed consent completion, taboo word identification, and data entry. Continuing to that, data are classified into the associated types defines and the functions are subsequently interpreted. Additionally, qualitative method (Vanderstoep and Johnson,2009:167), was applied to describe and identify each types and functions of taboo words, and quantitative one is used to get the frequency of each category of types and functions of taboo words to support the interpretation of the data.

ANALYSIS

This section presents the results of the recent study which embraces two points, i.e. finding in the taboo word classification and identification of their functions.

A. Types of Taboo Words

The analysis conducted on the types of taboo words produced by four teen-age Instagram users reveals two important points. Primarily, from the 63 entries of taboo words, it is found that they fall into six types of taboo words, taboo classification, which comprise sex, death, excretion, bodily function, religious matters, and animal (Wardaugh, 2006). The data can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Percentage of Types of Taboo Words on Instagram by Indonesian Young Adults

No	Types	Occurrence(s)	Percentage (%)
1	Sex	20	31.75
2	Death	13	20.63
3	Excretion	6	9.52
4	Bodily Functions	7	11.11
5	Religious Matters	10	15.87
6	Animal	7	11.11
	TOTAL	**63**	**100**

As shown in the above table, in terms of its quantity the major taboo word type uttered by Indonesian young adults is sex which appear 20 times (31.75%). Taboo words relate to death are discovered 13 times (20.63%) in the Instagram captions and comments. Thus, it places the cattery the second highest. Subsequently, taboo words connected to religious matters occur 10 times (15.87%). The next two categories are bodily functions and animal, which come up 7 times (11.11%) in the users' account. Meanwhile, the least frequent type of taboo words produced by the Instagram users is excretion which appear 6 times (9.52%). The findings, somehow, give an evidence that young Indonesian Instagram users generally are familiar with English taboo words of all categories. The dominance taboo words of 'sex' might demonstrate the familiarity and preference upon the other types.

Another interesting finding relates to the examples of taboo words from the six taboo word classifications. It is demonstrated that in each category there are variation taboo words used or written in the captions and comments. Some appear to be more 'favorable' and frequent to be used to reveal the writer's intention and to convey certain messages. In sex and religious matter categories, for instance, there are 14 and 6 different kinds of taboo words, respectively. A similar thing applies to the other four categories, death, excretion, bodily functions, and religious matters. Apart from the 'word' variations, the frequency of the taboo word use is worth-noticing. The word *fuck* and *shit* hold the highest frequency both for each category they represent and across categories with 5 (7.94%). This might take place due to the exposure to the two words through movies, interaction with native speakers of the language, as well as social media. In the second place, the words that have 4 occurrences with the percentage of 6.35% each word are *hell*, *goddamn*, and *bitch*. The words *hell* and *God* are the in third favorite taboo words to be uttered in Instagram with the percentage of 4.76% each word. Further, the fourth highest frequency of taboo words in Instagram are the words *slut*, *what the fuck*, *fucking*, *dick*, *oh my God*, and *holy* that occurred twice of each word which hold the percentage of 3.17% each word. Lastly, there are taboo words that only appeared once with the percentage of 1.59% each word. Those are *sucks*, *whore*, *fuckgirl*, *motherfucking*, *fuckload*, *fuckbags*, *gay*, *muddle sex*, *having sex*, *death*, *dead*, *hell*, *damn*, *goddamn*, *bullshit*, *ass*, *tits*, *Jesus*, *Lord*, *Goddess*, *cow*, *cat*, and *pussy*. The following table presents the choices of English taboo words by young adult Instagram users in a more detail way.

Table 2: List of Taboo Words on Instagram by Indonesian Young Adults in Each Categorization of Type of Taboo Words.

No	Types of Taboo Words	Taboo Words	Occurrence (s)	Percentage (%)
1	Sex	*sucks*	1	1.59
		slut	2	3.17
		whore	1	1.59
		fuck	5	7.94
		what the fuck	2	3.17
		fucking	2	3.17
		fuckgirl	1	1.59
		motherfucking	1	1.59
		fuckload	1	1.59
		fuckbags	1	1.59
		gay	1	1.59
		muddle sex	1	1.59
		having sex	1	1.59
2	Death	*death*	1	1.59
		dead	1	1.59
		hell	4	6.35
		damn	3	4.76
		goddamn	4	6.35
3	Excretion	*shit*	5	7.94
		bullshit	1	1.59
4	Bodily Functions	*asshole*	3	4.76
		ass	1	1.59
		dick	2	3.17
		tits	1	1.59
5	Religious Matters	*Jesus*	1	1.59
		God	3	4.76
		oh my God	2	3.17
		Lord	1	1.59
		holy	2	3.17
		Goddess	1	1.59
6	Animal	*cow*	1	1.59
		bitch	4	6.35
		cat	1	1.59
		pussy	1	1.59
	TOTAL		**63**	**100**

B. **Functions of Taboo Words**

The researcher also found the four theory of functions by Jay (2000) on Indonesian young adults' Instagram that are presented in Table 3. The four functions existing are to show emotional situation (e.g. angry, sad, happy, and thrilled), in humor, to talk about sex manner, and as an insult on someone. Table 3 shows the percentage of the functions of taboo words by Jay (2009) that are found in the 63 occurrences of taboo words on Instagram.

Table 3: Percentage of Functions of Taboo Words on Instagram by Indonesian Young Adults

No	Functions of Taboo Words	Occurrence (s)	Percentage (%)
1	Emotional	26	41.27
2	Humor	23	36.51
3	Sex	2	3.17
4	Insult	12	19.05
	TOTAL	**63**	**100**

This table shows the percentage of functions of taboo words in Instagram by Indonesian young adults. From the above table, it is demonstrated that most Indonesian young adults use taboo words to show their emotional feeling, such as anger, stress, disappointment, and sad feelings. It occurs 26 times with the percentage of 41.27 % from all the 63 cases and appears as the highest frequent motivation for using taboo

words. Further, the second highest percentage is when Indonesian young learners use taboo words on Instagram to make jokes to others. It appears 23 times (36.51%). Insulting people. There are 12 Indonesian young adults who use taboo words as an insult to other with the total of 12 occurrences (19.05%). Eventually, there are only two people who talk about sex when using taboo words in a percentage only 3.17% from all.

As for the functions of taboo words, it is revealed that showing emotional feeling on captions in the Instagram accounts becomes the most influential factor for Indonesian young adults to use taboo words. The caption below illustrates the phenomenon.

> *There are many thoughts in my head, so I can only afford certain other thoughts that I haven't been conditioned to accept. Other people, perhaps healthier and fitter people, might have different loads of thoughts. In short, **FUCK**. (Data 5, R1, August 7ᵗʰ, 2017)*

In the example above, the word *fuck* is used to summarize the whole caption. R1 shares his feeling of confusion towards things on his mind and his anger towards his health condition. Another example is taboo word of death such as *damn* and *hell,* which according to the analysis are mostly used by the users to show that they are happy or upset towards some particular conditions. See the following example when the view is very beautiful from the window of their room, they replace the word *very* with *damn*.
R4, March 29ᵗʰ, 2017

> *Baby, the view is tooooooooo **DAMN** pretty.* (*R4, March 29ᵗʰ, 2017)*

Interestingly, taboo words are sometimes used to make a joke to others while at the same can also hurt others if it is heard by people who do not understand the joke. To achieve the humorous effect, people can use taboo words that is connected to with sexuality such *slut*. To understand better about the concept of taboo word as humor, here is the example that is taken from an Indonesian young adult's caption:

> *In all seriousness, I apologize I haven't been very entertaining lately. You don't need to say comforting words to me, really, I would rather you get a kick out of my very Aries attitude towards facing a possible condition, but thank you so much for caring. Here, have a picture of my **SLUT** friend as a shepherdess saint. (Data 2, R1, August 7ᵗʰ, 2017)*

The caption made by R1 with the word 'slut' is merely to create a humorous 'nuance' in his response towards his best friend who has made an effort to show her care and attention through her caption.

CONCLUSIONS

Social media, such as Instagram, serves a channel for people, including young people to communicate with the world through written language. Captions and comments in response to the uploaded pictures and topic are the expressions of the social media users' thought and feelings which often times involve the use of taboo words. Young Indonesian Instagram users, who are eager to show their existence and want to be seen, heard, and understood by others, in fact, have selection of taboo words which can be classified to four general types: sex, death, excretion, bodily functions, religious matters, and animals. Though the use of taboo words are generally considered inappropriate in certain contexts, they appear to be an effective means of young adult self-expression in social media where communication and interaction is basically limitless. These words enable social media users to show their emotional states and serve the other functions of ways of stating humor, sexuality manners, and expressing an insult.

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