

TABOO WORDS IN DEVAYAN, A LANGUAGE IN SIMEULU ISLAND, ACEH INDONESIA

Muhammad Wiwin

Zulfadli A. Aziz¹

Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The research on taboo words in Devayan has not been conducted yet, and thus, this study investigated the taboo words in Devayan society. This research was a descriptive qualitative study. The technique used was in-depth interview by digging much information from informants about taboo words in the language. The data in this study were analyzed by using Miles and Huberman's framework (1984), namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion: drawing/verification. The results of this study were (1) taboo words related to sex, (2) taboo words related to the natural function of the human body, (3) taboo words related to the sexual activity, (4) taboo words related to misconduct, (5) taboo words related to deficiency, and (6) taboo words related to animals.

Keywords: *Taboo language, Devayan, Simeulu.*

INTRODUCTION

Devayan constitutes one of the three tribes in Simeulu, a regency in Aceh, located 150 km off the west coast of Sumatra. Besides Devayan, the other two tribes are Sigulai and Leukon. As Muslims, Devayan people are very welcome and friendly for other people. Moreover, they work at various sectors; some of them make a living by being fishermen, gardeners or farmers, while others are civil servants (*Pegawai Negeri Sipil*).

In speaking, they are very careful to convey their intentions to others to avoid offense. Therefore, they pay close attention to the words spoken when speaking. However, Devayan people are rather concerned with the

¹ Corresponding Author: zulfadli.aziz@unsyiah.ac.id

taboo words used for speech acts of prohibition or abstinence. This appears to be due to the culture they have inherited from generation to generation.

It can also be seen from the elders' habit in the area who often use very subtle words in various traditional events. As the words exist in the customary marriage procession, the customary elders or the authorized parties provide guidance to the bride. They will advise or provide guidance in the style of language and unusual forms of speech. In a sense, the words are more than words that have subtle meanings and speeches or sayings that sound polite. Likewise in welcoming guests for friendship (*melawat*), Devayan people usually give greetings in the form of verses that sound like poems which are spoken in polite and meaningful words. However, today, it is not used anymore by young generation. This is due to their lack of interest in preserving culture and also influenced by other dominant languages used, such as Indonesian and *Jame* language, a local language in Simeulu. In fact, some teenagers assume that people who cannot speak *Jame* language are considered *plebeian*.

In Devayan culture, taboo words can demean people who are subjected to these words. In the other words, people who are associated with the taboo word will feel embarrassed or offended and are considered bad by the surrounding community. In addition, they will also be exposed to a disgrace badly seen by others if the taboo words used violate ethics or norms within the community or religion. Thus, there are a number of taboo words for the Devayan communities which need to be avoided. However, there are a number of taboo words that are considered to be harsh words and can only be said at certain times and conditions.

However, prohibited words or taboo words spoken in the Devayan community are still preserved by the elders in the area, although many young generations do not care about it anymore. Thus, the researchers intend to investigate taboo words in Devayan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Taboo words are seen as words that should not be said because they can cause bad things for those who say them because they are considered either unethical or immoral.

The taboo words were first introduced by Captain James Cook. It was found on his third trip logbook to Tahiti in June 1777. The taboo word is taken from the Tongan language "*tabu*". After that, the term was

written in English (taboo) by him in July of the same year (see Allan and Burridge, 2006).

According to Richards and Schmidt (2010, p. 582), taboo is words or expressions that are considered offensive or embarrassing so that their usages are discouraged in public space. In addition, taboo words are advised not to be used because they relate to behavior which will cause others to be anxious and embarrassed (see Trudgill, 2000; Wardhaugh, 2006). Behavior is an important thing in social life since when people misbehave, they will no longer get respects from others. Moreover, someone's value and ethics can be represented from the taboo words he or she uses. It means that someone who often uses them can potentially lose dignity.

Battistella (2005, p. 72) mentions that taboo words are can be categorized into epithets, profanity, vulgarity, and obscenity. Epithet is a speech in the form of slurs like *wop*, *raghead*, *bitch*, or *fag*. In addition, this epithet can be in the form of words aimed at race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, appearance, disabilities, or other characteristics. Furthermore, profanity refers to religious cursing as *hell*, *damn* or *goddamn*, while vulgarity and obscenity refer to sex anatomy or sexual excretory functions, such as *shit* and *fuck*.

Taboo words in every society are different from other societies. Trudgill (2000, p. 19) says "In English, taboo words can be words related to sex and religion." In contrast to what Trudgill said above, in the district of South Aceh, there are more various taboo words related to several things. These taboo words can relate to the names of disease, animal, and season (Yuliasari, 2016). Differently, taboo words in Teunom, Aceh Jaya can be realized in addressing others such as addressing the parents with 'du' and 'ma, elder relatives by "kah", the person who died with "mate", animals with *buya*, *rimung*, and *elephant*, the God with "si Tuhan". Taboo words are also related to sex such as "bohkreh" (males' genital), *aneuktet* (female's breasts), *pik/pukoe* (females' vagina), sexual activity "kochokboh" (masturbation), sexual profession "lonte" (bitch); and government wisdom "gasin, kepeucat" (see Mutia, 2017).

In addition, another study regarding these taboo words in the Gayo community in BenerMeriah Regency was conducted by Yani (2019). She found the words can be tabooed when someone use certain words with a name for example, *Reje Kampung*, *Banta*, *Ine*, *Ama*, *Inen Mayak*, *Aman Mayak* and *Perasen*. Moreover, taboo words can also occur when one calls a name of animals such as, *kule*, *gajah*, *tikus* and *asu*. Furthermore, taboo words can happen when someone refers to certain parts of the body

such as, *otoh*, *tenek* or *etet*, and *kesut*. Mentioning the names of diseases such as *bodok*, *supak*, *tongkek*, and *busung* can also be considered taboo. Besides, taboo words can also be realized by saying profanity or swearing such as *demalah*, *benatang*, *kafir*, *jalang*, *pekak*. Other certain words such as *sotot*, *mutube*, *nik*, *micing* and *berniet* are also regarded as taboo words.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative approach. This method is used to find taboo words in the community of Devayan, Simeulu regency, Aceh province. The data were collected by means of in-depth interview. This technique is appropriate with the research since it is able to gain data in the natural setting (Sugiyono, 2015).

This research was conducted in several villages in Teupah Barat sub-district in Simeulu district. The study was undertaken in this sub-district because the native Devayan speakers who had not been affected by other languages were still found in this area. Therefore, it can maintain the authenticity of the data collected. Informants in this study were 3 (three) Devayan residents in Teupah Barat sub-district who had daily jobs as farmers and fishermen. Two informants were men, while the other was a woman who know taboo words in Devayan society well.

The data was analyzed by using Miles and Huberman's framework (1984). The stages are data reduction, data display, and conclusion: drawing/verification. Sugiyono (2015) explains these three techniques. Data reduction means summarizing the initial data obtained by selecting or searching for data that is presented in brief descriptions, whereas data display presents the data that has been reduced to the appropriate narrative arrangement to make it easier for researchers to understand it. Meanwhile, the conclusion: drawing /verification is the finding or data that has been obtained and described in the form of narrative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study shows some taboo words related to sex, natural functions of the human body, sexual activity, misconduct, deficiency and certain names of animals. In the following, each of these taboo words will be elaborated in detail.

1) Taboo Words Related to Sex

a. *Kolop*[kolop], *sisit*[sisit], *butu*[butu], and *boekboek*[bɔɛʔbɔɛʔ]

These words refer to the males' genitals. These words are strictly prohibited from being spoken by Devayan people in any situations because they sound harsh. Thus, if someone is forced to say it, he or she should replace it with a more polite word, namely *efe*[əfə]. The word *efe* is a very polite word spoken when saying one of the names for the male sex. It means "shy".

b. *Tiek*[tiɛʔ] or *toyo*[tɔyɔ]

Tiek or *toyo* are females' genital. Both words have the same meaning, and thus it is strictly forbidden to say. The Devayan community also replaces it with the word *efe* as it is said when referring to the male genitals as above.

c. *Otok tai* [otoʔ tai]

The word *otok tai* means "anus" which is forbidden to say because it is considered impolite. This word is strictly prohibited from being spoken in front of the older people or in front of a crowded audience. Therefore, the Devayan community replaced the word *otok tai* with a more polite word, that is *lamang*[laman]. However, the word *otok tai* is considered normal when used to speak with people of the same age.

2. Taboo Words Related to the Natural Function of the Human Body

a. *Afeselan*[afeselan]

The word *afeselan*, meaning 'full' is a taboo word to refer to a pregnant woman because it violates the norms of modesty. This word can only be said to denote a pregnant animal. The Devayan community gives a subtle word to refer to a pregnant woman with *ekawak*[ɛʔawaʔ]. The word *ekawak* itself is taken from the words *ek* and *awak*. The *ek* means 'in' while *awak* means 'trunk or body' which means in the body there is a baby.

b. *Mangiap*[manjap]

This word is forbidden to say in the public because it is considered rude by the Devayan community. The word *mangiap* means 'menstruation'. Because this word is considered too vulgar to be pronounced, it is replaced with other words, namely *mangirambawa*[manjirambawa]. The words *mangirambawa* has a

different meaning from the original word, namely *mangiram* “to see” and *bawa* “moon”. It means that the people of Devayan denominate a menstrual woman with “she sees the moon”.

3. Taboo Words Related to the Sexual Activity

a. *Kokok*[kokoʔ] and *rakan* [rakan]

The word *kokok* is a much prohibited word to be spoken by the Devayan community. This word is not allowed to be heard by other people. The word *kokok* is defined as sexual activity carried out by married couples. In English this word means "coitus". In the language of Devayan this word is divided into active and passive verbs. The active verb is *bekokok* [bəkokoʔ] "copulate" and the passive verb is *dikokok*[dikokoʔ] "copulated". Whereas *rakan* was taken or borrowed from the Acehnese language and it has the same meaning as *kokok*. Therefore, these words are replaced with words that are considered polite by the local community, namely *mangalanak*[maŋalanaʔ] (n/v) / *mangalanaki*[maŋalanaʔi] (av) / *dialanaki*[dialanaʔi] (pv).

b. *Mallos*[malləs]

The word *mallos* is prohibited from being spoken in public because it is a very despicable word. The word *mallos* is a word that signifies a sexual intercourse carried out by a man and a woman who is not a married couple. Obviously this act violated the rules of religion and local customs. Thus, people who are caught committing such acts will certainly be subject to *qanun* penalties in the form of caning and they will definitely be considered very despicable by the local community. Hence, since outside-marriage sexual intercourse is very bad and despicable, saying this word is also prohibited. Therefore, this word is replaced with a smooth and polite word, which is *mahaomahao*[mahaəmahao]. It is taken from the basic word *mahao*"bad" because it is a bad deed.

c. *Mansingel*[mansɪŋɛl]

This word is a speech that is forbidden to be spoken by Devayan people because it is considered a dirty word. The word *mansingel* is a word that signifies sexual activity carried out by animals. In English, the word *mansingel* means "mate". Therefore, the utter of this word in public is considered to violate the ethics of public manners. Because this is seen very seriously by the surrounding community, the use of the word is disguised by replacing it with another word. Words that are substitutes

for the word are deemed more polite to use if forced to say, namely *malalatae* [malalataɛ]. With this word, people who say the word would not be subject to violations of manners. Therefore, these words are sometimes often used as introductory words in discussions about livestock or so on.

4. Taboo Words Related to Misconduct

a. *Mammōd*[mammōd]

Mammōd refers to an act of theft. The meaning of this word is "stealing". This word is forbidden to be spoken in front of the public among Devayan people because it is considered rude. In addition, the use of this word in front of the family members of the thief can make them extremely shameful. Therefore, to keep this from happening, the word *mammōd* is prohibited from being spoken in public. Otherwise, when used, it must be replaced with a more subtle word, namely *maheahaok*[maheahaʔ]. The word *mahea* means "fast" and *haok* means "hand".

b. *Manehenehe*[manəhənəhə]

This word is considered to be a rough word because it refers to actions that are not good. The word *manehenehe* means 'peek' which is considered as a negative meaning. Because this word is not appropriate to say, therefore, the people of Devayan choose another word that is considered subtle, namely *maneteleo*[manətəleo] which has the same meaning with *manehenehe*, but it is used in general or positive context to sound polite.

c. *Mangasong*[maŋason]

In everyday life, sometimes Devayan people often see some embarrassing events, such as fights in a family or among neighbors and so on. Usually this fight can occur because there is a third party who slanders them. Thus, it causes the bickering. The misdeed of third parties who spread hatred towards people is signified by the word *mangasong*. However, this word should not be arbitrarily spoken in public. If this word is publicly used in a sentence "diamangasongmerekautukberkelahi" (he slanders them to fight), the person who does *mangasong* will be hated by everyone. Thus, this word is prohibited from being spoken in public except by village elders who can judge cases that occur, but they still avoid using this word by

replacing it with another word, namely *mansiaotdepon*[mansiaʔotdəpon].

d. *Mangakkali*[maŋaʔkali]

The word *mangakkali* is also a harsh word because it is understood to be 'cheat'. Devayan people, who are very strict with politeness norms, are very careful in choosing words, although it is to express action that is not good. Thus, they replace 'Mangakali' with another more subtle word, namely *manghelot*[maŋhelot] derived from *helot*. The words *mangakkali* and *manghelot* actually have the same meanings, namely 'cheat', yet the latter sounds more subtle.

5. Taboo Words Related to Deficiency

a. *Pakak*[pakaʔ]

The pronunciation of the word *pakak* is prohibited among the Devayan society because the word sounds harsh and against the modesty custom. The word *pakak* means "deaf". Thus, this word should not be used to refer to a deaf person. Apart from being able to offend others, saying the word to others means insulting them. Therefore, this word cannot be used, yet should instead be replaced with another word, namely *menggel*[mənggəl]. This word has the same meaning with *pakak*, but for Devayan people, this word sounds more subtle.

b. *Afuta*[afuta]

This word is the same as the word *pakak* above, which is a deficiency that others have. The word *afuta* means "blind". Just like the word *pakak*, this word is prohibited from being spoken in a public because it can make others feel offended. By saying this word, it means insulting others with their shortcomings. Thus, this word is replaced with a more polite word, namely *afetek*[afətek].

6. Taboo Words Related to Animals

a. *Boya*[böya]

Boya in English is a crocodile which is an animal feared by the Devayan community. In Devayan public belief, mentioning the word *boya* is considered taboo by the Devayan community. This word is prohibited from being said by people who are work in the riverbank or forest because these animals can bring disaster or misfortune. *Boya* in

Devayan community can be replaced with the word *nenek*[nɛnɛʔ] ‘grandmother’. Therefore, by changing the name, the person who uses it is not overwritten by misfortune.

b. *Sawa*[sawa]

Sawa is the name of another animal that cannot be spoken carelessly by the Devayan community. *Sawa* in English is a snake. Just like the word *boya*, the word *sawa* should not be said carelessly especially for people who work in the mountain. They believe that if it is said, a snake will come and pounce on the person who calls his name. By the Devayan community, the word *sawa* was replaced with the word *ollor*[ollɔr] ‘root’.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data regarding taboo words in Devayan language, it can be concluded that there are 6 groups of taboo words in this language. As noted above, the taboo words in Devayan can be classified into (1) taboo words related to sex (*kolop*, *sisit*, *butu*, and *boekboek*, *tiek* or *toyo*, and *otok tai*), (2) taboo words related to the natural function of the human body (*afeselan* and *mangiap*), (3) taboo words related to the sexual activity (*kokok* and *rakan* (Acehnese)), *mallos*, and *mansingel*, (4) taboo words related to misconduct (*mammod*, *manehenehe*, *mangasong*, and *mangakkali*), (5) taboo words related to deficiency (*pakak* and *afuta*), and (6) taboo words related to animals (*boya* and *sawa*).

REFERENCES

- Allan, K., & Burridge, K. (2006). *Forbidden words: Taboo and the censoring of language*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Battistella, E. L. (2005). *Bad language: Are some words etter than others?*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1984). Drawing valid meaning from qualitative data: Toward a shared craft. *Educational researcher*, 13(5), 20-30.
- Mutia, R. (2017). *Deskripsi bahasa tabu dalam masyarakat Teunom Kabupaten Aceh Jaya* [Description of taboo language in Teunom society, Aceh Jaya Regency], (Sarjana Pendidikan), Universitas Syiah Kuala. Banda Aceh.

- Mutia, R., Taib, R., & Iqbal, M. (2018). Deskripsi bahasa tabu dalam masyarakat teunom Kabupaten Aceh Jaya. *JIM Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, 3(2), 103-114.
- Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2010). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (Fourth Edition). Great Britain: Pearson Education Limited.
- Sugiyono. (2015). *Memahami penelitian kualitatif* [Understanding qualitative research]. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Trudgill, P. (2000). *Sociolinguistics: An introduction to language and society* (fourth Edition). London: Penguin Group.
- Wardhaugh, R. (2006). *An introduction to sociolinguistics* (Fifth Edition). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Yani, S. (2019). *Bahasa tabu dalam masyarakat Gayo di Kabupaten Bener Meriah* [Taboo language in Gayo society, Bener Meriah Regency], (Sarjana Pendidikan). Universitas Syiah Kuala. Banda Aceh.
- Yuliasari, R. (2016). *Deskripsi tabu dalam masyarakat Tapaktuan Kabupaten Aceh Selatan* [Description of Taboo in Tapaktuan Society, South Aceh Regency], (Sarjana Pendidikan). Universitas Syiah Kuala. Banda Aceh.