

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Taboo Words in *Bad Teacher* Movie

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Abstract

The researcher investigated taboo words uttered by the characters in *Bad Teacher* movie using the sociolinguistics approach. The objective of this research was to identify the types and functions of taboo words uttered by the characters in the movie. This research is descriptive qualitative. In addition, this research also used the quantitative method to support the interpretation of data by presenting fixed percentages in the numerical form. The data were collected by selecting dialogues containing taboo words after watching the movie and matching the transcript with the video carefully. The primary instrument of this research was the researcher, while the secondary instrument was a data sheet. The results of the research were stated as follows. There were four types of taboo words found in the movie. They were obscenity, profanity, vulgarity, and epithet. In addition, the characters in *Bad Teacher* movie employed taboo words for four functions in their utterances. They were to draw attention to oneself, to show contempt, to be provocative, and to mock authority.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, taboo words, *Bad Teacher* movie

INTRODUCTION

Communication plays an important role in human's life. Without communication, people in the society will not be able to understand each other since they do not have any social contact. Social contact is very essential for human being because it is the foundation to build strong connection among people in the society. According to Goodwin and Heritage (1990) in Liddicoat (2007:01), social interaction is a means to transact the business of social world which can also affirm participants' identities and also transmit cultures to others. Therefore, to make a social contact functioned and

transmitted properly; people need to have language as a means of communication.

As a means of communication, language has several functions. Generally, people use language to communicate their intention to others. Specifically, language is used by people to convey messages or to send information in order to make the conversation activities run smoothly. In other words, language is functioned as a means to share information such as recent news, interesting activities and gossip. Moreover, Chaika (1982: 2) also states that people use language to reveal or conceal personal identity, character, and background without realizing that they are actually doing so. Therefore, every person

has their own way to choose the language variation which can confirm one's identity. Some people may prefer to use language that has a strong impact when they are happy, sad, or angry. For instance, people sometimes use certain kind of words that are considered as bad language which is actually inappropriate to use. One of the ways to express their feeling is by producing taboo words. People usually produce taboo words because they are the strongest way to express their dissatisfaction. They sometimes emphasize people's real intention.

Taboo terms were firstly introduced by Captain Cook in the late 18th century when he was sent to Tahiti. According to Allan and Burridge (2006: 2-3), taboo or known as *tabu* is a Tongan term that denotes a person, object or act which is dangerous and therefore it must be avoided. The example of this case can be seen in *Nguni* societies of Southern Africa. In *Nguni*, it is forbidden for a woman to mention her husband and father-in-law's name directly. If she violates that rule, that woman will be punished by the rule in the society.

Taboo words are always associated with inappropriate language and it cannot be used in daily conversations. Therefore, taboo words still manage as offensive and savage words in most languages, such as English. Long time ago in America, there

were strict rules to avoid the use of taboo words in public such as in printed media. The use of taboo words such as *f**k* and *c**t* would lead to prosecution and imprisonment so that they were not used in printed media such as newspaper. However, it seems that nowadays the attitude towards the function of taboo words has already changed. The changes happened because the legal sanctions were disappearing and there were tendency that now people are getting more relaxed to accept taboo words. As a result, taboo words are now commonly found when someone expresses the emotive feeling.

The researcher concentrates on two problems regarding the taboo words that happen during the conversation between the characters in *Bad Teacher* movie. The first question is related to the types of taboo words uttered by the characters. Then for the second problem, the researcher is interested to analyze about the functions of taboo words uttered by the characters. Analyzing the function of taboo words will help the researcher to find the significance of producing taboo words.

The objectives of this research are to identify and describe the types and the functions of taboo words uttered by the characters in *Bad Teacher* movie. This research can be used as a supplementary material for teaching activities especially in sociolinguistics subject. For other

researcher this research can be used as a valuable reference in investigating the same subject. It also contributes to the readers in giving deeper understanding that taboo words are bad forms of language that cannot be spoken in any situation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative method, since it involved the collection of data for the purpose of describing the existing condition. According to Vanderstoep and Johnson (2009:167) this method focuses on cultural, social, personal identity and its purpose is more descriptive than predictive. It can give complex detail about particular phenomena which are difficult to be expressed with quantitative method. Therefore, the findings of qualitative research will not be in the form of statistic data which usually belong to quantitative research. In this research, qualitative method was chosen as the appropriate method because it represented what the researcher had studied. The researcher also used quantitative method to support the interpretation of data. Vanderstoep and Johnson (2008: 7) states that quantitative method brings statistical work to a certain phenomenon under study. Therefore, by providing statistical work in the form of percentage, the researcher could easily describe the

phenomenon that she wanted to investigate by giving fixed percentages to make a clear explanation.

In qualitative research, according to Moleong (2009:56) the researcher acts as the main instrument. The researcher is the planner, data collector, data analyzer, and data reporter. In addition, a data sheet was also employed as the secondary instrument. The sources of the data were the video of the movie and the transcript of the dialogues spoken by the characters in *Bad Teacher* movie. The transcript was not written by the researcher since she took it from *www.subscene.com*. The contexts of the data were dialogues containing taboo words.

This research employed *simak* and *catat* technique to collect the data from *Bad Teacher* movie. According to Sudaryanto (1993: 133-135), this was a technique for achieving data through listening carefully and then continued by taking note. Meanwhile, the process of collecting the data consists of the following steps. The first step was watching the movie *Bad Teacher*. The second step was downloading the transcript of *Bad Teacher* from *www.subscene.com*. The third step was re-watching the movie and checking the accuracy of the transcript. The last step was classifying and transferring the

selected dialogues containing taboo words into the data sheet.

After finishing the procedures of data collection, finally the raw data were ready to be analyzed. The relation between data collection and data analysis was inseparable. It means that when the researcher collected the data, she actually had started conducting data analysis. Then the remaining steps of data analysis were described as follows:

1. The data that have been collected would be transferred into categorization system which was drawn to a table presented as Table 1. The categorization was about the types and the functions of taboo words.
2. The next step to do after the categorization system was done was putting the selected utterances containing taboo words as the raw data into the table.
3. After classification was finished, the data that have been collected were ready to be analyzed. The classified data in the table were analyzed to describe the types and the functions of the taboo words in the dialogues.
4. The researcher confirmed the findings with the theories that were employed in the analysis. After that, the researcher also explained the findings in order to answer the objectives of the research.

5. The last step was reporting the findings and finally the researcher also added some points of conclusions and suggestions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Bad Teacher movie employed four types of taboo words. They are obscenity, profanity, vulgarity, and epithet. All of them appear in the conversation spoken by the characters in the movie. The most dominant type used by the characters is obscenity, which appears 19 times (59.38%). The second highest frequency which has the same percentage is profanity and vulgarity which appear 5 times (15.63%). Finally, the least to occur is epithet which appears 3 times (9.36%).

During the conversations in the movie, four functions of taboo words occur. They are to show contempt, to draw attention to oneself, to be provocative, and to mock authority. From the four functions, the highest frequency of functions of taboo words is to show contempt which appears 14 times (43.75%). To draw attention to oneself is in the second position with 10 occurrences. Next, to be provocative takes the third position with 7 occurrences (21.88%) and the last position is to mock authority which only occurs once and gets 3.12%. For further explanation, an example from each

type of taboo words with its function will be stated one by one.

First, an example of obscenity can be seen as follows.

Elizabeth : Listen, word to the wise, stop dressing like you're running for Congress.

Sasha : I don't wanna run for Congress. I wanna be president.

Elizabeth : See, that's what I'm talking about. Keep saying **s**t** like that and you're gonna get punched.

(Datum no. 11)

The dialogue above contains obscenity type because Elizabeth utters the word **s**t**. **S**t** is a vernacular word of English that means faeces. The function of taboo word above is to mock authority because the word that is uttered by Elizabeth indicates that she has a negative perspective to the government. Although the taboo word is not aimed to the government directly, it shows that Elizabeth does not put her respect to the institution.

An example of profanity is presented in following dialogue.

Wally : Next time you accuse one of my teachers of stealing, you better have some evidence. **Godd**n** it! We are done here.

Amy : All righty.

(Datum No. 10)

In the dialogue above, there is a taboo word which is categorized in profanity type. The word belongs to profanity because **Godd**n** above is actually a religious term that is supposed to use only in the church. **Godd**n** refers to Jesus Christ as a God. However, the word above becomes taboo because it is used outside the formal occasion. The function of taboo word uttered by Wally in the dialogue above is to be provocative. Wally feels angry with what Amy has done because she dares to disturb his private activity inside the toilet. Then, Wally utters taboo word **Godd**n** to provoke Amy's anger after he scolds Amy for saying something without any proof. Fortunately, Amy does not respond Wally's provocation and she just says "all righty" then leaves the toilet

The dialogue below shows vulgarity type.

Amy : You're not seeing anyone now, right?.

Elizabeth : Got my eye on someone, but he's dating a major **c**t**.

(Datum no. 22)

It is clear that the example above shows that Elizabeth utters the word **c**t** which is categorized as vulgarity type. The word **c**t** is a vulgar term that refers to the human female genital organ. That conversation occurs after Russell, Lynn, Scott, and Amy have a long chat in the

teacher's room. Here, the function is to show contempt. Elizabeth makes a sarcastic tone in answering Amy's question by uttering taboo words to show her disrespect toward Amy by saying "major c**t" to hurt Amy's pride.

An example of epithet taken from the conversation between gym visitor and Kirk presented in the following dialogue.

Gym visitor : Yo, **B**ch t*ts**. I'm not gonna ask you again, dude. I need those coupons mailed today.

Kirk : Consider it already done.

(Datum no. 20)

In the dialogue above, the gym visitor is calling Kirk with **b**ch t*ts** which is categorized as epithet because it is one of many slurs which refer to sexuality term. **B**ch** originally means a female dog but it has a different meaning when it is used as a word to insult another person. If the word is directed to a female, it can be meant as a female prostitute who likes to change her sex partner. If it is directed to a male person, the word means a homosexual who plays the female role in copulation. The taboo word used here are to draw attention one's attention. The gym visitor using taboo word "**b**ch t*ts**" to attract Kirk's attention since he needs to get the coupon as soon as possible so that he will get special discount from the fitness center.

In summary, it can be noticed that the types and functions of taboo words are closely related. Every type of taboo words may have all or some functions in it. Some functions of taboo words may appear in certain types more or less than other functions. For instance, obscenity as the highest frequency has to show contempt as the most appearing function in *Bad Teacher* movie. To show contempt also becomes the most obtained function in vulgarity type. However, to show contempt function only appear once in epithet type, while profanity type does not contain this function.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

First, all the four types of taboo words that consist of obscenity, profanity, vulgarity, and epithet appear in the movie. The highest frequency of the types of taboo words is obscenity, while the lowest frequency is obtained by epithet. Obscenity becomes the most frequently used taboo words because it is considered as the most effective way to insult someone. On the other hand, epithet has the fewest number because epithet is not effective enough to be used as an offensive word to debase other people's pride. Instead of using epithet as offensive language, the characters in *Bad Teacher* movie use epithet to draw someone's attention by calling one's name with a

certain type of slurs such as a word that refers to sexuality.

Second, four functions appear in the movie: to show contempt, to draw attention to one self, to be provocative and to mock authority. To show contempt gets the highest percentage with 43.75% and appears 14 times. The lowest function is to mock authority with only 1 occurrence (3.12%).

To show contempt appears as the most frequent function to occur in *Bad Teacher* movie because it can represent the speaker's intention of using taboo words that is to show their disrespect toward other people. Moreover, it can be the most effective function to express the disrespect feeling toward other people since it is directed and aimed to hurt someone's pride. In the movie, the characters employ taboo words when they want to show their dislike toward someone. Then, to mock authority appears as the least function to occur in the movie because of its theme. *Bad Teacher* movie is a romantic comedy which is concerned in creating humorous and romantic atmosphere to the movie. Therefore, this kind of theme is not concerned in criticizing governmental stuffs which usually show some negative perspectives about the government in general.

Suggestions

For the students of Linguistics, they had better pay more attention to the functions of taboo words which do not always mean that the speaker wants to hurt other people's feeling. They can be functioned to show intimacy or to maintain a good relationship by calling one's name with certain types of taboo words. In addition, for English lecturers, a movie which is the representation of human real life can be a good and interesting medium to learn about taboo words. Moreover, using a movie as the medium in learning activity will be much more fun because the students can enjoy the story as well as study the taboo words that are uttered by the characters in the movie. Last, for other researchers, this research focuses on identifying and describing the types of taboo words, and also describing the functions of taboo words in *Bad Teacher* movie. There are other problems such as gender issue and social status issue which are not analyzed in this research. Similar researches that will be conducted in the future are better to discuss those problems. The other researchers can observe the relationship between the use of taboo words and gender issue. They can also observe the relationship between the use of taboo words and social status in the society. Moreover, since this research only contains 32 data, other researchers who are

planning to conduct a research with the same topic can use other movies that contain more data for their research.

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