

## Taboo in Sasak Community

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### Abstract

This paper discusses about taboo in Sasak. The question answered is 'How is the classification of taboo in Sasak?' The purpose of this study is to describe the classification of taboo in Sasak used by Sasak people. The methods used in this study were note-taking, recording, in-depth interviewing, and observation. The method used in analyzing data is descriptive-qualitative method. After the data were collected, they were identified and classified, then analyzed as well as described based on their classification. The result of the research is that taboo in Sasak can be categorized into dietary restriction, sexual intercourse, nicknaming, mentioning certain animals, shouting '*antih aku*', saying '*sial*', mentioning certain diseases, taking the oath, and pointing towards something and giving or taking something using left hand. From that classification, taboo can be based on religion concept, custom or traditional myth or belief, and moral judgment of Sasak people. Finally, the existence of taboo in Sasak community can be beneficial for the people of Sasak in that they can be free from calamity by avoiding certain things considered to be bad thing to do.

Keywords: *Sasak, taboo, euphemism*

### 1. Introduction

Language as the primary tool of thought and perception is at the heart of individuals and language is changing constantly into new varieties of speech that lead to differences in how we expose ourselves as individuals to others (Jourdan and Tuite.2006: ii). Language also plays an important role in the construction of beliefs about things. Words are given meaning by being attached to the things represented through the ideas which represent them ( Jourdan and Tuite, 2006:17)

The relationship between language and culture is one of many topics or issues discussed in Sociolinguistics. According to Trudgill (1974) in Sumarsono (2009), Sociolinguistics is defined as the study of a language as a part of culture and society. From the definition above, it is emphasized that language is a part of culture and cannot be separated each other. Criper and Widowson in Sumarsono (2009) also stated that Sociolinguistics is the study of language in operation. Its purpose is to show how the convention of language use relates to other aspects of culture. In other words, in Sociolinguistics, we study language, culture and the relationship between them.

The possibility of insult and of humour based on linguistic choices means that community members agree on the underlying rules of speech and on the social meaning of linguistic features. Linguistic selection is “deeply enmeshed in the structure of society; community members can readily recognize and interpret socially codified deviations from the norms” (Fishman, 1970:15).

There are a lot of theories concerned with language and culture. Some theories stated that language is a part of culture. Others said that language and culture are two different things that have a much closed relation. On one hand, it is claimed that language is much more influenced by culture. As a result, all things included in culture can be manifested in language. On the other hand, it is also stated that language much influenced the culture and the way of thought of the society in which the language is used. (Khair and Agustina, 2010, p. 162)

Koentjaraningrat (1992) in Aslinda and Syafyahya (2010) stated that culture is only possessed by humans and it develops in accordance with the development of human society and language is a part of culture. Masinambaouw (1985) in (Aslinda and Syafyahya, 2010: 94) also said that language and culture are two systems possessed by human. Culture is a system closely integrated to human that organizes the interaction in society; while, language is a system that functions as a media for leading interaction.

Based on the theories above, one of many things that can show the way in which people use language in daily living and show the relation between language and culture is in the use of *taboo* and *euphemism*.

In one side, language is used to express cultural meaning. But in the other side, it is used to avoid saying certain things and express them in other expression. If certain things are not said because people do not talk about those things, they are referred to as linguistic *taboo*, and if those things are talked about in very roundabout ways to avoid mentioning certain matters directly, they are called *euphemism* (Wardhaugh, 1998: 234)

A taboo is a strong social prohibition relating to any case of human activity or social custom that is sacred and forbidden based on moral judgment and sometimes even religious beliefs. Breaking the taboo is usually considered objectionable or abhorrent by society (Wikipedia, 2009).

According to Molina (2001), taboo words are those that are considered to be bad taste or bad sense that is better to be avoided because they mention realities that are stark. The taboo is a social phenomenon; some terms are therefore regarded as taboo by some people, but not, by others. In short, taboo is not universal and not widely used around the world, for example, cannibalism, exposing of intimate parts of human body (<http://www.Polseguera.com/collaboration/English/6en.htm>). Accordingly, there are many things which can be categorized into taboo. They are dietary restrictions, restrictions on sexual activities, restrictions of the use of drugs, exposure of body parts, and restriction on the use of offensive language. Thus, taboo can serve some functions and some have argued that taboo reveal the history of societies. (<http://maps.thefullwiki.org/Taboo>)

In regard to linguistic taboo, there has been a considerable change since the late twentieth century. The decline may have been more increasing in the use of euphemistic language. Euphemistic words and expressions allow us to talk about unpleasant things and disguise or neutralize the unpleasantness, e.g. the subject of sickness, death, unemployment, and criminality. They also allow us to give labels to unpleasant tasks and jobs in an attempt to make them sound almost attractive. Euphemism is endemic in our society: the glorification of the common place and the elevation of the trivial (Wardhaugh, p. 235).

In short, taboo and euphemism affect us all. We may not be deeply conscious of the effects, but affect us they do. We all probably have a few things we refuse to talk about and still others we do not talk about directly. We may have some words we know but never-or hardly ever- use because they are too emotional for either us or others. Awhile we may find some thought too deep for words, others we definitely take care not to express at all even though we know the words, or else we express ourselves on them very indirectly (Wardhaugh, 236).

In Sasak, like in other languages, taboo is also known. The term `*malik`* or `*pemalik`* is used in terms of taboo in Sasak. It can include dietary restrictions (halal or kosher diets), sex and restrictions on sexual activities and relationships (sex outside of marriage or adultery, intermarriage), nicknaming, restrictions of bodily functions (burping, flatulence, restrictions on the use of psychoactive drugs, restrictions on state of genitalia such as circumcision or sex reassignment), exposure of body parts (from navel to ankles), and restrictions on the use of offensive language, mentioning certain animals, calling friends in certain place and many other things that will be discussed in finding and discussion section.

As Sasak people who live among the traditions, cultures, and communities of Sasak, we should know and be familiar with this phenomena and issues in order not to be isolated. So, the writer would like to raise as well as promote this issue, either for Sasak people or for non-Sasak people who live among communities of Sasak. Besides, this is also important for linguist or sociolinguist because this issue is including into language studies. Due to these, the problem that will be focused in this paper is “*How is the classification of taboo in Sasak?*”

In this research, the data were collected by using note-taking, tape recording, and observation as well as in depth-interview. The resources of data were from old people that know much about culture and society (*tokoh adat*), the history in Sasak life and those who know much about religion, in this case, Islam religion (*tokoh agama*).

In relation to the procedure of analyzing data, the writer tried to identify, classify and analyze as well as describe all the data related to taboo based on the classification.

## **2. Findings and Discussion**

### **A. Dietary restriction**

As all we know that the majority of Sasak people are Muslims. As Moslems, all the way of life is guided and influenced by the concept of Islam religion. For Muslim Sasak, there are some kinds of certain food that can be categorized into taboo food or taboo menu. This taboo is based on religion concept taken from Al-Qur`an and Al-Hadits. The kinds of food included into taboo are the meat of pig, dog, all kinds of abhorrent or repulsive animals like mouse, frog, etc, all kinds of reptiles, like snake, lizard, crocodile etc. The taboo meant in this case is that the meat of those animals is forbidden (*haram* or *not halal*) to eat because of the religion concept based on Al-Qur`an and Al-Hadits. Besides, all kinds of kosher animals can be taboo or *`malik`* to eat if they are slaughtered without mentioning the name of God (Allah) in the beginning of slaughtering process.

### **B. Sex and sexual activities (sexual intercourse)**

In Sasak community, to mention the name of genitals directly, e.g. *`lesek`* for man's and *`pepek`* for woman's is taboo, either for the speaker who mentions it or for the hearer.

They are considered in bad taste and abhorrent by some people so that they are better to be avoided because they mention realities that are stark or vulgar. Instead of mentioning those words, Sasak people can replace them by the word *`perabot dengan nine`* for woman's and *`perabot dengan mame`* for man's. So, in mentioning the words meant, the speakers of Sasak use euphemism words.

Concerning the sexual activity or sexual intercourse, either legal (with marriage) or illegal (without marriage), Sasak people consider it to be taboo to mention directly. The real word or term for the sexual intercourse is *`besawa`* or *`ngancot`*. It is taboo or *malik* to say it directly because it is categorized into bad taste and abhorrent to mention and to hear. It is better to be avoided to mention because it is stark and vulgar. So, Sasak people are better to mention it in another way by using euphemism that is considered to be more polite and delicate. For this word or expression, it is better for Sasak people to say *`jimak`* or *`pengantenan`* or *`duhul`* or *`tinduk bareng`* than *`besawe`* or *`ngancot`*.

Again, those who commit adultery (doing sexual intercourse without marriage) is called *`sundel`* or *`ubek`* or *`jadah`* in Sasak. But it is taboo to mention it directly. Even it is strictly forbidden to mention the direct word in front of a child or a baby. As the replacement of the word or expression, Sasak people use the euphemism word *`dengan buang dirik`* or *`dengan salak tadah`*.

In everyday interaction, we are forbidden, and automatically taboo, to call someone by the word *`ubek`* or *`sundel`*. If someone is called by using the words, s/he feels insulted and offended, and there often occur fights or ructions just because of the words.

### C. Nicknaming

Among Sasak community, calling or nicknaming someone with what s/he does not like is taboo. It is forbidden or banned because it can cause someone to be offended or insulted or even underestimated. For example, if someone we see is bald, we may not call him *`butak`* (bald), or if someone is blind, we may not call him *`pekek`* (blind), or if someone has one leg, we may not call him *`dempang`* or *`dencrot`* (lame) etc. In other words, it is taboo to call one with what he lacks of in part of the body or incomplete part of body. In this case, we can use euphemism to replace the taboo words, for example, the word *`butak`* with *`kurang bulu`*, the word *`pekek`* with *`kurang serminan`*, the word *`dempang`* and *`dencrot`*

with *`kurang rase`* or *`sakit nae`*. Also, we may not call someone with the name of animals, like *`basong`* or *`acong`* for dog, *`monyet`* for monkey, *`bawi`* for pig, etc because those words are considered to be taboo words. The most insulting one is that if someone is called by *`ubek`* or *`sundel`* or *`jadah`*, s/he will be automatically angry. It is because s/he is insulted and offended by the word.

#### D. Mentioning the name of certain animals

For Sasak belief, mentioning the bad things in front of a child or a baby is considered to be taboo. Mentioning the name of certain animals is one of it. As Sasak people, they may not mention the name of certain animals directly in front of or near a child or a baby, for example, *`monyet`* (monkey), *`acong`* or *`basong`* (dog), *`bawi`* (pig), *`jawa`* (big lizard), and *`ular`* (snake) etc. It is considered to be a taboo because of some reasons. First, parents feel worried about their child or baby being similar to what has been mentioned of the animals in his/her face or body. Second, parents worry about their baby or child being similar to those which have been mentioned of the animals in daily behaviour and attitude.

#### E. Shouting *`antih aku`* (wait for me) in certain places

Irrespective of myth or not and whether or not it is true, parents forbid their children to shout *`antih aku`* (wait for me) when they pass through a big forest and a big river. According to the belief of Sasak ancestors or forefathers, if people say *`antih aku`* to friends who are ahead of while passing through the forest, wild animals like a wolf, a tiger, or even a bear will be waiting for them. Also, when people pass through a big river and friends are ahead of them, they may not say *`antih aku`* because it is worried that crocodile will be waiting for them. Because of this, Sasak people are forbidden to say the expression above and so it becomes a taboo or *malik*.

#### F. Saying *`sial`* for unfortunate thing or bad condition

In our lives, we experience good and bad things in turn. We always hope that all things that we do are effectual and are conducive of being good luck. But not all we do will result in success immediately. Sometimes what we hope is up-side down with the reality. If we are in bad condition like that, automatically but unconsciously we may express *`sial`*, *`sialan`*, or *`sial gati nasibku`*. For Sasak people, it is forbidden to say or express those kinds

of expression and so they are taboo or *malik* based on the religious concept. It is better to say `ndekman rezki` or `ndekman bagian` than saying `sial`, `sialan` or `sial gati nasibku`. So, in this case, we use euphemism expression rather than the taboo words or expressions.

#### G. Mentioning certain diseases

In Sasak, we are common to see certain diseases like chicken pox or smallpox, hernia for body disease and mental illness. The name of disease `smallpox` or `chicken pox` is `cacar`, `hernia` is `borot` or `turun badok` and the mental illness, `crazy` is `jogang`. For the smallpox, we may not mention the name of the real disease. It is better to say `ngayah` (taking out money), `sugeh` (rich) or `nerima` (get) than to say `cacar`. Also, we cannot say `borot` for `hernia`. Rather, it is better to say `kron-ron`. For mental illness, we may not say `jogang` directly, but it is better to say `ilang ingetan`, `sakit salah sadu` or `sasar`. This is meant in order not to make the people who get the diseases feel humiliated, insulted, and underestimated. Saying the real names is considered taboo from the perspective of ethic and myth belief.

#### H. Taking the oath

Taking the oath is a taboo or *malik* for Sasak people. It is forbidden because it can cause bad effect to the person who takes the oath. There are many expressions used for taking the oath. The oath can be from religious concept, like, `Demi Allah`, `Wallahi`, `Lillah`, and `Billah`. It can also from social tradition or custom descended from ancestors like `bani pekek`, `bani bedok`, `bani te langgar isik montor`, `bani mate mbuteng`, `bani haram`, `bani ndek akuk isik Tuhan`, and many other expressions. If someone says the truth, and he says the oath to strengthen his statement or expression, he will not get the effect or consequence of his oath. However, if the person who takes the oath does not tell the truth, he will get the consequence of what he has said. For example, if he does not say the truth of certain fact, and he takes the oath by saying `bani pekek` (dare to be blind) to strengthen his expression or statement, he will be blind sooner or later. Again, if he does not say the truth of a certain thing, and he takes the oath `bani bedok` (look full to get mumps) in order to be believed or trusted, he will get mumps sooner or later. Thus, the forefathers of Sasak people forbid their descendents to make an oath in order to say the truth all the time so that they do not get the calamity in their lives.

#### I. Pointing towards something using left hand

It is considered to be impolite for Sasak people if someone, either older or younger people, points at something or somewhere by using left index finger. This way is categorized into taboo because whoever will feel insulted and loose temper when the interlocutor uses left hand to point at something in the case of giving information. This taboo is based on religious concept and moral judgment.

#### J. Giving and taking something using left hand

As it is mentioned previously that it is impolite for Sasak people if someone, either older or younger people, points at something or somewhere by using his left index finger, giving, and taking something using left hand is also categorized into taboo. The speaker will be insulted and/or angry when the interlocutor uses left hand to give and take something given using left hand. This taboo is based on religious concept and moral judgment and Sasak people will consider someone to be impolite if the interlocutor does it. In Sasak, the parents will always educate their children to avoid the taboo above.

#### K. Turning on the flashlight toward the sky

According to the tradition of Sasak people, turning on the flashlight or the searchlight in the night means “challenge to fight” to the enemy. So, the parents in Sasak suggest their children not to turn on their flashlight in the night if they do not want to have enemy in their lives. Because of this, it is also a taboo or *malik* for Sasak people.

#### L. Talking while defecating or urinating

From the religion concept, moral judgment as well as myth of Sasak, it is a taboo to speak or to talk, and even to shout to or with other people when someone is defecating or urinating. Someone is said to be immoral, slovenly and uneducated if he does something like that. As a result, he is disrespected by other people in his daily life.

#### M. Standing up while urinating

Based on the religion concept and moral judgment, it is a taboo or *malik* to stand up when someone is urinating especially in the open place. Someone is said to be immoral,



slovenly and uneducated if he does something like that and so he is disrespected by other people in his life around his community.

#### N. Interrupting and arguing to parents` or older people` suggestion

When our parents or older people in our family are still talking about something with their interlocutors, commonly old people, we, as young children, are not allowed to participate in the conversation. Even, we are not allowed to listen to and to know what they are talking about and at that time we are asked to play around with our friends in the field or in the yard. Again, when our parents or other older people are still giving suggestions to us, we are not allowed to interrupt and to speak a word. If we do so, we are called immoral children and we will be accursed and get calamity in our life. So, based on the religion concept and moral judgment, they are considered as taboo or *malik* in Sasak community.

#### O. Playing the flute (*seruling*) inside the house or around the house yard.

Around Sasak community, a person who plays flute or *seruling* inside the house or around the house yard is believed to have the snake of all kinds and the devils will come to the house or places where the sound of flute derives from. This belief is much influenced by the traditional myth from ancestors. Because this can cause calamity for the people, this thing is forbidden to do and it is perceived to be taboo or *malik* for Sasak people and especially the young boys of Sasak are strongly suggested not to do this around the house.

### 3. Conclusion

Based on data analysis, there are some points to be concluded:

1. Taboo in Sasak is something to be forbidden to do or to say by Sasak people.
2. Taboo can be called as *malik`* or *pemalik`* in Sasak.
3. Taboo or *malik`* in Sasak can be classified into dietary restriction, sex and sexual intercourse, nicknaming, mentioning the name of certain animals, shouting *antih aku`* in certain places, saying *sial`* for bad condition, mentioning certain diseases, taking the oath, pointing towards something using left hand, giving and taking something using left hand, turning on the flashlight toward the sky, talking while defecating or urinating, standing up while urinating, and interrupting and arguing to parents` or

older people` suggestion as well as playing the flute (*seruling*) inside the house or around the house yard.

4. Taboo in Sasak can be based on religious concept, traditional myth or belief, and moral judgment of Sasak people or community.
5. The existence of taboo in Sasak community can be positive and beneficial for the people of Sasak in that they can be free from calamity by avoiding certain things considered to be bad thing to do.

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