

**PATTERNS OF CHANGE IN TABOO WORD USE
ACROSS TIMES AND DEMOGRAPHIC COMMUNITIES
IN SIMALUNGUN**

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Background of the Research

Language cannot be separated from the socio culture where the language exists. The socio culture of a particular society will influence the speakers of its language. It means that speakers must consider the socio culture of a society so that they can use the language properly. One of the cultural aspects that people must be aware of is the case of taboo. Taboo can be found and exists in many speech communities. Taboo is one way in which society expresses disapproval of certain kinds of behavior believed to be harmful to its members, either for supernatural reasons or because such behavior is held to violate a moral code (Wardhaugh, 1986). Linguistic taboos are linguistic forms that cannot be uttered because they are considered to be improper speech forms. Consequently, the speakers will try to avoid using the linguistic taboo terms not to be considered impolite. Of course, those who break the taboo in attempt

to show freedom from such restrictions or to expose the taboos will be punished and scorned by their communities. The penalty for breaking the taboo words and phrases can be severe such being cursed, scorned and the like.

Language is considered to contain special powers and able to cure sickness, keep away evils, bring good to oneself and harm to an enemy. This belief that words control objects, people and spirits influences human activities through human history happened since ancient time. Such language usually has to be used with great care, and meticulous attention is paid to pronunciation and wording. People even tend to avoid mentioning them. When people have to talk about those things, they are talked about in very roundabout ways.

As a heterogeneous country, Indonesia consists of many different ethnic groups, religions, culture and languages. The heterogeneity which exists in Indonesia should be kept in harmony in order not to create conflicts among the members of Indonesian people and it is supported by the idea that Indonesia is a nation state which acknowledges the existence of its various communities. This idea is stated in the Indonesian 1945 Constitution (UUD 1945). These various different cultures stretch from Sabang to Merauke. The plurality is expressed in *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* in which the various cultures are acknowledged and have the right to be developed to contribute and enrich the national culture. The government has the policy and responsibility to develop the national culture continuously.

In terms of language, hundreds of local languages spread around the country. The local languages, as communication device among the local, play an important role in their life. That is why many Indonesian people use local languages and feel proud of using the language among the members of their groups. It is one way to maintain the cultural heritage which still exists among the members of its community. However, many of the ethnic group cultures become detached from its existence. The crucial problem is how to maintain and further develop the various local cultures so that they can be transferred to the young generations. The local cultures are the elements of the national culture that need to be taken care of in order to develop the national culture.

The Simalungun culture is one of the national cultures in Indonesia that is still alive and practiced by the group members in its customary settings which are called *adat*. In birth, wedding ceremonies and funeral activities, the Simalungun cultural values are still performed. Also, some of the Simalungun cultural activities such as *tortor* (dancing), *limbaga* (proverbs), *tangis-tangis* (lamentation), *doding* (songs), etc are still alive and enjoyed. The Simalungun language (SL) is not merely used by the Simalungun ethnic group, but it is also used by the people who reside in the Simalungun district of North Sumatera. The Simalungun language supports the Simalungun culture in terms of arts, customs, laws, religion, etc. As a means of communication, the Simalungun language is used to express desires, ideas, feelings and the like.

In other neighboring languages (Karo, Toba Batak and Malay languages, etc.), there are polite and respectful forms of addressing which can be found in the Simalungun language. The elements of politeness and respect are basically influenced by the kinship systems and **marga** (clan) whose interrelationship should be considered before communicating with others. Related to that, the Simalungun speakers are able to choose the appropriate forms for addressing someone. i.e., a father-in-law and father-in-law's brother will be called *tulang* (uncle) and cousins to their mother's brother will be also called *tulang* (uncle).

Unfortunately, the purity of the Simalungun culture nowadays becomes loose, including the language. Some of the language elements have been detached from its originality. The Simalungun people who live near to the other neighboring districts (North Tapanuli, Dairi, Karo, etc.) have been influenced by the languages of these communities. It can be seen from the words used by the Simalungun speakers which are coming from those districts.

The Simalungun language is regarded more refined than those neighboring languages. However, nowadays the Simalungun people's smooth and beautiful language has changed. In daily communication, many Simalungun speakers seem to use the pronunciation of their neighboring district members. For example, the Simalungun speakers in sub district of Saribudolok which is close to the district of Karo speak in the Karo way. This also happens in Parapat and Nagori Dolok which are close to North Tapanuli and Deli Serdang. The migration of people from other

ethnic groups from outside into the Simalungun district has also influenced the Simalungun language. Among their members, they still use their own language, but talking with the Simalungun speakers, that they often speak Bahasa Indonesia. It can be predicted that in the future the Simalungun language may be replaced by other languages.

Furthermore, in reality some of the Simalungun young people do not want to use the Simalungun language and even cannot speak the Simalungun language. This happens to young people who live in the towns. Consequently, it is possible that Simalungun language may not be handed down to the next generations. The young generation is expected to maintain the Simalungun language and culture in the future. As a national asset, the Simalungun language must be developed because it is a part of the national culture. It is supported by one of the main policies of education and culture to develop the national culture which consists of the regional culture varieties in Indonesia. In this way, the Simalungun language will be handed down to the Simalungun young generations.

Attitudes toward taboo in a speech community are extremely strong and violations may be sanctioned by imputations of immorality, social ostracism, and even illness or death. No topic is universally forbidden: what cannot be said in one language can be in another and vice versa. Neither are linguistic taboos arbitrary: they relate integrally to culture-specific beliefs and practices in religion or magic, decorum, and social control. Taboos related to religion or magic may affect a wide

range of linguistic phenomena, and include animal-name avoidances in many speech communities. It may be believed that animals or spirits understand human language, and that mentioning their names would either drive them away (undesirable if one is hunting), or attract them near where they might inflict harm.

Linguistic taboos exist in most cultures, tabooed words generally being culture specific and relating to bodily functions or aspects of a culture that are sacred. Such words are avoided, considered inappropriate and loaded with affective meaning. Some taboo words and phrases denote objects that are not to be mentioned in a casual way or perhaps not to be mentioned at all. In many communities the names of persons are taboo under some circumstances or to some people for example the Cree Indian does not speak the name of his sisters and of some other female relatives. Another direction of taboo is the taboo on so called obscene forms. Another type of taboo is the avoidance of ominous speech forms which name something painful or dangerous. One avoids the words die and death (if anything should happen to me). In some communities, one avoids the names of game animals, either during the hunt or more generally (Bloomfield, 1964) in ordinary daily life.

Taboo language is generally acknowledged to be a socio cultural phenomenon associated with superstition, custom, and hierarchical power. Every human society prohibits or restricts certain kinds of behavior, although those prohibited in one society are not necessarily the same as in another. Now, if a community or the society as a whole regards some articles or certain acts as taboo, usually the names of these

acts and things must not be mentioned or talked about, at least in public. Consequently, words and expressions related to social taboo become verbal taboo, or linguistic taboo as it is preferable to call it in this writing.

Throughout the analysis of linguistic taboo, we shall employ this term to cover a rather broad category of related items including taboo words in the Polynesian sense, words associated with obscenity, vulgarity, insults, rude or very offending expressions, etc. We assume for the purpose of argument that all the words under this broad category are either interdicted or carefully avoided or sparingly used in a restricted set of situations. Taboo is generally acknowledged to be a sociocultural phenomenon associated with superstition, custom, and hierarchical power.

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The word taboo refers to forbidden language, and tabooed language is subject to censoring. There are discussions of constraints on the use of jargon, slang, swearing and insult; censoring the way we talk about people who may be perceived

or perceive themselves to be disadvantaged or oppressed; notions about correct and incorrect grammar; taboos on naming and addressing people and dangerous animals; injunctions on speaking about the organs of sex, micturition and defecation, their functions and effluvia; censoring the language for foods, and language dealing with diseases, death and killing. The most serious taboos apply to things thought to be ominous, evil or offensive to supernatural powers; to violate such taboos automatically causes harm even death to the violator and perhaps his/her fellows.

Generally, there are some taboo words and phrases in certain areas similar to the tabooed words and phrases in the other areas. This can happen even though they have a different culture and background, for example mentioning sexual organs. On the other hand, specifically we can find some words which are considered taboo in certain areas, but in the other areas the words are not tabooed. For example, a conversation between daughter-in-law and father-in-law is acceptable in one area, but tabooed in another area.

Taboo words and phrases also exist in the Simalungun language and there are some reasons which motivate the writer to conduct the research on taboo. Actually, in the Simalungun language there are some aspects of language which can be studied such as songs, lamentations, proverbs, etc., yet the writer will concentrate on taboo. The case of taboo itself is influenced by the sociocultural background and taboo is still practiced among the Simalungun community which is quite different from other places. Taboo language is considered as the prohibition to use words or expressions

which do not conform to the ethical, philosophical, religious and social norms of the Simalungun community. Even though there are some similarities of taboo in the Simalungun community and in the other speech community, there are also differences which cause the occurrence of taboo in the Simalungun community. In Simalungun language, taboos can be categorized into the prohibition of objects, persons and behaviors. The linguistics taboo can be regarded as sacred and dangerous as well. They certainly happen because of the background of the Simalungun community such as ethnic groups, ethics, religion, philosophy etc.

The consequence of those who use linguistic taboos in a social interaction is that they will be scorned by the community. For example, it is not common for one to call his/her uncle's name, because uncle is believed as the man who gives blessing to his sister's family. The cultural system causes one to avoid not calling his/her uncle's name. In this ways taboos can hamper communication between a speaker and hearer and raise conflict between the speaker and hearer. In the global era, even though it should be questioned whether this kind of taboo should be maintained, it is necessary to keep the linguistic taboos as a cultural richness.

The success of the former Dutch and German missionaries in converting the Simalungun people through the process of evangelization and the downfall of the Simalungun kingdoms caused the traditional beliefs to disappear (J. Saragih, 1979). The missionaries built schools where the Simalungun people got education and outside information. Since that time, the Simalungun people were open toward the

outside information. As a consequence, some of the taboo cases relate to the laws, customs, traditional religion, ethics and philosophy of the Simalungun society decrease.

In the globalization era, the cultural values become loose because of the arrival of foreign culture. Cultural values which are attached to language might also become loose. Possibly, the tabooed words and phrases which exist in the Simalungun language will disappear because of the foreign influence. It is a must to keep the cultural values in the Simalungun language because those values will not disappear from its existence. In line with this, some aspects such as: what we want to say, how we want to say it and the specific sentence types, words and sound should be considered. It means that the speaker and hearer should speak appropriately and politely so that the interaction will proceed smoothly avoiding any conflict and disharmony.

Although taboo words are part of every culture and language and individuals at a certain point in their life would, for one reason or another, use a taboo word, the topic is poorly studied because of its sensitive nature which implies that it is not appropriate for academic study. However, the study of linguistic taboos in any society from a socio-cultural perspective is hoped to add a new dimension to the understanding of the human psyche, as communal members are watched reacting to the world around them by creating prohibitions and linguistic sanctions to screen off behavior and certain objects. Moreover, despite the censoring of language, taboo

words will persist in the community's lexicon because they strengthen the social fabric and group identity through the feeling of sharing one socio-cultural and belief system. They make the members of the society distinct from other members in other societies. And if we understand why a taboo exists, we can understand the values and realities in the society- it gives ample information on what people think about certain issues. It also sheds light on the social customs, religious and metaphysical beliefs and also the political system of the community.

1.2 The Problems of the Research

In line with the background discussed previously, the research problems are written as the following:

1. What taboo words are used across times in Simalungun?
2. What taboo words are used across demographic communities in Simalungun
3. What patterns of change occur in the use of the taboo words across in Simalungun?

1.3 The Objectives of the Research

With the reference to the research problems, the research objectives are:

1. To ascertain the use of taboo words across times in Simalungun.
2. To ascertain the use of taboo words across demographic areas in Simalungun.
3. To search the patterns of change in the use of taboo words in Simalungun.

1.4 The Scope of the Research

This study is in the scope of sociolinguistics in which the language is studied from the perspective of how human beings use of the language in their social interaction either in a small group or large group membership. It can cover the study of language use and language attitude, language and behavior norms, which can be associated with superstition, custom in hierarchy power, obscenity, vulgarity, insults, rude expression, etc. This study belongs to the area of the study of language use and attitude and it is limited to the study of taboo words in Simalungun, as the large group of Simalungun ethnic. The taboo words used by Simalungun speakers in Pematang Siantar, Pematang Raya, and Saribu Dolok are included as smaller groups. Pattern of change in the use of the Simalungun taboo words is limited to the pattern of change existing in large groups which is in Simalungun. Due to the limitation of the time and resources, the patterns of change in the smaller group are not included.

1.5 The Significance of the Research

Practically, the research will be useful to raise positive attitude of other ethnics toward the Simalungun culture and improve their perception that the culture is one of the national assets which must be maintained and developed. For international level, the research will increase references that the foreign readers can access to facilitate their understanding that Simalungun culture is one of the national cultures that exists in Indonesia. The research is also expected to contribute to the development of

education concerning the alternative materials for the local load in the teaching of Simalungun language in elementary schools of Simalungun district and teaching the Introduction to Simalungun Culture course for S1 students in FKIP Universitas Simalungun (USI) Pematangsiantar. Through this research, the linguistic taboos are expected to be documented so that they will not disappear from Simalungun language.

Theoretically, the findings contribute to the theory of sociolinguistics, especially to the theory of how taboo words change in terms of types and use as a result of change in social or community culture and technology change including mass communication.

Populations around the world are becoming increasingly more diverse. People with different languages, religious beliefs, gender orientations, and family values interact more frequently than ever before. Such interaction change is facilitated by the increasingly modern ways of communication. Psychologists and social scientists are pressured to develop multicultural views of thought and behavior, resulting in a more inclusive worldview of human nature. The role of taboo language should be presented in a multicultural approach. In Simalungun area, there are different people ethnic groups of Batak, Jawa, Karo and Simalungun with different cultures who are living in Simalungun. This research wants to see how much the multicultural influence the existence of taboo language in Simalungun communities.

Understanding differences in offensiveness, offendedness, appropriateness, sexual expression, religious beliefs, and child rearing are just a few of the issues associated with emotional language. These issues need to be expressed and understood through cross-cultural comparisons. A more diverse world means more diverse speech which means more diverse forms of taboo language.

1.6 The Key Terms of the Research

The key terms which are used in this research are namely:

- 1.6.1 Taboo words are words that are avoided because they are deemed unfit for normal linguistic usage and by community consensus are banned in everyday language in the public domain (M. L. Apte, 1994: 284).
- 1.6.2 Patterns of change are defined the cultural themes which are recurring in a numbers of domains (Spradley) and recurrent and common which are happening many times (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014:67).
- 1.6.3 Across times refer to the period of times and ages of the informants who recognize the taboo words.
- 1.6.4 Demographic Communities refer to the people of different ages, professions, income and belief who are living in a community.
- 1.6.5 Simalungun District refers to the place where the Simalungun people reside