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Analysis of Taboo Language Domain in Denpasar City and Tenganan Village through Ethnolinguistic Approach

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Abstract

Taboo language reflects a community's social and cultural norms and play a crucial role in shaping linguistic practices. Despite existing research on the role of language in expressing cultural identity, limited studies have examined how taboo words differ between urban and traditional settings. This study addresses this gap by exploring the use of taboo words in Denpasar City and Tenganan Pegringsingan Village through an ethnolinguistic approach. Using qualitative methods, the data were collected through interviews and direct observations. The findings reveal significant contrasts between the two regions: in Denpasar, taboo language is more flexible and influenced by urbanization and modernization, being more commonly used in informal settings. In contrast, in Tenganan, the use of taboo words is strictly governed by traditional customs, which prioritize social harmony and adherence to sacred practices. Specific taboo words are considered violations of cultural respect. These findings highlight the influence of cultural and social contexts on linguistic behaviour and underscore the distinct ways urbanization and tradition impact taboo language. This study contributes to understanding the intersection of language, culture, and social identity, with implications for preserving local linguistic practices amid ongoing social change.

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1. Introduction

Language and culture are two closely intertwined elements in people's lives. Language serves as a means of communication and a reflection of cultural identity, documenting a community's traditions, norms, and values. Through language, speakers convey information and express thoughts, emotions, and cultural values, making it a vital tool for ethnolinguistic studies. One intriguing aspect to be explored within ethnolinguistics is the phenomenon of taboo language, which refers to words or phrases considered inappropriate or forbidden in specific social contexts. Taboo language often touches on sensitive topics such as sexuality, religion, or death, and the social norms and cultural values of a community strongly regulate its use. The wonderful thing about taboos is that they can be placed on any behavior. For a behavior to be proscribed, it must be perceived as harmful to an individual or their community. The great thing about this is that the harm can fall anywhere from a breach of etiquette to an out-and-out fatality (Allan, 2019).

Taboo words/language plays a critical role in reflecting a society's social dynamics, as it reveals the moral boundaries upheld by a community and illustrates how beliefs, customs, and social structures function in regulating interpersonal interactions. By studying taboo language, we gain insights into how communities manage linguistic expressions and maintain or violate these norms in daily life.

In Bali, taboo language manifests differently across communities, especially in the contrasting environments of urban Denpasar and the traditional village of Tenganan Pegringsingan. As a dynamic urban centre, Denpasar is influenced by modernity, mass media, and globalization, contributing to a more flexible use of taboo language. In this urban setting, taboo language may emerge from slang or new terms from social media, where boundaries of appropriateness are fluid and contextual. Conversely, Tenganan Pegringsingan, a Bali Aga village that preserves strong traditions, views taboo language in connection with religious rituals, strict customs, and respect for sacred practices. In Tenganan, using or avoiding certain words reflects reverence for ancestors, deities, and nature, highlighting a more conservative approach to language.

Previous studies in ethnolinguistics have demonstrated the importance of language in transmitting and preserving cultural knowledge. For instance, La Hisa et al. (2017) documented the role of language in maintaining traditional knowledge about sago plants among the Maori tribe in Papua. However, due to migration and cultural contact, a language use shift threatens the Maori language's sustainability. Similarly, Anggraini et al. (2022) examined how children in Mataram City use taboo language to express emotions like anger, potentially eroding norms of politeness in daily communication. While these studies highlight the role of language in reflecting cultural dynamics, they have not explored how cultural factors specifically influence the use of taboo language, nor have they examined strategies for preserving local language amid these changes.

Previous researchers have conducted research on taboo words/language/lexicons, but comparative taboo research in ethnolinguistic studies is still relatively rare. Analyzing taboo words from a comparative perspective in ethnolinguistics involves exploring how different cultures and linguistic communities treat specific topics as taboo and how these taboos are encoded in language. Ethnolinguistics seeks to understand the relationship between language and culture, emphasizing how societal norms, values, beliefs, and worldviews shape language use, including taboos. This study

seeks to address this gap by investigating the use of taboo language in Denpasar City and Tenganan Pegringsingan Village. Through an ethnolinguistic approach, this research will examine the forms of taboo language, the cultural and social factors influencing its use, and how taboo language functions as a reflection of the values and beliefs of each community. The study, which focuses on both an urban and a traditional environment, seeks to discover the dynamics of modernity and tradition in determining language use, contributing to a better understanding of language, culture, and social identity in Bali. Furthermore, this research hopes to contribute to preserving local languages and cultures amid accelerating social changes.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Theoretical Background*

This research draws on several critical theories that support understanding taboo language use in an ethnolinguistic context. One crucial approach used is Duranti's (1997) theory in Linguistic Anthropology, which emphasizes the relationship between language and socio-cultural structures. According to this theory, language is not only used as a means of communication but also as a reflection of a community's social and cultural identity. In this context, taboo language serves as a reflection of the cultural values held by the community, as seen in Balinese society, particularly in the traditional village of Tenganan.

Another relevant theory is Jay's (1992) theory on the use of abusive and taboo language in American culture. This theory highlights how taboo words are used to express emotions and violate certain social norms. Jay argues that taboo language is often used in situations involving anger or frustration, and its use is strongly influenced by social context. This theory is relevant for understanding the differences between taboo language use in Denpasar, which is more flexible, and Tenganan, which is more bound by strict traditional norms.

Astawa (2019) also makes an essential contribution through his research on the concept of Tri Hita Karana in Tenganan, which emphasizes harmony between humans, nature, and gods. This research shows how taboo language in Tenganan is strongly linked to religious practices and customs, which emphasize the importance of maintaining social and spiritual harmony. This view supports the argument that sacred values bind taboo language in Tenganan compared to Denpasar, where modernization has changed language use.

2.2. Taboo Language Use in Cultural Contexts

Research on taboo language use across different cultures shows significant variation in the way taboo language is treated and used. Rusnak (2021) examines the ethnolinguistic phenomenon of folk etymology and taboo language in Ukraine, which shows that taboo words are often hidden through alternative forms in cultural and religious contexts. This study aligns with research in Bali, where taboo words are used as a form of respect for tradition and social norms.

In their research on the Kazakh language, Kulzhanova Imangazina (2021) shows that taboo words are often related to religious principles and customs, which maintain social stability. It is similar to the findings in Tenganan, where taboo language is used to maintain social harmony through

strict language regulation. Wardani et al. (2023) also highlighted how taboo language in Acehnese society is used in specific social contexts, such as hunting and farming, to avoid violating social norms.

2.3. Research Gaps

Although research on taboo language has been conducted across various cultures, there is a significant research gap regarding the impact of modernization and globalization on changes in taboo language use, particularly in urban areas such as Denpasar. Previous studies, such as those conducted by Jay (1992) and Rusnak (2021), focused more on traditional cultural contexts without examining how social media and urbanization affect the flexibility of taboo language use. In addition, most studies have yet to explore how younger generations, who are more exposed to outside cultures, adopt or abandon taboo language norms in urban environments.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining the differences in taboo language use between the urban Denpasar and traditional Tenganan communities. By focusing on the influence of modernization and tradition on language, this research will provide new insights into how social change affects taboo language in different contexts.

3. Methodology

This research uses an ethnolinguistic approach with field methods to examine taboo language in the socio-cultural context of Denpasar and Tenganan Pegringsingan communities. The qualitative research design provides maximum space for researchers to explain and describe the variables studied in depth. The field method was chosen because the researcher went directly to the field to collect primary data, allowing direct observation of taboo language use in the two communities.

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study are the people (young generation) of Denpasar, who represent the urban area, and the people of Tenganan Pegringsingan, who represent the traditional Balinese community. Data were collected through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. In this study, the primary data collection instrument was the researcher, who was assisted by unstructured interview guidelines, recording devices, and field notes.

3.2 Data Collection

The data collection process was conducted in two ways: questionnaires and interviews. The distributed questionnaires contained questions about the use and avoidance of taboo words and the social sanctions received when taboo words are violated. In-depth interviews were conducted with guided questions covering the form and meaning of taboo language in both regions. These interviews were unstructured, so participants were free to explain their views and cultural practices regarding the use of taboo language.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data obtained from observations and interviews were analyzed qualitatively to identify the forms of taboo language and its role in the culture and customs of the Denpasar and Tenganan

Pegringsingan communities. This analysis aims to reveal the relationship between language and culture and its social role in controlling the use of taboo language in both community contexts. The thematic method was used to analyze interview data to identify patterns and themes from participants' experiences and views regarding taboo language.

Through this approach, the research is expected to provide deeper insights into the differences in taboo language use between urban and traditional communities and reveal the role of taboo language in maintaining social harmony and cultural values in both areas.

4. Results and Discussion

The use of taboo words in Denpasar and Tenganan Pegringsingan Village shows differences in the types of taboo words identified. Based on the research results, there are taboo expressions in Denpasar City and Tenganan Pegringsingan Village that are categorized into several types, namely taboo animal names, taboo activities, taboo body parts, and Taboo swearing, as below.

a. Taboo of animal-related names/disclosures

As the name implies, the community uses the following taboos to denote animal names. These words should not be spoken carelessly, as they have connotations of being impolite or rude. The data are presented from the most frequently used taboo expressions to the least used ones.

No	Kota Denpasar	Desa Tenganan Pegringsingan
1	Cicing/anjing (dog)	Bojog (monkey)
2	Bangsat (flea)	Bedag (horse)
3	Bikul (rat)	Cicing (dog)
4	Kuluk gudig (mangy cur)	Kebo (buffalo)
5	Bojog (monkey)	Kaung (boar)
6	Celeng/babi (pig)	Ubuan (whelp)

Table 1 Taboo words related to Animal

The table above shows that the words cicing and bojog dominate taboo lexicons according to the people of Denpasar City and Tenganan Pegringsingan Village. This is due to cultural differences between the two regions. *Cicing* or *dog* is often used and considered taboo due to the influence of culture and the times that occur in Denpasar. However, the word *bojog* can also be classified as taboo in certain conditions and situations. In Tenganan Pegringsingan Village, the word *bojog* is a taboo expression that, according to the community, should not be used because of the belief that if the expression is used carelessly, it will bring disaster or misfortune to the speaker. In other words, the taboo expression that refers to the animal's name means ordinary, but if used in a specific context, it will become taboo.

In addition to differences in words, there are differences in the performance and indexicality of taboos between Denpasar City and Tenganan Pegringsingan Village. Denpasar, considered a modern city by Balinese people, has influenced the shift in the performance and indexicality of taboos, such as the use of the expression bikul, which is now commonly used when referring to a rat. The younger

generation in Denpasar City today is unaware of the expression Jero Ketut, which is a metaphor given by the Balinese people because of its nature and services (Laksana, 2009: 71).

In contrast, the performance and indexicality of the words *bojog* and *kaung* are classified as taboo, and their use is highly avoided in Tenganan Pegringsingan Village. Until now, people in the village still believe it is taboo to mention specific animal names in any conditions and situations and replace them with other terms such as *bo* for *bojog* and *truna* for *kaung*.

b. Taboo of Activities

Taboo activities encompass a range of actions, behaviors, or expressions that are prohibited or discouraged within particular cultural or social contexts due to their violation of moral, religious, or social norms.

No	Kota Denpasar	Desa Tenganan Pegringsingan
1	Ngamah (to eat)	Nyegseg (to eat)
2	Medem (to sleep)	Nginem (to drink)
3	Mekatuk/ngentot (yo copulate)	Nyangklik (to copulate)
4	Ngoyot (to drink)	Melud (to sleep)
5	Bangke (dead)	Megarang (to fight or struggle over something)
6	Not (to see)	Ngendig (to defecate)

The table above compares taboo words in Denpasar City and Tenganan Pegringsingan Village, showing differences in language use for daily activities considered taboo or rude in specific contexts. In Denpasar City, words such as ngamah "eating" and medem "sleeping" are commonly used but may be considered impolite in certain situations. Other words, such as "Mekatuk/ngentot" for intercourse, are taboo in most formal or social contexts. Words such as bangke "dead" and not "to see" also fall into the category of language that is considered rude or inappropriate in some situations.

All the taboo lexicons used by people in Denpasar are mainly categorised as Basa Bali Kasar. Basa kasar are harsh words that are used in situations where people are angry or irritated or are often used in quarrels (Adnyana, 2014).

In Tenganan Pegringsingan village, different words such as nyesgeg "to eat" and nginem "to drink" align with their traditional norms. Nyangklik "to copulate" is also a taboo word, as well as melud "to sleep". Another interesting difference is the taboo word megarang, which means "to fight over something". It is familiar in Denpasar but taboo in Tenganan as it is considered impolite if used in the social context. The word ngendig "to defecate", is also a rude word or topic that is avoided in general conversation in Tenganan, as it is taboo concerning excrement topics that should not be discussed openly.

These differences reflect how language can be influenced by cultural context and social norms. In Denpasar, a more urbanized city, language use may be more flexible, whereas in Tenganan, which maintains Balinese Aga traditions, language norms are more strict and conservative.

The table comparing taboo words in Denpasar City and Tenganan Pegringsingan Village illustrates how cultural and social norms shape language use, particularly for everyday activities considered taboo or impolite in specific contexts.

Denpasar, as an urban centre, displays more flexibility in language use. Words like ngamah "to eat" and medem to sleep, commonly used in informal settings, might be deemed impolite or inappropriate in more formal conversations or when speaking with elders. These terms reflect a more casual urban vernacular, where language norms may be relaxed depending on the context. However, more explicit words like mekatuk/ngentot "to copulate" are taboo and would generally be avoided in most formal or polite social situations. Similarly, words like bangke "dead" and not "to see" are used in informal conversations but might be seen as rude in formal or sensitive contexts. For example, using "bangke" in a discussion about death in a formal setting, e.g. e leak, bangka iba "hey, you better go to hell" could be considered disrespectful, as the word carries negative connotations and lacks the sensitivity expected in such situations.

In contrast, Tenganan Pegringsingan Village, which adheres to Bali Aga (pre-Hindu) traditions, has stricter language norms In contrast, Tenganan Pegringsingan Village, which adheres to Bali Aga (pre-Hindu) traditions, has stricter language norms. Words like nyesgeg "to eat" and nginem "to drink" reflect the village's more formal and traditional approach to language. These words align with the cultural values of maintaining respect in everyday communication. Similarly, nyangklik "to copulate" is a taboo word that would rarely be used in public or formal settings due to its strong connection to private activities. The use of melud "to sleep" and ngendig "to defecate" is highly controlled, as topics related to bodily functions and excrement are considered inappropriate topics for public conversation. The avoidance of these words, especially in mixed or formal companies, reflects a strong emphasis on maintaining social and cultural decorum.

It also goes to another taboo word like megarang "to fight or struggle over something". Megarang highlights a significant cultural difference. While the term is familiar and commonly used in Denpasar, it is considered taboo in Tenganan because the word megarang is closely collocated with the term animal, and fighting or competing for public resources is seen as disruptive to social harmony, a core value in the village. This difference in the acceptability of the term shows how each community's values influence the words that are considered appropriate or inappropriate.

The word ngendig (to defecate) further illustrates this cultural distinction. In Tenganan, discussing bodily functions like defecation in public or social settings is strongly avoided. This comparison reflects the traditional view that topics related to bodily functions should remain private and not be openly discussed. In Denpasar, while such words might still be avoided in formal settings, urban culture may be more lenient in private or informal settings, where casual language might be more acceptable.

c. Taboo of Part(s) of Body

Taboo lexicons related to parts of the body are often associated with cultural sensitivities, social norms, and offensive language. These taboo words can vary widely across cultures and languages but generally refer to parts of the body in vulgar, crude, or inappropriate ways. These topics are usually avoided in polite or formal conversation due to the discomfort they may cause or the perception that they are unacceptable to discuss openly. In many cultures, even medically accurate terms for body

parts, such as "vagina," "penis," "anus," or "breast," might be seen as taboo in everyday conversation, though they are not inherently vulgar. Instead of using direct or crude terms, people tend to replace these words with euphemisms—polite, less explicit alternatives that soften the impact of discussing bodily functions. Here are some data on taboo words that can be associated with different body parts:

No	Kota Denpasar	Desa Tenganan Pegringsingan
1	Bungut (mouth)	Tendas (head)
2	Kelet/plet (penis)	Bungut (mouth)
3	Mata (eye)	Lengget (penis)
4	Teli (vagina)	Momok (vagina)
5	Polo (brain)	Kopek (breast)
6	Kontol (penis)	Kompol (ass)
7	Tendas (head)	Clokotokan (mouth)
8	Pepek (vagina)	Gintil (vagina)

The table above compares taboo words related to body parts in Denpasar City and Tenganan Pegringsingan Village, showing the different terms used in two areas with different cultural and social norms. In Denpasar, some body parts are referred to with words considered less polite (Basa Bali Kasar) or taboo in formal or more polite conversations. For example, the term bungut "mouth" is often used but can be considered rude compared to more formal words like bibih. The words kelet/plet "penis" and teli "vagina" fall into the taboo category of not being used in everyday conversation as they refer to very private body parts. Meanwhile, the word polo "brain" (although it refers to or literally means brain), can be considered demeaning to someone if used in the wrong context. In Tenganan Pegringsingan Village, which is very traditional and upholds Bali Aga customs, terms used for specific body parts are also considered taboo as they are closely related to customs and cultural respect.

For example, tendas (head) is considered impolite if it is used to refer to someone's head, especially someone who is older or someone who has a higher social status than the speaker. If the speaker does so, he/she will be considered impolite by the people and can be subject to social sanctions by the community.

Besides tendas, words related to body parts, such as lengget "penis", momok "vagina", and kopek "breast" are highly taboo and avoided in general conversation. From this table, it is clear that the two regions, although both in Bali, have different rules regarding body parts that are considered taboo. In Denpasar, these terms are more flexible depending on the social context, whereas in Tenganan, traditional norms strictly regulate language to maintain politeness and social harmony.

In conclusion, these differences in taboo terms show how strong cultural and social influences are in shaping language use, especially regarding sensitive body parts. In the more urbanized and modern society, especially Denpasar, language develops more freely, whereas in Tenganan, language is maintained more strictly by customary and religious values.

d. Abusive swearing or cursing

Abusive swearing or cursing involves the use of harsh, offensive language meant to insult, demean, or provoke. These words and phrases can carry strong negative emotional weight and vary widely in intensity and impact based on cultural context, tone, and intent. Swear words are often categorized by their targets, such as body parts, actions, family members, or ethnic/racial insults. According to Laksana (2003), the words related to abusive swearing or cursing (known as sumpah serapah) have overlapping semantic ranges; for example, the form of swearing also contains features of the meaning of curse. Likewise the form of curse contains the meaning of swearing. They are generally considered taboo, especially in public or formal settings where maintaining a certain level of civility and professionalism is expected.

They can have severe social, emotional, and psychological impacts. The meaning and intensity of swear words are often context-dependent, varying with tone, cultural norms, and the relationship between the people involved. In some contexts, swearing can lead to social exclusion, legal consequences, or even physical confrontations. The results show that there are numerous data of abusive swearing or cursing as follows.

No	Kota Denpasar	Desa Tenganan Pegringsingan
1	Nas Kleng (fuck)	Kawah (damn)
2	Sundel (bitch)	Kawah incuk (damn)
3	Dakin teli (fuckin cunt)	Sinteli (cunt)
4	Panak liak/panak babinjat (bastard)	Bebangkan (scum)
5	Nas bedag (idiot)	Nas bedag (idiot)

The table comparing swear words in Denpasar City and Tenganan Pegringsingan Village above reveals significant differences in abusive or insulting language, strongly influenced by each region's cultural and social context. In Denpasar, an urbanized and more modern city, swear words are often more common among the community, especially in informal situations or when angry. For example, words like Kleng or Nas Kleng "fuck" are often used as curses or insults in particular situations, and although rude, their use is quite common in certain circles. The same goes for sundel "bitch", which is a crude insult to women who are considered to be behaving immorally. Words like dakin teli (fuckin cunt), panak liak/panak babinjat "bastard," and nas bedag "idiot" fall under the category of vulgarity and are highly taboo, mainly as they refer to very private body parts and social deviation. These words are usually not used in formal or polite conversations as they are considered disrespectful to norms of politeness in social interactions.

In contrast, in Tenganan Pegringsingan Village, which firmly upholds Balinese Aga customs, language use is highly regulated by traditional and customary norms. Swear words here, such as kawah/kawah incuk "damn" and sinteli "cunt", are considered highly offensive and not only taboo in daily conversation but also violate the highly respected norms of politeness. "Kawah" is often used as a form of crude swearing, and 'Sinteli' is used in a very offensive context. Tenganan people have a much more conservative view of language use, especially concerning body parts and uncommon/rude topics, since they have negative meanings, and if it is used carelessly, the people will be subject to social sanctions.

The differences between Denpasar and Tenganan in terms of the use of swearing are strongly influenced by the cultural values and social norms that apply in each region. As a more modern and urbanized city, Denpasar shows greater flexibility in language use. More open socialization and outside cultural influences allow swearing to be heard more often, although there are limits in formal contexts or more polite situations. Tenganan, on the other hand, with its robust Bali Aga culture, emphasizes the importance of maintaining politeness in speech. Any form of swearing, especially about body parts, is considered a violation of customary norms and can have serious social consequences.

Using words such as bebangkan in Tenganan to insult someone's social status is strictly prohibited, as Tenganan upholds the principles of social harmony. People in this village are very careful in their use of language, as every word uttered is considered to have the potential to affect relations between residents. In Denpasar, although swearing is used more freely, there are contexts where its use can cause conflict or offend, especially if used in conversations involving respected people or in more formal public spaces.

The difference in the use of swearing between Denpasar and Tenganan underscores the importance of culture and social values in shaping language use. In Denpasar, swear words are more flexible and situational, influenced by the modern urban environment and highly dynamic social interactions. However, there are still boundaries regarding when and where this language is used, especially in more formal contexts. Swearing is taboo and strictly forbidden in Tenganan, which vigorously upholds Balinese Aga traditions and norms. Language use is strictly regulated to ensure that norms of politeness and social harmony are maintained, with violations taken very seriously.

5. Conclusion

This study analyzes the use of taboo language in Denpasar City and Tenganan Pegringsingan Village through an ethnolinguistic approach. The results show that the social and cultural context strongly influences the differences in the use of taboo language in these two areas. In Denpasar, the use of taboo words is more flexible, reflecting the influence of modernization and a more open urban environment, while in Tenganan, which maintains Balinese Aga customs, the use of taboo language is highly regulated by traditional norms and strict customs.

Taboo language in Tenganan is more about maintaining social harmony and respect, while in Denpasar. However, there are restrictions. The use of taboo words is more acceptable in informal contexts. Thus, these differences illustrate how social and cultural norms shape how language is used in each region. Studying taboo words through an ethnolinguistic study reveals deep insights into cultural values, power structures, and societal norms. Taboos reflect what societies consider sacred, profane, or off-limits, and the way different cultures treat taboo subjects like sex, family, death, religion, and race can vary significantly. By comparing these linguistic taboos, ethnolinguists can discover the underlying cultural dynamics that shape communication and social interaction across different linguistic communities.

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