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Sociopragmatic Insights into Verbal Taboos and Euphemisms in the Angkola Language: A Pathway to Cultural Diplomacy

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Abstract

This study examines the sociopragmatic roles of verbal taboos and euphemisms in the Angkola language, focusing on their function in maintaining cultural diplomacy and social harmony. A qualitative ethnographic approach was employed, with data collected from 320 respondents through observations, in-depth interviews, and online surveys. Respondents represented diverse demographic and occupational backgrounds within the Angkola-speaking regions of North Sumatra. To analyze the data, the study applied thematic analysis, categorizing expressions based on domains such as kinship, religion, body, social status, and supernatural beliefs. The findings reveal a high level of awareness about verbal taboos within the Angkola community, yet these practices are under threat due to the impact of globalization and technological advancements. The research identifies key challenges in the transmission of these cultural norms to younger generations, who are increasingly detached from traditional linguistic practices. The implications of this study emphasize the need for integrating indigenous languages and cultural education into school curricula, as well as leveraging media and digital platforms to promote cultural preservation. This research provides a foundation for further investigation into the role of language in cultural sustainability and offers practical strategies for safeguarding endangered linguistic traditions in the modern era.

Keywords: Angkola language, cultural preservation, diplomacy, euphemisms, verbal taboos.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of taboo constitutes an intrinsic element within the social structure and beliefs of communities, often intertwined with notions of sacredness and purity (Ouidade, 2012). Within cultural and religious contexts, taboos encompass prohibitions on certain words and actions deemed inappropriate, vulgar, or offensive. Meanwhile, euphemism, as a linguistic strategy to avoid the use of taboo or coarse language, plays a significant role in the dynamics of social communication. Euphemism exists in every language and is often used to soften expressions, indicating that euphemism is an integral part of effective and efficient communication strategies. This approach not only provides positive cultural values but also enhances the success of communication among individuals. However, behind its social function, euphemism can also obscure meaning, introduce ambiguity into communication, and affect shared understanding between speakers and listeners (Rosikh, 2014). In the context of the Arabic language, euphemism, known as *al-alfāz al-tahsīn* (الألفاظ التحسين), plays a significant role in social etiquette and communication. Euphemism is also defined as indirect and gentle expressions used to replace harsh or unpleasant words. This demonstrates cultural sensitivity in using delicate language and affirms that language is a vital tool in upholding social norms and politeness (Rosikh, 2014).

In the region of South Tapanuli, South Sumatra Province, Indonesia, the belief in *lubuk larangan* or ‘forbidden areas’ in rivers for fish conservation reflects enduring taboo practices (Turmuzy et al., 2022). *Lubuk larangan* is regulated with formal and non-formal rules by the local community as an effort to maintain ecological and social balance for Angkola people. Though the exact origins of this tradition are not precisely recorded, violations of *lubuk larangan* result in severe sanctions (e.g., illness or death) for those who steal fish from these areas, stressing the seriousness of consequences for breaching taboos.

The Angkola language is a member of the Austronesian Batak language family. Spoken predominantly by the Angkola ethnic group, a sub-group of the broader Batak people, the language is actively used in familial, religious, and community life. It carries rich oral traditions and linguistic nuances, particularly in the use of verbal taboos, euphemisms, and honorifics, which reflect deep-rooted politeness strategies and cultural identity. Hence, the Angkola society is undergoing rapid socio-cultural transformation, where traditional values, including verbal taboos, are at risk of erosion due to modernization, urbanization, and generational disconnection. Despite the crucial role of taboos in shaping communication ethics, maintaining intergenerational respect, and sustaining cultural identity, scholarly attention to how these linguistic prohibitions function within specific ethnolinguistic contexts like Angkola remains scarce. Taboos in Angkola society serve not only as prohibitions but also as instruments to regulate social interaction. Sanctions and punishments are imposed to ensure compliance with social norms, with religious and customary leaders acting as guardians and enforcers of communal values. For example, violations of *lubuk larangan* are not only criminal infractions but also breaches of spiritual and social contracts within the community (Rukiah, 2020). While studies such as Barus et al. (2018) on the Karo language emphasize ancestral roots in taboo traditions, and Goldenberg (2010) illustrates how bodily taboos in Brazil act as negotiated social constructs, these works highlight the broader relevance of taboos in managing cultural meaning.

However, the research gap lies in the limited sociopragmatic exploration of how euphemisms and verbal taboos are strategically used by the Angkola people as tools of communicative diplomacy, intergenerational respect, and cultural resilience amidst social change. The novelty of this study is its reframing of taboos and euphemisms not merely as linguistic constraints but as adaptive sociocultural mechanisms that support the vitality of regional languages. By exploring the sociopragmatic dimensions, the study positions taboo language as a living system, dynamic, performative, and culturally strategic, especially within a context where local traditions are threatened by dominant narratives and linguistic homogenization.

Accordingly, this research is guided by the following questions:

1. What kinds of verbal taboos and euphemisms exist in the Angkola language?
2. What sociopragmatic functions do these taboos serve in Angkola society?

3. How can euphemisms and taboos be interpreted as cultural strategies for maintaining regional language vitality?

This study is significant as it highlights an under-researched linguistic community, showing how language encodes social values and identity. It heightens the role of culturally rooted communication in language preservation and affirms sociopragmatic competence as key to sustaining linguistic diversity and intercultural dialogue.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Taboo and Euphemism

Euphemism, as a linguistic strategy to avoid the use of taboo or coarse language, plays a significant role in the dynamics of social communication. In the context of the Angkola language, the practice of euphemism not only emphasizes social sensitivity but also reflects the depth of cultural values embedded in language usage. Waridah (2008) defines euphemism as a figurative device that employs delicate words as substitutes for expressions deemed taboo or coarse, affirming that euphemism acts as a medium to maintain politeness in social interactions. Suparno (2018) adds that euphemism exists in every language and is often used to soften expressions, indicating that euphemism is an integral part of effective and efficient communication strategies. This approach not only fosters positive cultural values but also enhances the success of communication among individuals. However, euphemism, while serving a social function, can obscure meaning, create ambiguity, and hinder mutual understanding (Rosikh, 2014).

The use of euphemism in the Angkola language reflects the complexity of interactions among language, culture, and social context. In related research on taboos and euphemisms in various languages, concepts from Fromkin et al. (2014) and Allan and Burridge (2009) are often used as theoretical frameworks to classify and analyze these phenomena. Euphemism serves as a tool to overcome the limitations set by social and religious norms, enabling individuals to communicate about sensitive topics without violating taboos (Allan & Burridge, 2009; Fromkin et al., 2014).

In the context of the Angkola language, euphemism and verbal taboos are deeply rooted in the social and cultural structure of Angkola society. For example, the words *babiat* 'tiger' and *ular* 'snake' have clear lexical meanings but become taboo when used in certain contexts, requiring the use of euphemisms to maintain social harmony (Jayanti et al., 2019). This phenomenon indicates that euphemism in the language is not only a reflection of linguistic politeness but also an effective tool for preserving cultural values and reinforcing the social identity of the community.

2.2 Verbal Taboo in Various Cultures

Verbal taboos and euphemisms function as linguistic manifestations of cultural wisdom. This wisdom can be classified into local wisdom, which reflects communal norms and ancestral customs, and practical wisdom, which refers to socially appropriate decision-making (Purba & Siahaan, 2020). In many cultural contexts, verbal taboos regulate language use to uphold social harmony, avoid offense, and respect sacred or sensitive domains. Euphemisms, therefore, serve as strategic linguistic alternatives that mitigate directness and maintain interpersonal decorum. In English, for example, euphemisms show a diverse range of forms to address sensitive topics with politeness. Allan and Burridge (2009) highlight the use of metaphor, acronym, and circumlocution in expressions like 'pass away' for 'die' or 'between jobs' for 'unemployed'. Such strategies not only soften the message but also reflect the culture's sensitivity to social face and emotional tone.

In Angkola society, verbal taboos are deeply embedded in religious, psychological, and social norms (Fan, 2020). Euphemisms are employed to replace terms considered offensive or inappropriate, especially in public or intergenerational settings. Words such as *kafir* 'infidel' and *haram* 'forbidden (by God)' are often avoided in daily speech due to their spiritual weight and

potential to offend (Rosikh, 2014). Additionally, stigmatized mental health references like *gila* ‘crazy’ are substituted with gentler alternatives to reflect cultural respect and empathy.

Beyond lexical substitution, the Angkola language exhibits morphological and phonological modifications to euphemize taboo terms (see Table 1). This structural adaptation is a culturally driven strategy to maintain politeness without abandoning the topic entirely. For instance, the term *bujang* ‘vagina’ is softened through several variations such as *bujak*, *bujas*, and *bujakkas*. Similarly, *bureket* ‘vagina’ becomes *beket*, *haram* ‘forbidden (by God)’ becomes *haras*, and *kapir* becomes *kapit*. Even anatomical references such as *teteng* ‘penis’ is transformed into *totong*. These creative alterations reduce the perceived harshness of the original words while maintaining their communicative function (Sasabone et al., 2024).

Table 1. Morphological and phonological changes of taboo words.

No.	Taboo word	Changed form	Lexical meaning
1.	<i>Bujang</i>	<i>Bujak</i>	Vagina
2.	<i>Bujang</i>	<i>Bujas</i>	Vagina
3.	<i>Bujang</i>	<i>Bujakkas</i>	Vagina
4.	<i>Bureket</i>	<i>Beket</i>	Vagina
5.	<i>Haram</i>	<i>Haras</i>	Forbidden
6.	<i>Kapir</i>	<i>Kapit</i>	Infidel
7.	<i>Teteng</i>	<i>Totong</i>	Penis

This linguistic phenomenon demonstrates how euphemism in Angkola culture extends beyond word choice into phonological and morphological adaptation. It affirms that taboo avoidance is not merely about censorship but reflects a thoughtful and culturally respectful approach to communication.

2.3 Semantic and Sociopragmatic Meaning of Words

Sociopragmatics is the study of local or more specific conditions regarding the use of a language. As depicted by Leech (1983), sociopragmatics is referred to as ‘the sociological interface of pragmatics’ or pragmatics studied through its sociological perspective (Burton, 1985). Sociopragmatic studies not only prioritize language aspects but also focus on the social environment that supports the use of that language (Nurdiyanto & Resticka, 2021). Therefore, sociopragmatics is the intersection between sociology and pragmatics. Sociopragmatics is closely related to sociology because sociopragmatic research connects the language usage of a group of people with their social factors (age, gender, and occupation).

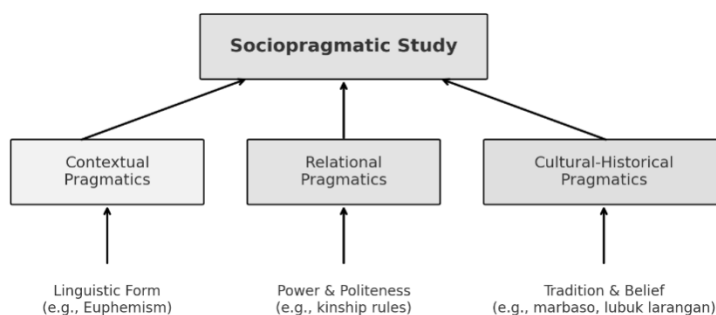


Figure 1. Sociopragmatics in linguistic studies.

Figure 1 adapts a multidimensional model of sociopragmatic analysis presented by Kádár (2024), contextualized to the Angkola language, by integrating contextual, relational, and cultural-historical layers to examine how taboos and euphemisms are interpreted. This approach is grounded in sociolinguistics, an interdisciplinary field that explores the relationship between language and society (Chaer, 2013; Holmes & Wilson, 2022). Theoretical foundations from Searle’s (1969) work on speech acts and implicatures offer valuable insight into how semantic

and pragmatic meanings intersect in the use of taboo and euphemism. Additionally, Culpeper's (2018) discussion on language politeness and its interaction with verbal taboos enhances the understanding of how politeness strategies shape sociopragmatic communication.

2.4 Related Studies and Analytical Approaches

The exploration of verbal taboos and euphemisms across different cultures reveals a complex relationship between language and social norms. A study by Ulfa et al. (2024) utilizes the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach to analyze animal-related taboo names in Acehese culture, identifying taboos related to swearing and fear. These findings emphasize the cultural importance of alternative names to maintain respect for nature and reflect deep-seated cultural values (Ulfa et al., 2024). Allan and Burridge (2009) further discuss the evolution of taboos from metaphysical fears to social prohibitions, illustrating how language reflects and enforces cultural norms through categories such as dirty words, bad language, and name avoidance.

Research on the pragmatics of swearing by Janschewitz (2008) and Jay (2009) highlights the emotional impact of taboo language and its role in expressing social relationships. These studies underscore the significance of taboo words in managing interpersonal dynamics and maintaining social order. Similarly, the contextual use and societal reactions to taboo words in the Acehese language reflect a sophisticated understanding of when and how such language can be employed humorously or persuasively (Aziz et al., 2020).

Further research by Nasution and Mulyadi (2021) on kinship communication patterns in North Sumatra highlights the dynamic nature of verbal taboos and their shifting meanings in contemporary society. This study shows how certain taboo words, such as *kafir* 'infidel', can lead to conflicts in diverse socio-cultural contexts, emphasizing the importance of understanding the sociopragmatic aspects of taboo language. In Nagan Raya, Aceh, verbal taboos like swearing commonly express anger and disappointment, while nonverbal taboos enforce youth obedience through mythical consequences (Syahputri et al., 2019).

Empirical studies by Kurniasari et al. (2013) and Affini (2017) emphasize the importance of understanding the social and cultural contexts in the analysis of taboo and euphemism, utilizing sociopragmatic frameworks to explore language phenomena within broader social contexts. The concept of taboo has long been a subject of interest in anthropology and linguistics, with Montagu (2001) and Douglas (2002) identifying taboos as adherence to sacred or holy norms, which, when violated, result in social disorder and misfortune. In the linguistic context, Sutarman (2017) notes that verbal taboos are often softened through euphemisms to create more socially acceptable expressions, such as replacing *harimau* 'tiger' with *ompung* or *datuk* in Sumatera.

These studies provide important findings into the functions and implications of taboo and euphemism in different cultural settings. Integrating these findings into the analysis of Angkola language taboos and euphemisms offers a comprehensive understanding of their significance and challenges in the modern era. This approach is expected to provide new insights into how verbal and non-verbal taboos function in the Angkola cultural context and to inform strategies for cultural preservation and adaptation in the face of global social changes.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative ethnographic approach to explore the phenomena of verbal taboos and euphemisms in the Angkola language as forms of communicative diplomacy embedded within the sociocultural practices of its speakers. This methodology enables a deep, context-rich understanding of language use and verbal behavior, emphasizing the subjective perspectives of the Angkola people themselves (Saragih et al., 2025). Specifically, it seeks to

comprehend how verbal taboos are manifested in everyday life and how they influence social interactions.

3.2 Selection of Subjects

The research was conducted in South Tapanuli and surrounding areas in North Sumatra, Indonesia, including Kota Padangsidimpuan, Kabupaten Tapanuli Selatan, Kabupaten Padanglawas Utara, Kabupaten Padanglawas, and surrounding regions. These locations were selected because they represent the core region of the Angkola language. The respondents in this study were community members aged 17 and above, selected through purposive sampling to ensure they were fluent in the Angkola language and aware of its sociopragmatics and cultural taboos. A total of 320 participants were selected, representing a broad demographic and occupational spectrum, including civil servants, teachers, students, scholars, entrepreneurs, homemakers, farmers, and drivers. This diversity captures the social reality of the Angkola-speaking community and enhances the generalizability of the study's cultural-linguistic insights.

The geographical distribution of respondents is historically tied to a single administrative unit of South Tapanuli Regency (Tapsel), which was later subdivided through several stages of regional autonomy. According to Law No. 12/1998, Mandailing Natal Regency was formed in 1998. Subsequently, Padangsidimpuan City separated from South Tapanuli Regency in 2001 under Law No. 4/2001. North Padang Lawas (Paluta) and Padang Lawas (Palas) regencies were later established based on Law No. 37/2007 and Law No. 38/2007, respectively (see Figure 2). This historical restructuring has shaped the present-day linguistic and cultural landscape, contributing to subtle regional variations in the Angkola language that were captured in this study. The language used across these regions is shaped not only by ethnic affiliation but also by socioeconomic conditions and geographic variation, making them ideal for examining verbal taboos and euphemisms in context.

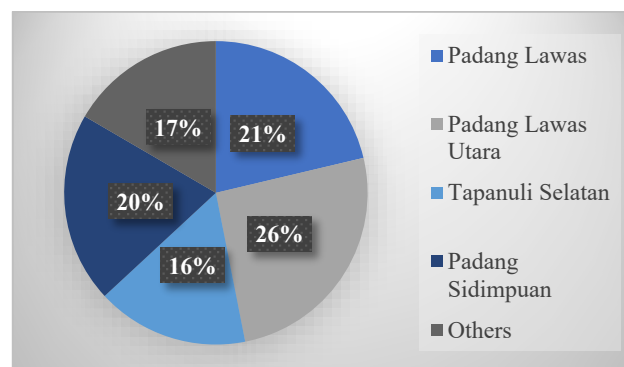


Figure 2. Geographical respondent distribution

3.3 Instruments

The instruments used to collect data were interviews and observations to gather information on how the Angkola community uses language to maintain harmony, show respect, and uphold cultural norms. Observations in natural settings captured the authentic use of verbal taboos in everyday interactions (Pujiono et al., 2025), while interviews provided detailed insights into participants' perceptions and attitudes toward these expressions in the Angkola language. The resulting data comprised qualitative responses and field notes documenting real-life language use.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted in natural settings such as markets, coffee shops, religious sites, and other public spaces where the Angkola language is actively and spontaneously spoken. These environments enabled researchers to observe real-life interactions involving verbal taboos

and euphemistic expressions, thereby grounding the study in authentic language use. Such contextual immersion ensured that the findings reflect the organic sociopragmatic patterns of the community. Structured thematic questions were used during interviews to assess participants' understanding of taboo communication, particularly regarding interpersonal etiquette within kinship contexts. Thematic analysis was used to uncover patterns related to verbal taboos in the Angkola community by coding and organizing data based on participant responses and observed behaviors. Emerging themes reflected the underlying social functions and cultural meanings of these expressions. This approach provided a holistic view of how verbal taboos operate within the community's communicative practices.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Data validity was ensured through method and source triangulation by combining participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and cross-referencing information from informants with diverse backgrounds. The researchers' sustained field engagement further reinforced validity by allowing for ongoing verification and refinement of findings. Reliability was maintained through consistent data collection procedures and the use of clearly defined protocols for both observations and interviews. This rigorous methodological approach strengthens the credibility of the study and ensures that the findings accurately represent the sociocultural dynamics of language use and verbal behavior in the Angkola community, thereby offering meaningful contributions to the broader understanding of language practices in context.

4. RESULTS

The analysis revealed consistently high levels of awareness regarding verbal restrictions in kin-based relationships, particularly those involving in-laws and senior family members. These findings confirm that verbal taboos and euphemisms are not only present but are actively upheld as cultural strategies. Accordingly, the results are organized into three sections, each corresponding to one of the study's guiding research questions.

4.1 Types and Categories of Verbal Taboos and Euphemisms in the Angkola Language

This section addresses the first research question on the kinds of verbal taboos and euphemisms that exist in the Angkola language. Analysis of ethnographic interviews and field observations identified 48 verbal taboo terms and expressions, systematically categorized into 8 semantic domains. These domains include taboo references to:

1. Animals (e.g., *babi* 'pig', *anjing* 'dog', *babiat* 'tiger'),
2. Sexual organs (e.g., *bujang* 'vagina', *bureket* 'vagina', *pilat* 'penis', *teteng* 'penis'),
3. Sexual activities (e.g., *marbokok* 'intercourse', *manyorsor* 'masturbation'),
4. Religious violations (e.g., *haram* 'forbidden (by God)', *kapir* 'infidel', *murtad* 'apostate'),
5. Supernatural beings and concepts (e.g., *begu* 'evil spirit', *setan* 'devil', *aji-aji* 'black magic'),
6. Mental conditions (e.g., *bintot* 'mentally slow', *rintik* 'insane'),
7. Bodily excretions (e.g., *te* 'feces', *untut* 'flatulence'),
8. Kinship terms and social status (e.g., *jampurut* 'servant', *anak gampang* 'child born out of wedlock').

These taboo words are considered socially sensitive because of their potential to offend, violate spiritual norms, or disrupt interpersonal relationships. To mitigate this, the Angkola community employs euphemisms as linguistic strategies that help maintain social harmony, demonstrate respect for elders, and uphold the values of politeness (*marbaso*), modesty, and indirectness. Accordingly, the identified taboo terms were systematically categorized by domain, taxonomy, meaning, and semantic classification. The complete list of taboo terms in the Angkola language is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. List of taboo terms in the Angkola language.

No.	Domain	Taxonomy	Component	Theme	Type
1.	<i>aji-aji</i>	disease/murder	<i>teluh/jimat</i> , black magic to harm others	supernatural	basic word/noun
2.	<i>anjing</i>	animal	mammals are often kept to guard the house and for hunting	living creature	basic word/noun
3.	<i>babi</i>	animal	mammal with a long snout, thick skin, and coarse fur	living creature	basic word/noun
4.	<i>babiat</i>	animal	wild animal, carnivore, resembling a large cat	living creature	basic word/noun
5.	<i>begu</i>	supernatural being	evil ghost/spirit, unseen creature believed to inhabit certain places	supernatural	basic word/noun
6.	<i>binatang</i>	animal	a living creature that can move, react to stimuli, but does not have intellect	living creature	basic word/noun
7.	<i>bintot</i>	mental-psychological	mentally slow, lacking intelligence	human psychology	basic word/adjective
8.	<i>bodat</i>	animal	ape with grayish fur, long tail, hairless face, and hands and feet	living creature	basic word/noun
9.	<i>bolus</i>	greeting activity	to pass by (excuse me), to walk past a place	supernatural	basic word/verb
10.	<i>bujang</i>	sexual organ	female genitalia (vagina), the channel between the cervix and the vagina	human body	basic word/noun
11.	<i>bukbuk</i>	sexual organ	pubic hair, hair on human genitalia	human body	basic word/noun
12.	<i>bureket</i>	sexual organ	female genitalia (vagina), the channel between the cervix and the vagina	human body	basic word/noun
13.	<i>cacing</i>	animal	small, round/flat-bodied creeping animal (some live in water, soil, human/animal intestines)	living creature	basic word/noun
14.	<i>gampang</i>	social status	forbidden/out of wedlock (adultery), child born out of wedlock	socio-cultural	basic word/adjective
15.	<i>haram</i>	sinful act (islam)	prohibited (by islam), not halal (non-halal)	religion	basic word/adjective
16.	<i>ipput</i>	waste disposal	buttocks, the base of the thigh at the back, buttocks, anus	human body	basic word/noun
17.	<i>jabut</i>	coconut part	coconut husk, fibrous skin on the coconut fruit	plant	basic word/noun
18.	<i>jampurut</i>	social status	servant, slave, person of low status	socio-cultural	basic word/noun
19.	<i>kapir</i>	sinful act (islam)	a person who does not believe in allah and his messenger (in islam)	religion	basic word/noun
20.	<i>loak</i>	mental-psychological	stupid, slow to understand, slow to know, foolish, slow to understand	human psychology	basic word/adjective
21.	<i>lopek</i>	food type	<i>lepat</i> , a type of food made from glutinous rice and grated coconut, seasoned with salt, wrapped in coconut leaves	food	basic word/noun
22.	<i>manyorsor</i>	sexual activity	masturbation, ejaculation of semen (sperm) without intercourse, masturbation	sex	word with prefix/verb
23.	<i>marbokok</i>	sexual activity	intercourse, activity between a man and a woman by combining or touching their genitals	sex	word with prefix/verb
24.	<i>mate</i>	supernatural activity	dead, already lost their life, no longer alive	supernatural	basic word/adjective
25.	<i>murtad</i>	sinful act (islam)	to turn away, to become an infidel, to leave Islam, no longer adhere to Islam	religion	basic word/verb

Table 2 continued...

26.	<i>oto</i>	mental-psychological	stupid, slow to understand, slow-witted	human psychology	basic word/adjective
27.	<i>parrasun</i>	disease/murder	poisoner, one who engages in supernatural activities to poison others	supernatural	word with prefix/noun
28.	<i>pial-pial</i>	sexual organ	penis, male genitalia, part of the body capable of ejaculating semen, sperm, and urine	human body	reduplication/noun
29.	<i>pilat</i>	sexual organ	penis, male genitalia, part of the body capable of ejaculating semen, sperm, and urine	human body	basic word/noun
30.	<i>rintik</i>	mental-psychological	insane, memory loss, mental illness (nerve disorder and abnormal thinking)	human psychology	basic word/adjective
31.	<i>santabi</i>	greeting activity	bowing, an expression to give greetings, an act of respect, apology (spoken when entering a sacred place)	supernatural	basic word/noun
32.	<i>setan</i>	supernatural being	the evil spirit that constantly tempts humans to do evil	supernatural	basic word/noun
33.	<i>takar</i>	coconut part	coconut shell, the hard outer layer of the coconut	plant	basic word/noun
34.	<i>te</i>	body waste	feces, excrement, food residue from the stomach that exits through the anus	waste	basic word/noun
35.	<i>teteng</i>	sexual organ	penis, male genitalia, part of the body capable of ejaculating semen, sperm, and urine	human body	basic word/noun
36.	<i>tolor</i>	sexual organ	testicles, male reproductive organs producing sperm, testicles	human body	basic word/noun
37.	<i>ulok</i>	animal	legless crawling animal, elongated round body, scaly skin, some venomous, some non-venomous	living creature	basic word/noun
38.	<i>untut</i>	body waste	flatulence, foul-smelling gas (foul gas) emitted from the anus	waste	basic word/noun
39.	<i>urut</i>	waste disposal	buttocks, base of the thigh at the back, buttocks, anus	human body	basic word/noun
40.	<i>nama orangtua/lebih tua</i>	age & address (senior)	name, word used to refer to or call someone	socio-cultural	basic word/noun
41.	<i>anak ni anjing</i>	animal	puppy	living creature	noun phrase
42.	<i>anak gampang</i>	social status	child born out of wedlock	socio-cultural	noun phrase
43.	<i>bujang inam</i>	sexual organ	vagina/mother's genitals	human body	noun phrase
44.	<i>inangmu</i>	age & address (senior)	your mother, your maternal parent, your mother	socio-cultural	noun phrase
45.	<i>mate anjing</i>	supernatural activity	to die as a dog, to die like a dog	supernatural	verb phrase
46.	<i>mate kapir</i>	supernatural activity	to die as an infidel, to die in a non-Islamic state	supernatural	verb phrase
47.	<i>tarte</i>	body waste	to be touched by feces/dirt, the condition of someone touched by feces	waste	verb phrase
48.	<i>urutni amamu</i>	waste disposal	your father's buttocks, your father's buttocks	human body	noun phrase

Some of the most commonly euphemized taboo words include:

- *Babiat* 'tiger' → *Ompung* 'grandfather', used to avoid invoking a feared and spiritually charged animal.
- *Ulok* 'snake' → *Andor*, a coded euphemism to prevent shock or superstition.
- *Kapir* 'infidel' → Substituted or avoided in daily speech due to strong religious implications.

A key informant noted that the word *babiat* is especially avoided when interacting with members of the *Siregar* clan, as it is considered sacred and dangerous to mention directly. This substitution highlights the relationship between language, kinship, and spirituality within Angkola society.

4.2 Sociopragmatic Functions of Taboos in the Angkola Society

Verbal taboos in the Angkola language are not merely linguistic prohibitions; rather, they function as powerful instruments of social regulation, communicative diplomacy, and cultural preservation. These taboos play a crucial role in upholding respect within hierarchical relationships, particularly in familial and communal settings where interaction norms are shaped by age, gender, and kinship. Central to this is the Angkola concept of *marbaso*, a system of politeness that dictates not only what is said, but also how, when, and to whom certain expressions may be directed. Within this framework, verbal taboos are strategically employed to (1) avoid offending elders or in-laws, (2) preserve social decorum, (3) express reverence for spiritual or sacred concepts, and (4) maintain discretion around morally or culturally sensitive topics.

4.2.1 Taboo awareness in kinship relationships

The study revealed a strong awareness of verbal taboos in kin-based communication, particularly in interactions involving in-laws, senior relatives, and marital relationships. Table 3 summarizes the respondents' awareness of specific communicative restrictions.

Table 3. Awareness of communicative taboos in kinship relationships.

No.	Kinship relationship	'Yes' Response (%)
1.	<i>Ompung Bayo</i> 'In-laws'	79.4%
2.	<i>Parumaen and Amangboru</i> 'Father-in-law and Daughter-in-law'	82.8%
3.	<i>Nantulang nd Babere</i> 'Mother-in-law and Son-in-law'	79.7%
4.	<i>Marito</i> 'Siblings'	81.9%
5.	<i>Besan</i> 'Co-parents-in-law from both sides'	82.5%

The figures in Table 3 confirm that speech etiquette in family communication is deeply internalized. Verbal taboos are used to create respectful distance, maintain boundaries, and avoid informal or humorous language with certain relatives. For example, joking between a father-in-law and daughter-in-law is considered inappropriate and is often strictly avoided in social settings.

4.2.2 Customary and social sanctions

Though these taboos are not formalized in national law, violations are subject to customary sanctions or verbal reprimands. Informants explained that if a taboo is broken, such as joking with a close in-law or uttering an offensive term, the consequence may be a public rebuke or stern advice from an elder. In more severe cases involving breaches of customary law, as recorded in Uhum dohot Patik, the community may impose ritual punishment. According to an informant from Sirahar Padang, those who violate communication customs may be required to slaughter a buffalo and serve respected leaders (*namora*) and elders (*hatobangon*) as part of a ceremonial reconciliation. In extreme cases, exclusion from familial communication lines or loss of inheritance rights may also occur.

This demonstrates how language serves as a gatekeeper of cultural continuity, with verbal taboos functioning not only as tools of politeness but also as mechanisms of moral order and social justice. In the Angkola speech community, euphemisms and verbal taboos are more than mere avoidance strategies, they act as cultural tools to preserve identity, promote intergenerational respect, and sustain traditional norms. These linguistic choices are dynamic, evolving alongside cultural transformations and serving as adaptive sociopragmatic mechanisms that regulate speech and encode meaning within local contexts. Supporting this, the findings show that 72.2% of

respondents believe communication taboos remain actively practiced in daily life, while 88.4% agree that these taboos should be preserved, highlighting a strong collective awareness of their social value despite the challenges posed by globalization and cultural erosion.

4.3 Euphemisms and Taboos as Cultural Strategies for Language Vitality

The study documented numerous examples of euphemisms used to replace taboo expressions in the Angkola language. These euphemisms are semantically and phonetically adapted to reduce emotional impact, prevent offense, or honor sacred beliefs. Key examples are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Examples of euphemisms used in the Angkola language.

No.	Taboo term	Euphemism	Context/Explanation
1.	<i>Babiat</i> 'tiger'	<i>Ompung</i> 'grandfather'	Used to avoid invoking a dangerous and spiritually potent animal, especially in the Siregar clan.
2.	<i>Ulok</i> 'snake'	<i>Andor</i>	Used to prevent surprise or fear; considered spiritually charged.
3.	<i>Bujang</i> 'vagina'	<i>Bujak, Bujas, Bujakkas</i>	Modified morphologically to soften reference to female genitalia.
4.	<i>Haram</i> 'forbidden'	<i>Haras</i>	Religious term softened to avoid confrontation in casual contexts.
5.	<i>Kapir</i> 'infidel'	<i>Kapit</i>	Religious term rephrased to show politeness and avoid offense.
6.	<i>Teteng</i> 'penis'	<i>Totong</i>	An anatomical term softened to comply with public modesty and avoid vulgarity.

These euphemisms are often passed down orally and are embedded in everyday speech across both rural and urban contexts. Informants described their use as “cultural reflexes” that embody moral awareness and community identity. For example, one key informant explained:

- P: *Tabu na so tola didongkon harana suci, misalna babiat, natola didongkon?* 'Is there any taboo that cannot be mentioned because it is considered sacred, such as the tiger, that should not be mentioned?'
- I: *Olo, apalagi marga Siregar harana penghargaan de i.* 'Yes, especially if someone has the surname Siregar, it's considered an honor'.
- P: *Ulok?* 'Snake?'
- I: *Olo aso ulang tarsonggot* 'Yes, so you won't be surprised'.

The excerpts show that euphemism functions both symbolically and socially, maintaining the harmony of discourse and reflecting the cultural logic of indirectness.

The study also reveals that euphemistic language acts as a protective mechanism for the survival of the Angkola language amid modern pressures. When asked why the younger generation is less aware of traditional taboos, the informants cited reasons related to modernization, cultural neglect, and educational gaps.

Table 6. Perceived causes of decline in taboo awareness.

No.	Reasons	Percentage (%)
1.	Influence of globalization and technology	65.3%
2.	The younger generation no longer knows traditional customs	49.1%
3.	Not taught by parents	32.2%
4.	Belief that taboos are outdated	27.5%
5.	View that limiting speech is strange	10.6%
6.	General community apathy toward cultural values	27.2%

These responses highlight a critical cultural gap, a break in intergenerational transmission. Without formal education or sustained family communication, taboos and euphemisms risk becoming obsolete. However, the strong support for their preservation (88.4%) suggests fertile ground for language revitalization strategies.

To reinforce this preservation, the study recommends:

- Integrating cultural education initiatives into local school curricula.

- Promoting community-based storytelling or oral history projects that incorporate euphemistic norms.
- Launching digital campaigns or media that encourage polite and traditional Angkola expressions.
- Supporting parent-to-child language mentoring that raises awareness of cultural taboos.

By framing euphemisms not merely as linguistic constraints but as culturally dynamic strategies, this study demonstrates that such expressions actively support the vitality of the regional language. They help sustain Angkola identity by embedding cultural values into daily interactions, especially amid increasing linguistic homogenization.

5. DISCUSSION

This study reveals that verbal taboos and euphemisms in the Angkola language reflect a deeply rooted system of sociocultural regulation and communication diplomacy. These linguistic features are not merely restrictions but serve as instruments of respect, identity preservation, and community order. The complexity and diversity found in Angkola verbal taboos suggest a broader scope than traditional classifications proposed by scholars such as [Allan and Burridge \(2009\)](#), [Jay \(2009\)](#), and [Vogel \(2014\)](#), which often focus on Western or generalized taxonomies of taboo. Unlike these prior models, the Angkola context includes not only body-related taboos but also terms related to fauna, supernatural beliefs, religious prohibitions, kinship hierarchy, mental conditions, and customary law, demonstrating a culturally unique semantic range.

The findings also reinforce that verbal taboos and euphemisms are not only linguistic phenomena but also tools of cultural transmission. With 91.3% of respondents fluent in Angkola and 75.6% aware of *marbaso*, a local concept for polite and indirect speech, there is a clear awareness of the social and cultural roles embedded in language. Respondents affirmed that these taboos are still widely practiced, particularly in kinship-based interactions such as with in-laws and elders, where indirectness is used to avoid social offense and preserve harmony.

Further, the thematic analysis highlighted that euphemisms are used to navigate sensitive topics by substituting harsh or sacred terms with softer or symbolic alternatives. For example, the substitution of *babiat* ‘tiger’ with *ompung* ‘grandfather’ illustrates how metaphors and coded language preserve respect while maintaining communicative clarity. This linguistic behavior reflects the community’s sensitivity to both social and spiritual dimensions of speech, where words are chosen not only for their meaning but for their performativity and cultural resonance.

However, the study also reveals the fragility of these traditions in the face of modernity. Many respondents, especially younger ones, cited globalization, technological advancement, and a lack of parental transmission as reasons for the fading practice of euphemistic and taboo-based communication. These observations are consistent with studies such as those by [Aziz et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Nasution and Mulyadi \(2021\)](#), which document similar shifts in other Indonesian ethnolinguistic communities where modernization challenges the continuity of oral traditions.

In comparing these findings with prior literature, parallels emerge with the sociopragmatic patterns identified in other cultural contexts. [Allan and Burridge \(2009\)](#) and [Jay \(2009\)](#) emphasize the emotional and relational dimensions of taboo language, observations that align with how the Angkola people manage politeness through verbal restraint. [Ulfa et al. \(2024\)](#) documented the preservation of verbal etiquette in Acehnese speech, showing that taboos serve not only as cultural filters but also as boundary-markers of respect and social cohesion. Meanwhile, [Affini \(2017\)](#) and [Kurniasari et al. \(2013\)](#) argue for the necessity of understanding taboos within the cultural frameworks from which they emerge, an argument this study strengthens by providing empirical data from an underrepresented linguistic group.

This research advances previous works by offering a detailed sociopragmatic profile of the Angkola language, with particular focus on how euphemisms operate within kinship, ritual, and daily speech. It introduces *marbaso* as a significant cultural-linguistic practice, a term and concept largely absent in existing literature. By highlighting this practice, the study not only contributes to sociolinguistic theory but also adds to regional anthropological knowledge.

The implications of this research extend beyond linguistic description, providing strategic insights for language revitalization and cultural preservation. As Angkola society faces increasing exposure to dominant national and global languages, preserving these embedded linguistic codes becomes critical. This study emphasizes the need for culturally responsive education and policy interventions that support the teaching and intergenerational transmission of traditional speech norms. The findings offer practical guidance for curriculum development, community workshops, and digital content creation aimed at sustaining linguistic identity. In sum, verbal taboos and euphemisms in the Angkola language are not static relics of tradition but dynamic, adaptive strategies for maintaining cultural integrity. They represent a sociopragmatic system that warrants greater attention in both linguistic and anthropological scholarship, especially in efforts to understand how language functions as a vessel for cultural survival in an era of globalization.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has explored the nature and function of verbal taboos and euphemisms in the Angkola language, revealing their deep entwinement with the community's sociocultural and spiritual values. Through an ethnographic approach involving 320 respondents, the research identified 48 taboo expressions, ranging from anatomical terms to religious and supernatural references. The study confirms that these linguistic forms are used not only to maintain politeness and avoid offense, but also to negotiate identity, respect kinship hierarchies, and encode sacred beliefs into everyday language use. The presence of *marbaso* as a concept of indirect, respectful speech highlights the cultural distinctiveness of Angkola linguistic norms.

The findings demonstrate that euphemism and taboo are not merely passive elements of speech but constitute active sociopragmatic strategies for sustaining cultural coherence and community values. While the study acknowledges signs of decline in the younger generation's awareness due to globalization and weakening oral transmission, it also finds strong community sentiment in favor of preserving these traditions. The data support the view that verbal taboos function as cultural safeguards, transmitting moral boundaries and ancestral wisdom from one generation to the next.

The study contributes original insights to the fields of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, particularly in the underrepresented context of the Angkola language. It provides a framework for understanding taboos not as constraints but as dynamic tools of cultural continuity and resistance. Future research should expand on this foundation by incorporating comparative analyses with other Batak subgroups or investigating the impact of digital media on the preservation and transformation of taboo speech practices. Efforts toward cultural revitalization must be rooted in both linguistic awareness and community engagement to ensure the survival of these uniquely local expressions of identity.

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