

## A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF THE USE OF ENGLISH TABOO TERMS IN MIKE LACHER'S *ON THE BRO'D*

**Raihna Meiska Pasaribu<sup>1</sup>; Obat Mikael Depari<sup>2</sup>; Yuli Widiانا<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>English Department Student, Catholic University of Widya Mandala, Madiun

<sup>2</sup>Lecturers at Catholic University of Widya Mandala Madiun

raihnameiska@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

This research focuses on taboo terms found in Mike Lacher's *On the Bro'd*. The aims of this research are to describe the kinds of taboo terms and their usage. This research uses descriptive method which involves the following steps: collecting, classifying, and analyzing the data. Library research is used as technique of data collecting. The population of this research is all of the terms and phrases containing taboo terms. The data of the research are analyzed one by one, therefore, the total sampling is applied. Referential equivalent method is used to determine the kinds of taboo terms. Meanwhile, pragmatic equivalent method is used to analyze the purpose of using taboo terms. Due to the kinds of taboo terms found in the novel, the taboo terms include religion taboo terms, disease, death and killing, bodily excretion taboo terms, personal name, sexual organ, sexual activity, gender identity, and mental illness. The mostly used taboo term in the novel is sexual taboo term while the least is disease, death and killing. In terms of the purposes of their usage taboo terms are used to express anger, surprise, curse or wish harm, habitual epithets, insult, joke or humor, sex talk, and slang. Among them, insult is the most intended purpose which occurs in the novel; whereas, slang is the least.

**Keywords:** sociolinguistics, taboo terms, kinds of taboo terms, purposes of using taboo terms

### INTRODUCTION

Language in relation to society is studied in sociolinguistics. Moreover, sociolinguistics also focuses on language varieties. The varieties of language can be in the form of colloquialism, jargon, swear words, argot, register and taboo terms.

Taboo terms are variety of language which is inappropriate to utter in certain context. According to Wardhaugh, taboo is the prohibition or avoidance in any society of behavior believed to be harmful to its members in that it would cause them anxiety, embarrassment, or shame (2006: 239). Due to the quotation, taboo terms are something that should be avoided by the society because they can cause unwanted things to happen. Taboo terms consist of some types such as swear words which are concerned with sex and excretion, words which are related to religion or words which are related to name of animal. According to Allan, the varieties of taboo terms can be described as follows:

Bodies and their effluvia (sweat, snot, feces, menstrual fluid, et cetera.); The organs and acts of sex, micturition and defecation; Diseases, death and killing (including hunting and fishing); Naming, addressing, touching and viewing persons and sacred beings, objects and places; Food gathering, preparation and consumption. (2006: 1)

People have desire to express their idea, feeling or humor. Therefore, to achieve these purposes, people sometimes use taboo terms. The purposes in such a language are intended to achieve the conversational goals of the speaker. Taboo terms are used to express how people feel. Although taboo terms tend to be used negatively, some of them have positive purposes. In connection with their purposes of the use, Jay divided taboo terms into two kinds, they are negative taboo terms and positive taboo terms.

Taboo words can be used to achieve a variety of personal or interpersonal outcomes that may be positive, negative, or inconsequential in terms of their impact on other although some might argue all uses of taboo words are harmful to some degree (2009: 3).

Observing taboo terms are very interesting. Therefore, the use of taboo terms is regarded as a topic necessary to investigate scientifically. Besides, it is also a further research from the previous one entitled *Bro-Speak Slang in Mike Lacher's On the Bro'd* conducted by Yusita Astriana. In the previous research, the topic focuses on the kinds and the purposes of using Bro-speak slang, while this research focuses on the kinds and the purposes of using taboo terms in Mike Lacher's *On the Bro'd*.

## **METHOD**

Descriptive method is applied in this research. It is used to determine the characteristic of the data based on fact. The data are taken from the novel entitled *On the Bro'd*. To describe the kinds of taboo terms in the novel, referential equivalent method is used. According to Djajasudarma, referential equivalent method is a method to analyze the data based on the extra-linguistic factors (1993:58). In order to analyze the purposes of using taboo terms, pragmatic equivalent is applied. Pragmatic equivalent method refers to the institutional setting in which a piece of language occurs and embraces not only the subject-matter in hand but also the whole activity of the speaker of participant in setting (1993: 60). The implication of the participants who participate in conversation and the context of conversation determines the purposes of using taboo terms.

## **DISCUSSION**

The analysis focuses on the kinds and the aims of using taboo terms found in Mike Lacher's *On the Bro'd*. The analysis of each of them is elaborated as follows:

## 1. The Kinds of Taboo Terms Found in Mike Lacher's *On the Bro'd*

There are six kinds of taboo terms found in Mike Lacher's *On the Bro'd*. They are religion taboo terms, disease, death and killing, bodily excretion, personal name, sex, gender and sexuality, and mental illness.

### a. Religion

Religion taboo terms are related to someone's belief. Actually, all of religion terms are not forbidden to be uttered if they are used in appropriate situation. Religion terms are considered as taboo terms when they are used to curse or to express fury, such as exemplified in the following datum.

I was like, "*Jesus fucking Christ*, Ricky, you're always getting us into shit. Can't you just cool down? Why do you gotta be stealing like such an asshole all the time?"

The phrase *Jesus fucking Christ* is related to religion taboo term which means that someone believes Jesus Christ as Christian's savior. This phrase contains the term *fucking*. However, this term is the most popular taboo term which implies sexual activity and it is uttered to curse someone. In this conversation, Sam gets mad and curses Ricky, Sam's friend by using such a phrase.

### b. Disease, Death and Killing

Taboo terms dealing with disease, death, killing are considered as taboo terms that are rude and horrible. Take a look of the following.

Derek was destined *to die the sweet death* of complete snatch-phyxiation. I wasn't gonna get up in his grill.

The phrase *to die the sweet death* belongs to a taboo term related to death. This phrase is used by Sam to tease Derek that his destiny is to die sweetly. Derek may die because he has a date with many girls as long as he lives. So that, Sam curses Derek by using the phrase *to die the sweet death* to emphasize that Derek will die peacefully and sweetly.

### c. Bodily Excretion

The terms concerning with human excretory are classified as bodily excretion taboo terms. The following analysis may support the discussion.

"I'll cover for you while you're gone. Carrying that *shit* sucks. We've just gotta get those nugs home, and that's fucking that." he wiped his face.

The term *shit* is related to something which is disgusting to utter because it usually deals with human excretion. Parker utters this term to express how useless, bad, and terrible the nug is. Consequently, the term *shit* is categorized as a taboo term related to bodily excretion.

### d. Personal Name

Personal name refers to someone's identity or sobriquet. It is regarded as a taboo term because someone's identity is used intimately but it is not given out to the public. The following analysis is aimed to clarify the statement.

We snagged a couple ladies, *a hot-ass blond chick* and a chubby grenade.

The phrase *a hot-ass blond chick* refers to a girl who is very sexy. The term *blond* refers to white people. In this case, the phrase *a hot-ass blond chick* is a negative sobriquet for a sexy white girl.

#### e. Sex, Gender and Sexuality

Besides referring to religion, disease, death and killing, bodily excretion and personal name, some of the taboo terms in the novel refer to sex. To make the discussion clearer, consult the following analysis.

"Now I'm not trying to be an asshole, but it seems like you all are acting like a real bunch of *queers*."

The term *queer* is usually used in informal communication. It refers to taboo terms related to gender identity because it deals with man's sex desire or relationships. Furthermore, this term is commonly used as a derogatory word to describe someone who is homosexual or sexual perversion.

#### f. Mental Illness

Mental illness deals with people who suffer from mental disorder. The terms of mental illness are believed to be taboo terms when they are used to degrade someone. The following analysis may prove the statement.

The chick drove for a couple hours made us go look at a stupid old monument or something, like we were *fucking idiots*, and then I got my drive on.

The phrase *fucking idiot* is used to degrade someone mentally. As we know, the term *idiot* refers to someone who suffers from mental disorder. Then, the term *fucking* is used to intensify the term *idiot*. So, the phrase *fucking idiot* is uttered to insult someone as an idiotic person.

## 2. The Purposes of Using Taboo Terms

Whether taboo terms have positive or negative purposes, it depends on the context where they occur. According to Jay, the purposes in using taboo in negative way can be described as follows:

Besides literal or denotative uses (we fucked!), the primary uses of swearing is for emotional connotation, which occurs in the form of epithets or as insult directed toward others. Epithets are offensive emotional outburst of single words and phrases used to express the speaker's frustration, anger or surprise (2009: 3).

It means taboo terms could be used to express human's emotion such as to express anger, frustration, and surprise. However, some others are used positively.

Jay added that, positive social outcomes are achieved by using taboo words in jokes and humor, social commentary, sex talk, storytelling, in group slang, and self-depreciation or ironic sarcasm in order to promote social harmony or cohesion (2009: 3). Hence, taboo term is not only used to insult someone but also it is used for positive activity like promoting social harmony or cohesion. The following discussion is expected to clarify the statement.

#### a. Negative Taboo Terms

The negative purposes of using taboo terms include to express anger, to express surprise, to curse or wish harm on someone, to express anger, surprise, curse or wish harm, habitual epithets, insult, joke or humor, sex talk, and slang.

##### *Taboo Terms Used to Express Anger*

Anger is emerged by some reasons such as disappointment, anxiety or curiosity toward someone or something. Therefore, someone utters taboo terms to express his or her emotional feeling. Consider the following analysis.

I was done, besides I couldn't keep charging the room to my parent's credit card. We had to get the fuck out. "You should go crash at your dad's place," I was like. "**Jesus Christ**, you can't keep hanging with dudes in hotel rooms with a little kid; it's a huge drag." Tali cried because of I was being douche; I was just being fucking honest.

Sam's expression shows that he is not in a good feeling. Sam tries to show his anger to Tali, his girlfriend. Actually, Tali has a kid from her ex-husband. Her kid follows her and Sam to live in a motel. So they cannot commit sexual intercourse because of the presence of the kid. Besides, Sam does not like a kid.

##### *Taboo Terms Used to Express Surprise*

People have their own way to express surprise or shock when they are scared, startled, or frightened of someone or something. The following analysis clarifies the statement.

"**Damn**, boy. You're gonna get a flat at that speed. Can't you relax?"

The term **damn** is usually used to express disbelief or surprise. Here, Sam is in the car with an old man. He feels shocked when the old man drives the car fast. The old man would like to catch Teddy because Teddy drives the car up to the speed of ninety miles per hour.

##### *Taboo Terms Used to Curse or to Wish Harm on Someone*

Cursing or wishing harm on someone can make the receiver feel angry or frightened. The statement may be evidenced through the following analysis.

"Ah, the Cardinals just blew it in the third quarter again-**fuck** that!-**fuck** that **fucking** team!"

Derek and some of his friends go to a minimarket to get some groceries. Derek checks his phone and talks to someone immediately. Then, they talk about a

baseball team, Cardinal, which is lost in the competition. Besides, it is also one of the most frequently used taboo terms.

#### *Taboo Terms Used as Habitual Epithets*

Sometimes people use taboo terms to express their feeling spontaneously. It is known as habitual epithets. To make it clear, take a look at the following analysis. The following analysis is presented to support the statement.

We didn't give a fuck and started up a mad rager there. That bitch just kept yelling at us from upstairs. "Go fuck yourself, you **old bitch!**" Ronnie was like.

The phrase **old bitch** is derived from the word *mongrel* which means a cowardly dog. It symbolizes female dog. Here, the phrase **old bitch** is used by Ronnie Gray to mock his aunt, when he invites his friends to join a party in his house. Then, his aunt gets angry and yells at them. Afterwards, Ronnie gets mad and mocks his aunt by shouting **old bitch** spontaneously.

#### *Taboo Terms Used to Degrade or Put Down*

Some words are believed to be taboo terms when they are used to degrade or put down someone. Someone may utter taboo terms to show his or her hatred toward people in order to degrade or put down them. The following discussion may support the statement.

We drove slow as fuck back to Gaby's place and we just chilled in her living room with Ray Jeffries and his chick, and everybody was all uptight, but Derek was being hilarious and drinking two beers at once. "Why are you always such a **jackass?**" Gabby was like. "I got text from Carly and she said you left. You have kids with her, you dick!"

**Jackass** refers to a donkey. Usually, donkey symbolizes stupid or idiotic person. The quotation shows that Derek makes affair with Carly and they accidentally have a child. In this case, the term **jackass** is uttered to show that Derek is an idiotic person because he does not know that Gabby has known the truth.

#### **b. Positive Taboo Terms**

Taboo terms become positive if they are not used to distract people. Instead, they are used to entertain them.

#### *Taboo Terms Used as Jokes or Humor*

Taboo terms are often used to make someone laugh by reducing the solemnity in conversation. The following analysis is hoped to support the discussion.

We were taking a piss in the bathroom of an Outback and I was pissing in one urinal, then cut my stream and jumped over to another one, and was like, "**Piss acrobatics!**" Derek was like, "Yeah that shit's pretty funny, and I didn't know that you could just stop the flow like that with a little dick 'cause I always figured you needed a bigger dick because there's just like

more room to stop the flow.” That shit pissed me off. “Little dick? My dick is like almost the same size as yours!” “Yo chill, that’s not what I meant, bro!”

The context shows the character tries to make a joke. Derek and Sam urinate in a toilet. Then, Derek utters the phrase *piss acrobatics* which refers to a vulgar way to describe bodily function to pull out urea. Derek conveys this phrase because he would like to show his ability to move from one urinal to another urinal while he is urinating.

#### *Taboo Terms Used as Sex Talk*

People use some vulgar words to talk about sex with their friends or their partners. They utter these vulgar words toward someone else without any offensive purposes. The following analysis is expected to support the statement above.

I had written a limerick about how I wanted *to bone* with her. “I’d love to, baby, but I have a date with my boyfriend.” “Can’t you *drop his ass*?” “No, no, I can’t,” she said in a way that showed how much she totally wanted to bone with me, with her Outback nametag looking all hot on her rack.

The term *to bone* refers to a sexual intercourse. It is used to show that Sam wants to commit sexual intercourse with a woman. Besides, the phrase *drop his ass* is also uttered by Sam as a mandatory for the woman to ask his boyfriend to go. So, the woman can commit a sexual intercourse with him.

#### *Taboo Terms Used in Group Slang*

Slang is used by certain class or certain group because the group may feel bored of using the same words and the members want to use new words to make the conversation runs well. The discussion may be clearer through the analysis below.

We heard that Derek was sick of ASU and was transferring to Ohio state and we heard that he was cruising in with some *slam piece* named Maryann.

The term *slam piece* is used as a group slang. It refers to a girlfriend who likes to have sex with a boyfriend. A boyfriend can ask her to commit sexual intercourse without marrying or paying her.

### **CONCLUSION**

The aimed of this research figures out the kinds of taboo terms and the purposes of using them. The data analysis shows that there are five kinds of taboo terms. They are sexual taboo terms, religion taboo terms, bodily excretion taboo terms, disease death and killing, mental illness and personal name. The result of the data analysis shows that sexual taboo terms are most frequently used. The negative purposes of using taboo terms include taboo terms used to express anger,

to express surprise, to curse or wishing harm on someone, to show habitual epithets, and to degrade or put down. Meanwhile, the positive purposes of using taboo terms include taboo terms used to create jokes and humor, sex talk, and in group slang. Among them, to degrade or put down is the most intended purpose which occurs in the novel; whereas, slang is the least.

Observing taboo terms is very interesting, however, the research on them is still rare to be found. Thus, the findings of this research are beneficial in the development of linguistic field, especially sociolinguistics. This research may motivate other researchers to conduct further researches about taboo terms which are based on the current topic. Moreover, this research can motivate the users of language to learn more about taboo terms. Besides, it is aimed to enrich the vocabularies in informal English and to understand the usage of taboo terms in appropriate situation.

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