

A STUDY OF TABOO TERMS IN THE COMMUNICATION IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA

Abstract

Taboo is a term refers to something forbidden or unacceptable according to the norms and conventions of societies or religion. Taboo is a linguistic phenomenon which is found in all languages around the world. It is represented by using the prohibited words in speech or writing. Such words are used by people for many various reasons depending on the background and education of the speaker.

One of the areas in which such words are used are the social media such as facebook, twitter, YouTube, etc. One can notice taboo words in the posts, video content or comments.

This study concentrates on the use of taboo words in the comments of YouTube. It investigates the nature of such phenomenon linguistically and tries to justify the possible reasons behind such a problem.

It is hypothesized that:

- Taboo words compose a rate of 25% of the comments of YouTube.
- Such words are used because of anger, sadness and the influence of other people.

In order to investigate the hypotheses above, this study focuses on analyzing five samples chosen from YouTube which include clips of famous movies as well as interviews.

This study presents many important results about the use of taboo words. Among these results are the following important ones:

- Taboo words compose a rate of 5% of the comments of YouTube.
- There are four main reasons for using these words which are:
 - a- Expressing an opinion in a negative way.
 - b- expressing a state of anger.
 - c- repeating the actors' words.
 - d- expressing an opinion in a positive way.

Finally, this study ends with drawing some relevant conclusions based on the results above.

Introduction

Taboo is a term refers to a cultural and linguistic phenomenon which is found in different societies. Taboo is the use of words which cause shame and embarrassment to the hearer, or even the speaker. However, taboo words are different from one society to another and from one culture to another.

These words are affected by many psychological and social factors in the world. These factors are responsible in one way or another to use taboo words.

This study studies and examines such taboo words in the language of social media and specifically in the comments of YouTube.

This study aims to find out how, when, where and why taboo words are used by the commenters of YouTube.

This study hypothesizes that these words constitute a rate of 20% of the comments of social media. They are used because of anger, sadness and influencing by the other commenters.

This study deals with this topic in four sections : The first one is literature review, it includes an idea about the taboo as well as politeness theory and euphemism which are related with taboo, in addition to some of the previous studies about taboo. The second one is methodology and data analysis which includes an idea about the method followed in the analysis as well as the samples of the study, in addition to the analysis of the selected samples along with the results. The third section is the discussion of the results which tries to discuss the results of the samples of study as a whole for the sake of drawing the final conclusions. The last one is the conclusions.

Please note that APA style is going to be used in this study.

Section One: Origin and Meaning of Taboo

This section is going to explain meaning and types of the taboo words along with the politeness theory which is related to taboo. It also explains euphemism which is the opposite of taboo or the solution for dealing with the forbidden words. The origin of the word Taboo is borrowed from 'Tongan' the Polynesian language. It refers to "acts that are forbidden or to be avoided" (Fromkin et al. 2007: 442). O'grady et al (1996:555) define taboo as a word which "refers to a prohibition on the use of, mention of, or association with particular objects, actions, or persons." These forbidden words reflect the customs and norms of a particular society. In other words, some words are considered taboo in certain societies but they are not in others.

As far as themes are concerned, there are many types of taboo such as profanity, obscenity, vulgarity, blasphemy, name-calling and prejudices. Profanity is defined as "the abuse of anything sacred" (Montagu, 2001:101). It also refers to items which are not belonging to religion, the words which show scorn of someone or something (ibid). While obscenity is defined as "a form of swearing that makes use of indecent words and phrases"(ibid : 103). 'Blasphemy' is "the act of vilifying or ridiculing the figures of objects of religious veneration" (ibid). 'Vulgarity' is a term refers to "a form of swearing in which it is used crude words such as 'bloody' "(ibid).

The term 'insult' refers to a type of taboo found in many forms within languages. It is not preferable because it is used to describe the opposite of the person (Jay, 1997 as cited in Babou, 2014). The term 'name-calling', refers to a type of taboo words used by children such as 'stupid', 'idiot', etc to call their friends. This type is also used by parents to address their children or others (ibid). Prejudice is defined by Brown (1995:9) as "the holding of derogatory social attitudes or cognitive beliefs, the expression of negative effect, or the display of hostile or discriminatory behaviour towards members of a group on account of their membership of that group".

All languages require 'evaluative nouns' in which the speaker uses them to express his opinion towards the others. These nouns are divided into two main types: firstly, the nouns which express the positive emotions of the speaker towards the others such as carpenter and architect, while those which express the negative emotions are called 'epithets' such as wanker and fool (Ljung, 2011).

However these types are not agreed by all linguists. In other words, each linguist has his own definition for the types above which are different from the other. A clearer and easier taxonomy is

suggested by Ljung (ibid: 33) in which he presents five major themes and five minor themes of the taboo in many languages, as follow:

The Major Themes:

- 1-The religious theme .
- 2-The scatological theme .
- 3-The sex organ theme .
- 4-The sexual activities theme .
- 5-The mother (family) theme .

1-The Religious Theme

This theme refers to curses which has a relation to religion. For example, in Christianity, the taboo words are related with words like God, Jesus / Christ, the Holy Ghost and the saints. While in Islam, religious swearing includes Allah, the prophet, holy places, etc (Abed-el Jawad,2000 as cited in Ljung ,2011) .

2-The Scatological Theme

This type is the most well-known among all languages. It includes the English such as, a*s / a**e, a*****e, ar*****e, c**p, f**t, p**s, s**t and t**d (Ljung ,2011).

3-The Sex Organ Theme

In many languages, the organs of sex are considered taboo. The English examples of this theme are c**t and p***k, and the most common examples are c**k and p***y (ibid).

4-Sexual Activities Theme

This theme refers to the taboo words which are associated with sexual practices like f**k, c*****r, s**k and l**k (ibid).

5-The Mother Theme

It is the most well-known in many languages and it is widely used in English. It refers to the curses related with mother and sister such as 'son of the b***h ' (ibid).

The Minor Themes:

1-Ancestors

It plays an important role in many cultures such as those found among the Australian people, it includes using curses with reference to ancestors (ibid).

2-Animals

The animal theme is found in many expressions. For example, 'you are a dog' and b*****d (ibid).

3-Death

It refers to the terms of taboo in relation with death such as 'Eat s**t and die' (ibid).

4-Diseases

It includes the curses which use words referring to diseases such as plague, cholera and pox (ibid).

5-The Prostitution Theme

The best two examples, In English, are the words b***h and w***e which refers to a woman who take money for sexual services (ibid).

Section Two: Effecting Factors on Taboo Words and Politeness Theory

A. The Effects

1- Time

Time is one of the factors that affect on the usage of taboo words. Some words are considered taboos in the past, but overtime they lose their negative meaning and become normal words. For example, in the nineteenth century, in American culture, ladies were so much careful to say "leg" and "chicken", so they used the substituted terms which were "white meat" or "dark meat" (Eschholz et al.,1978). People, during Victorian age, were avoiding using the word 'leg', but they use the word 'limb' as a euphemism for it (Pyles, 1971).

2- Culture and Location

The use of taboo words is different from one location to another or from one culture to another. For example, today in North America, the word rooster is used instead of the embarrassing word c**k (Katamba, 2006 as cited in Ali, 2015). On the other hand, people who live and bring up in the rural areas have a tendency to use taboo words that are related to sex and the functions of body than urban people. The reason behind that is those people usually observe animal sexual behavior around them (Qanbar, 2011).

3- Gender

According to Allan & Burrige (2006), males tend to use taboo words more than females. For example "males use words such as s**t, and f**k while females use words such as 'God' or euphemisms 'darn it' and shucks" (ibid : 77). Lakoff (1975:55) states that "women are supposed to be particularly careful to say 'please' and 'thank you'.

4. Social Class

The words or vocabularies that are used by the speakers of the upper classes tend to be superior to those they are used by the lower classes. For example, in English there are words that are borrowed from Latin seem to be cleaner like the word 'mammary gland ' which is used by the upper classes instead of the taboo word 't**s' (Fromkin et al., 2007).

B. Politeness Theory

Politeness is not a natural phenomenon, but it is an important aspect in the process of human communication. Politeness is something acquired through the process of interaction in the society (Reiter, 2000). While Yule (2010: 60) defines politeness as "a fixed concept, as in the idea of polite social behavior, or etiquette, within a culture. It is also possible to specify a number of different general principles for being polite in social interaction within a particular culture. Some of these might include being tactful, generous, modest, and sympathetic towards others." He (ibid) also defines politeness in an interaction as "the means employed to show awareness of another person's face"

Politeness theory is adopted first by Brown and Levinson (1987). Their names become fixed and synonymous with the word 'politeness' itself. They consider that the concept of face as the central idea of politeness theory. 'Face' is defined as "the public self image that every member wants to claim for himself" (ibid : 61). Face consists of two opposing 'wants', negative face "is the need to be independent, to have freedom of action, and not to be imposed by others "(Yule, 2010: 61), and positive face "is the need to be accepted, even liked, by others, to be treated as member of the same group, and to know that his wants are shared by the others"(ibid: 62).

The best strategy which is suitable to deal with positive face is 'solidarity strategy'. This strategy is defined as the tendency to use positive forms like "personal information, use of nicknames, even taboo words, and slang language"(ibid : 65). While the best strategy which is used for the negative face is 'deference strategy' which is defined as the tendency to use negative forms like formal expressions, no slang language or taboo words, and "expressions that refer to neither the speaker nor the hearer" (ibid : 66).

On the other hand, Culpeper defines impoliteness as the opposite of politeness. Culpeper et. al. (2003) state that the impoliteness theory is the use of the strategies as a means to attack or break the hearer's face and make social conflict and disharmony.

It is clear that taboo words are against politeness theory (specifically deference strategy) and since taboo topics, words and language are considered inappropriate in certain contexts, one can use euphemisms instead. The word euphemism is derived from Greek and defined as "the use of an auspicious word for an inauspicious one" (Burchfield, 1986 : 13). All communities including the primitive and the advanced use euphemisms (Hughes, 2006).

So the solution for the problem of taboo words is "Euphemism" which is employed as an alternative expression when one wants to avoid losing face or causing annoyance or embarrassment to the others (Gramley and Patzold, 1992 as cited in Ali, 2015). Many euphemisms are figurative, characterized by being a metaphor. For example, the expressions "sleep with" and "go to bed with" are preferred over "have sex with" (Hughes, 2006:153). Another example is the words that are used for death. Many people, instead of saying "died", they use expressions like "passed away", "went to his reward", "departed", and "went west" (Eschholz et al, 1978: 232).

C. Previous Studies

A study was entitled "A Sociolinguistic View of Linguistic Taboo in Chinese" accomplished by two researchers: Hongxu and Guisen in 1990. They discussed how these words are created and viewed as a socio-cultural phenomenon related with the customs of society. They found that taboos fall under two categories: the first is macrolinguistic taboos which includes the words that can be seen by all speakers in a speech community to be dirty and shameful such as sex and death. While the second category is microlinguistic taboos which includes certain words that can be perceived as taboos in relation to a specific context (Hongxu and Guisen, 1990 as cited in Ali, 2015).

Another study was entitled "A Sociolinguistic View of Linguistic Taboo in Jordanian Arabic" accomplished by the researcher Alkhatib in 1995. He tries to describe how linguistic taboo words are created and what are the possible strategies that can be used in order to avoid using such words. He found that socio-cultural factors can determine how to use taboo words and found the alternative euphemism of these words (Alkhatib, 1995 as cited in Ali, 2015).

The first study mentioned above, by Hongxu and Guisen (1990), concentrated on the types of taboo. It distinguished between two main categories of taboo : macrolinguistic and microlinguistic taboo words. The current study uses the taxonomy of another study (or linguist) in its analysis, and it aims to investigate the reasons which push the commenters on YouTube to use the taboo words. The second study, by Alkhatib (1995), studied how the taboo words are created, and tried to suggest a solution to this phenomenon by using the euphemism words. The current study also investigates the nature of taboo words but it does not strive to find a solution for this problem.

Section Three Methodology & Data Analysis

3.1. Preliminary Remarks

This section shows the method which is used in this study (the model and way of analysis as well as the chosen samples. It also includes the analysis of the samples selected from YouTube by using the model of Ljung (2012).

3.2. The Adopted Model

The adopted model in this study is the major and minor themes adopted by Ljung (2011) which are illustrated in pages (3 – 5) along with the type of taboo, defined by the same linguist, call-naming illustrated in page (3).

3.3. The Samples of the Study

The samples are chosen from YouTube as follow:

The first sample includes a video clip of the well-known movie (Child's Play I). It is considered as a horror movie.

The second sample includes a video clip of the same movie above but Part II, The third sample includes a video clip of the well-known movie (The Mask). It is considered as a comic movie.

The fourth sample includes a video clip of an interview with two Iraqi gays who escaped from Iraq to the USA.

The fifth sample includes a video clip of an interview with the famous actor Tom Cruise.

Method of Analysis of the present study is mainly concerned as first the comments which include the taboo words will be copied from the YouTube. Then, the taboo words will be shadowed in order to be recognized. After that, according to the model of Ljung (2011), the taboo words will be classified along with the number of frequency of each taboo word in each sample. Later, the reasons and environment which make the commenter write such words will be analyzed. Finally, all the results will be analyzed together in order to reach the final conclusions.

2.5. Data Analysis

The First Sample

The first sample is a video clip of the movie of Child's Play (Part One) on the channel of [ChuckysFans2000](#). This movie is about a great magician who conveys his evil soul inside a doll. Later, this doll becomes a great killer and kills many characters in the movie. The video clip is only a part of 8 minutes of the whole movie. It constitutes the first minutes of the movie in which the magician appears while he is followed by a policeman, the magician enters a doll shop and utters taboo words and then conveys his soul inside a doll.

This video is watched by 1,365,909 till now, and there are 706 comments till now. 48 out of 706 comments contain taboo words which constitute a rate of 6.8% out of the total comments, as follows:

1- jhgepiquowe ty8

His voice is so dark so deep so scary, he has one of the most f**king amazing voices i have ever heard.... He can play the role a total psycho great with a voice like this!!!

2- Travitas James Dimas

"YOU HEAR THIS, YOU SON OF A B***H! IM GONNA GET YOU FOR IT! I'M GONNA GET YOU & I'M GONNA GET EDDIE NO MATTER WHAT!!!"-Charles Lee Ray

3- Attitude Problem

The "timing" of this movie is far scarier than the story Where is the remaining f**king movie?? :(

4- bobSCOTT99

8:01 Ohhhhhh... s**t!

5- Annabel Wilson

"Oh S**t I'm dying" Me: Me too mate. Me too.

6- Anthony

You son of a b****h!!!

7- logang 4 life

Why are the graphics like s**t

8- Ghost of War 1776

I grew up to this hahaa I thought of how id kill him sooooo many times. Melt his a*s down, mix it with some concrete and send it to the deepest part of the ocean I could find.

9- Matthew Jewell Too

Stupid woman had to tell the cops. Why didn't she just let him be part of the family? He's a good guy!

10- eduardo ramirez

Why the f**k would you only upload part 1 but not the rest of the movie?

11- catherine roberts

Not that I agree with what Chucky does - the whole killing thing - but I felt REALLY sorry for him when the a*****e coward Eddie just LEFT him like that. Snorts THAT children, is what we call NOT A REAL FRIEND

12- dua noor

u are b****h

13- quicksilver2055

I dont f**king get this? it makes no sense how he got into the doll?

14- halil ergule

ç**k tatlı b****h 😊😊😊

15- shahdrahman96

where the hell is f**ken part 2 huh!

16- yeetskeet

When I first saw this I was really young and almost s**t myself from being so scared.

17- Snowbird

Sick b*****d.

18- snakeeyes541

Used to scare the s**t outta me

19- Brandon the don

Anybody wondered how mike survived when the lightening struck I mean ik its just a movie but no one could of survived that s**t.

20- Chucky The Doll

YOU HERE THIS YOU SON OF A B***H IM GONNA GET YOU FOR IT IM GONNA GET YOU AND IM GONNA GET EDDY NO MATTER WHAT!! i gotta find something i gotta find sombody i dont know i gotta find sombody gotta find somebody ada due damella give me the power i beg of you leveu mercier depou shiou sacouse entiene ledevou de mobocheu morteism lieu de vocuier de mieu vochtte adaleu bwaseu damella ADALEU BWASEU DAMELLA ADALEU BWASEU DAMELLA ADALEU BWASEU DAMELLA

The Second Sample

The second sample is a video clip of the movie of Child's Play (Part Two) on the channel of [ZK NIGHTMAREZ](#). In part two of Child's Play, the doll continues to kill and make evil activities like the first part of the movie. This video clip is only part of 4 minutes of the whole movie. In this video, the doll starts the video with taboo words "Chucky is back b***hes" and then appears to write a taboo word (f**k you b***h) on the exam paper of a child (Andy) who has bought this doll in the first part of the movie. Later, his teacher reads this word on the paper and decides to punish Andy for writing such forbidden word.

This video is watched by 583,499 till now, and there are 562 comments till now. 17 out of 562 comments contain taboo words which constitute a rate of 3% out of the total comments, as follows:

1- zero granger

This stupid woman really thought he wrote that? He's 8 he probably didn't even know how to spell b***h. He would've thought it was spelled B-i-c-h. Stupid a*s teacher. She was one person I was glad Chucky killed.

2- Michael Vella

Dum a*s teacher

3- Josh Vega

S**t 😞😞😞😞😞😞

4- Daniel Mizeperez

get lost a*****e would be better

5- Horacio Campos

F**kin chucky 😄😄😄

6- Adrien Parker

chucky is stupid for killing the teacher

7- Brennan Young

a b***h teacher who doesn't even listen or help you with a bully, she definitely deserved it.

8- k Munoz

chuckys back b***h

9- Lila Bush
Stupid teacher

10- Juan Acuna
Chucky his bad a*s

- The word stupid repeats 4 times in the comments which belongs to call naming type.
- The word b***h repeats 3 times in the comments which belongs to prostitution theme.
- The word a*s repeats 2 times in the comments which belongs to scatological theme.
- The word a*****e repeats 3 times in the comments which belongs to scatological theme.
- The words die / death repeats 3 times in the comments which belongs to death theme.
- The word s**t repeats twice in the comments which belongs to scatological theme.
- The word f**king repeat twice in the comments which belongs to sexual activities theme.
- The word s**k repeats once in the comments which belongs to sexual activities theme.

It is also noticed that the taboo words above are used in the comments for the following reasons:

- 1- Expressing an opinion in a negative way.
- 2- Expressing a state of anger.
- 3- Repeating the words of the actors in the movie. It reflects the effect of the language of the videos on the audience. The number of comments of this group is 4 out of the total number of comments including taboo which represents a rate of 24%.

Section Four: Discussion of the Results

This section deals with the results of the analysis of the two samples in the previous section as a whole to draw the results of the study in general.

The results in the previous sections will be discussed in the following points which are accompanied with tables.

- 1- It was noticed, in the previous section, how the taboo words mentioned in the comments were classified according to their themes along with their frequency. Now the table below shows the most three taboo words repeated in each sample for the sake of determining the most frequent words and themes of taboo in YouTube.

Table No. (1) The taboo words for the five samples of the study

Sample No.	Taboo Word	frequency	Theme
1	F**k	27	Sexual activities theme
	S**t	11	Scatological theme
	B***h	7	Prostitution theme
2	Stupid	7	Call- Naming type
	B***h	6	Prostitution theme
	A*s	4	Scatological theme

The table above shows that there is no logical justification for the frequency of the words and themes of taboo above except that YouTube is a community, and as it is known, each community has its own norms, conventions and properties which recognizes its member. As stated by Botello and Sahlin (2011) "YouTube is not only about videos ... YouTube is a community in which

people sharing and watching videos." One of the norms of YouTube community is the use of taboos. The commenters, from all over the world, tend to use the taboos in their comments according to the norms of YouTube than to the norms of their cultures or societies. Thus, one can hardly recognize the commenter's culture through his comment.

It was also noticed, through the analysis of each sample in the previous section, how the video content affects on the language of the commenters. Now table (2) shows a summery to the results of the two samples together and explains how the video content affects on the rate of using taboo in the comments.

Table No. (2) summery to the results of the study samples

The Sample No.	The video content	The rate of the comments of taboo to the total	Expressing an opinion in a negative way	Expressing an opinion in a positive way	Expressing a state of anger	Repeating the actors' words
1	Includes dirty words	6.9%	61%	9%	19%	12%
2	Includes provocation	4%	42%	1%	35%	25%

According to the table above, it is noticed:

- How the dirty content of the video is reflected on the comments. The two highest rates of the comments including taboo words are in the 1st sample (6.9%).
- The provocative content of the video occurs after the dirty content. The rate of the comments including taboos reaches to (4%) in the 2nd sample.

Conclusions

- 1- The rate of comments including taboo words reaches to 5% out of all the investigated comments. The reason underlies this expectation is the power of the taboo words compared with other words.
- 2- The taboo words are used to express an opinion or an idea in a negative way, as it is seen in the study samples.
- 3- The rate of taboo words will rise if the content of the video includes something provocative.
- 4- The taboo words used in the videos of YouTube affect directly on the language of the commenters. This seems clearly in the comments, the commenters tend to write the same taboo words of the people or characters in the videos.
- 5- The taboo words used by the commenters themselves affect on the language of the other commenters. This might be seen in the first sample which records the highest rate of using taboo words although the content of the video seems similar to that of the second one.
- 6- The commenters of YouTube tend to use taboo words in rather similar way regardless of their cultures and societies.

- 7- The language used in the comments of YouTube seems to be more informal, it contains a lot of mistakes and taboo words.
- 8- The most frequent themes used in the comments of YouTube are sexual activities, scatological and prostitution themes.

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