

CATEGORIES AND FUNCTIONS OF ENGLISH TABOO WORDS IN THE FILM “BLINDSPOTTING” (2018)

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ABSTRACT

The taboo word is a word that is avoided because it is felt to have a 'strong' meaning so that some types of taboo words cannot just be spoken by anyone or anywhere. To overcome this, one usually chooses to use other words that are safer. This paper aims to determine the types of taboo words in the film "Blindspotting" based on Ronald Wardhaugh's theory which divides them into several categories, namely: sex, death, excretion, bodily functions, religious matters, politics, mother-in-law, animals, and cultural matter, as well as the function of each taboo word in the film which he divides it into four functions, such as: showing contempt, drawing attention, being provocative or aggressive, and mocking authority. The method used to analyze this film is a qualitative descriptive method where the researcher describes, analyzes, and discusses the data in the film as it is in narrative form. The results showed that there are seven categories of taboo words in the film, included: sex, death, excretion, bodily functions, religious matters, animals, and cultural matters. Sex and bodily function are the most used category in the film, while cultural matters are the least used. Of the four functions of Ronald Wardhaugh, All of them are found in the film.

Keywords: Blindspotting; Ronald Wardhaugh; Taboo Words.

ABSTRAK

Kata tabu adalah kata yang dihindari penggunaannya karena memiliki makna yang dirasa 'kuat'. Oleh karenanya, beberapa jenis kata tabu tidak bisa diucapkan oleh sembarang orang ataupun di sembarang tempat. untuk mengatasinya, seseorang biasanya memilih menggunakan kata lain yang lebih aman. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui jenis kata tabu dalam film “Blindspotting” berdasarkan pada teori Ronald Wardhaugh yang membaginya dalam beberapa kategori, yaitu: sex, death, excretion, bodily functions, religious matters, politics, mother-in-law, animals, dan cultural matter, juga fungsi penggunaan kata tabu dalam film yang ia klasifikasikan dalam empat fungsi, antara lain: showing contempt, drawing attention, being provocative or aggressive, dan mocking authority. Metode yang dilakukan dalam analisis film adalah metode deskriptif kualitatif dimana peneliti mendeskripsikan, menganalisis, dan mendiskusikan data dalam film secara apa adanya dalam bentuk narasi.. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ada tujuh kategori kata tabu dalam film, antara lain: sex, death, excretion, bodily functions, religious matters, animals, and cultural matte.. Kata tabu kategori sex dan bodily functions adalah kategori terbanyak yang digunakan dalam film, sedangkan cultural matter adalah yang jenis paling sedikit penggunaannya. Dari empat fungsi penggunaan kata tabu menurut Wardhaugh, keempatnya (showing contempt, drawing attention, being provocative or aggressive, dan mocking authority) ada dalam dalam film Blindspotting.

Kata Kunci: Blindspotting; Ronald Wardhaug; Kata Tabu.

INTRODUCTION

As a member of a social group, everyone should have to interact with one another. The interaction aims to share ideas and express emotions and feelings. To be able to achieve the goals of the interaction, everyone would need the help of language. Language serves as a tool that facilitates interaction between humans that has its own rules of use.

Language procedures to convey ideas and express emotions must always be considered. Everyone be necessary to always look at the conditions and situations in which he is in. He must always pay attention to the context of the conversation, in other words, when someone wants to speak or produce a text, he should consider who is invited to speak or who the reader is. He must pay attention to the close relationship, the vertical relationship as well as the level of formality. Besides that, it must also look at the place, time, knowledge of the interlocutor and so on so that the speech expressed can be understood (Saifudin, 2019). In communication, it has to always be remembered that every place has certain norms and rules that must be obeyed, including the rules in language.

Every place has rules about words that are avoided or taboo words. If the word taboo is spoken, it means that someone has violated a norm or rule in a society. Such violations can result in a person being penalized or punished. One word that is considered 'normal' in one society may be considered taboo by another. Therefore, learning the norms and rules of language in a society is necessary before someone starts interacting. However, there are always people that prepared to break taboo rules to show their freedom of speech from such social constraints or to show that taboo rules are irrational and unjustified (Wardhaugh, 2006).

The true taboo word does not always have a negative meaning in the form of dirty words, some of them have a positive meaning in the form of holy and sacred words that should not be said in any place such as the word 'Oh My God' in English. Freud stated in Sumarsono that, *"For us, the meaning of taboo expressions divided into two opposite directions. On the one hand, taboo means holy or sanctified but on the other hand, it means unnatural (mysterious), dangerous, forbidden, and unclean. The opposite of taboo in Polynesian is noa, which is common and generally accessible. Thus, something resembling the concept of opposition is taboo; taboo itself essentially expresses prohibitions and restrictions. The combination of the meaning of "holy and terrible" is often biased in expressing taboo meanings* (Ar, Juita, & Burhanuddin, 2015).

In certain fields such as art and comedy, taboo words are not a problem even though they are often spoken. When watching a comedy act or listening to a song, for example, the use of taboo words will not cause discomfort for those who hear it (Affini, 2017.). Compared to denotative meaning, the word taboo is also more likely to have a connotative meaning. Apart from comedy acts and song lyrics, taboo words can also be found in films. In a film, taboo words can always show a person's social culture, educational background and identity (Kusumaningsih, 2019). To analyze

taboo words, the researcher chose a film entitled *Blindspotting*, a comedy-drama film launched in 2018, which was written, produced, and starring Daveed Diggs and Rafael Casal. The Screenplay for this film itself written by the duo over a period of nine years, tells of a black man named Collin Hopskin undergoing the last three days of his probationary period before being declared unconditionally free. Collin spends his days with his white friend, Miles Turner. In his probationary period, Hopskin witnessed a white cop shooting a black man. In this film, Diggs and Casal wanted to show the reality of life that happens in the city of Oakland, California which never separated from racism, police violence, and gentrification. This film will be adapted into a series that will be released in 2021.

This film deserves to be the object of research because of its good plot, beautiful story message and shows a lot of interactions between Collin and Miles, friendship between men that cannot be separated from taboo words, with all its variety of subjects as mentioned by Ronald Wardhaugh in his book *An Introduction To Sociolinguistics*, such as follows: sex, death, excretion, bodily functions, religious matters, politics, mother-in-law, animals, and cultural matters, and its usage functions, such as showing contempt, drawing attention, being provocative or aggressive, dan mocking authority (Wardhaugh, 2006). Although polemical, the taboo words used by the characters make the storyline more colourful and interesting. Regarding the taboo words found, the researcher wants to analyze and classify the categories of each taboo word and the function of its pronunciation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Taboo Words

Language serves as a tool to convey the cultural meaning of the speaker's speech, but there are forms of language that should be avoided for pronunciation for various reasons, namely taboo words. The word taboo, which became known at the end of the eighteenth century, comes from the Tongan language *tabu*. According to Radcliffe-Brown, the word taboo in Polynesian means 'to forbid', 'forbidden', and can be applied to various kinds of prohibitions (Allan & Burrige, 2006). To quote Timothy Jay, "*Taboo words represent a class of emotionally arousing references concerning body products, body parts, sexual acts, ethnic or racial insults, profanity, vulgarity, slang, and scatology*" (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008), while Wardaugh defines the word taboo as follows, "*a taboo is something that is prohibited and avoided in society, which is believed to be detrimental to its members because it can cause anxiety, embarrassment and shame*" (Wardhaugh, 2006).

Discussing taboo issues means also discussing the issue of politeness in language. So far, because of the politeness of language, something cannot be said, or can only be said to certain circumstances or certain people. Referring to Brown and Levinson in his book entitled *Politeness: Some Universals In Language Usage*, in

communication one, must always try to save the 'face' of the listener or interlocutor by as much as possible not to use utterances that are considered threatening or in terms of both referred to as face-threatening acts (FTA). Brown and Levinson then introduce some politeness strategies that can be used. The following is a sequence of strategies from the most threatening, including bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off the record, and even don't do the FTA (face-threatening acts) (Yusny, 2013).

In the case of taboo words which are usually synonymous with strong, overly sensitive, offensive, or even threatening words, it should not be said openly (bald on record strategy) and better not to say (don't do the TFA strategy) or replaced with other more friendly words. Compared to 'neutral' words, taboo words will be remembered better. This happens because words that are produced at a deep level (semantic, connotative), will be easier to remember than words that are produced superficially or denotatively (Jay, Caldwell-Harris, & King, 2008). The word taboo itself is synonymous with informal moments in everyday life. Taboo words will not be found at meetings with company leaders or in report essays. An English teacher will not pronounce the word 'ass' as the meaning of a part of the body instead of saying the word 'butt/bottom' even though they mean the same thing. Because in English the word 'ass' is one of the taboo words.

Taboo words are not only spoken by men, but also by women. Between the two –men and women-, men have more frequency in the use of taboo words than women. Taboo words and swear words are signs of intimacy in relationships between men. In a study conducted by Timothy Jay on who said taboo words more frequently in public, men accounted for 67% of all data, and the results narrowed to 55% in 2006. Men said more offensive words (eg fuck, shit, motherfucker) more often than women. Women say oh my god, bitch, piss and retard (ed) more often than men. Men and women say taboo words more often in one-gender conversations than in mixed-gender conversations. About age, swear words are spoken by all age levels, but reach a peak at the adolescent level and beyond (Jay, 2009). During childhood, a person internalizes taboo words on an individual level. At that time when someone said a taboo word, he would be punished by his parents or caregivers. When a person is old enough to have an awareness of social standards, he will learn taboo words through socialization which creates verbal knowledge about etiquette using taboo words and swearing (Jay, 2009). At the institutional level, taboo words are certain forms of speech that arise from authorities who have the power to restrict speech and can act as arbitrators for harmful speech. Such as law courts, religious leaders, teachers, and mass media managers. The authorities that give rise to taboo words have the power to control and punish those who violate the prohibition (Jay, 2009).

Categories and Functions of Taboo Words

Ronald Wardhaugh in his book *An Introduction To Sociolinguistics* mentioned categories of a tabooed subject that can vary widely, are as follows: sex, death, excretion, bodily functions, religious matters, and politics (Wardhaugh, 2006).

The first category is the words that related to sexual activity and its activist. The example of words that included to death category is hell and die. The excretion category is a word that is related to what someone does or releases in the toilet and the results of the excretion process. The bodily functions category is the words that are related to some parts of the body that can be rude to be spoken. The religious matters category is the words that are related to religion that is not spoken at the right time and place. The politics category might be the symbolization of a political figure and his follower into something else for an insulting purpose (Arif, Nababan, & Santosa, 2019).

In addition, Wardhaugh also mentioned that subjects, such as mother-in-law, certain game animals, and cultural matters as using left hand (the origin of *sinister*), are subjects that must be avoided to say or to use carefully (Wardhaugh, 2006). Further, in the same book, Wardhaugh later mentioned that taboo words –linguistic taboo- are often misused by someone to draw attention to oneself, or to show contempt, or to be provocative or aggressive, or even to mock authority (Wardhaugh, 2006).

RESEARCH METHOD

By the literature review above, the researcher relies on Ronald Wardhaugh's theory which divides taboo words into several categories, including sex, death, excretion, bodily functions, religious matters, politics, mother-in-law, animals, and cultural matters. to analyze the form of taboo words. Meanwhile, for the function of using taboo words, the author refers to the same theorist, Ronald Wardhaugh, who divides it into four functions, including showing contempt, drawing attention, being provocative or aggressive, and mocking authority. To facilitate the analysis process, the researcher chose to use descriptive qualitative methods which use descriptions and words to study human experiences from the subject's perspective (Palmer & Bolderston, 2006). Researchers searched for data in the form of taboo words in the dialogue of the film *Blindspotting* (2018), then noted them to then analyze the categories and function of each taboo word. The taboo words found were then grouped according to their type and function of use to be presented in a table. Primary data was obtained from the dialogue film *Blindspotting* (2018) while secondary data was obtained from articles, dictionaries, journals, and books.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Types of Taboo Words in Film *Blindspotting*

Ronald Wardhaugh in his book suggests that there are several categories of taboo words and expressions, including sex, death, excretion, bodily functions, religious matters, politics, mother-in-law, animals, and cultural matters. After conducting the analysis, the data collected shows that there are twenty kinds of taboo

words and expressions in the film, five words or 25% fall into the sex category, two words or 10% fall into the death category, two words or 10% fall into the excretion category, five words or 25% fall into bodily functions category, three words or 15% fall into religious matters category, two words or 10% fall into the animal category and one word or 5% falls into cultural matter category. The taboo word for sex and bodily functions occupies the first position as the most common type of taboo used in the film, while the taboo word for cultural matter occupies the last place. The following is an analysis of each category of taboo words in the film *Blindspotting*:

a. Sex

The researcher found five words related to sexual activities, including: 'fuck (in/ing/ed), mother fucker, and fuckboy' which means sexual activity or people having sex, as well as 'bitch' and 'son of a bitch' which can be interpreted as a naughty and wild woman, and often engage in sexual activities.

b. Death

In this film, the researcher found two words that considered two this category, which are hell and damn. Hell is a place where bad people will be placed after death, while damn is eternal punishment that bad people will suffer in hell after death.

c. Excretion

This category of the taboo word included words that relate to what someone does or releases in the toilet. Researchers found two types of lavatory words in the film, which are shit and bullshit. Both words have the literal meaning of faeces as a result of the human digestive process. Because it is related to what someone releases in the toilet, the researchers put these two words into the excretion category.

d. Bodily Functions

The researcher found five words that were included in this category of a taboo word. Data shows that these words which are considered as parts of the body not used properly, they are: ass which means buttocks, dick and balls which means male genitals, pussy which means female genitals and middle finger which is often interpreted as a symbol of the male genitalia.

e. Religious Matters

The taboo word for religious matters category are words that include holy and sacred words that cannot be said carelessly. In the film *Blindspotting*, researchers found three kinds of taboo words for this category, including Jesus, oh lord, and oh my god. The word 'Jesus' means the name of God in Christianity, while 'oh lord' and 'oh my god' were two expressions that actually should be used when praising god. The three words mentioned above will not be considered taboo if they are spoken by

and at the right time, for example by a priest during a joint service in the church.

f. Animal

In the animal category, two words were found by the researcher, such as horse and dog. These two words that have the literal meaning as kinds of animal, considered to be taboo when not used as they should be.

g. Cultural Matter

In this category, the researcher found one kind of word nigga/nigger that is much related to black culture. This word is considered as a most taboo word in America that belongs exclusively to black people. Using this word without concern will be too offensive and sometimes even threatening for many people.

To clarify the results of the analysis, data regarding the categories of taboo words uttered by the characters of the film *Blindspotting* and their usage quantity will be shown in table 1. The Categories of Taboo Words

No	Categories	Words	Quantity
1	Sex (25%)	Fuck/ Fuckin/ Fucking/ Fucked	133
		Mother Fucker	23
		Fuckboy	1
		Bitch	10
		Son Of Bitch	2
2	Death (10%)	Damn	5
		Hell	6
3	Excretion (10%)	Shit	64
		Bullshit	2
4	Bodily Function (25%)	Ass	13
		Balls	1
		Middle Finger	1
		Dick	1
		Pussy	3
5	Religious Matters (25%)	Oh My God	4
		Jesus	1
		Oh Lord	1
6	Animal (10%)	Horse	1
		Dog	1
7	Cultural Matters (5%)	Nigga/Nigger	37
Total			310

Regarding the words that are used quantitatively by the characters in the film, the data in the table shows that taboo words and expressions are spoken 310 times by the characters in the film *Blindspotting*. The most frequently spoken words and expressions are the word fuck (in/ing/ed), as in the following expressions *'I fuck with these wedges though'* (*Blindspotting*, 03:54), *'get the fuck of, get of!'* (08:49), *'why the fuck is he wearing his hat all low?'* (15:21) and *'he's just fucking with you, babe!'* (17:07), while the least spoken words in the dialogue, are between others: horse, dog, middle finger, balls, dick, fuckboy, Oh Lord and Jesus, which are expressed in the following expressions: *'I hope it's moving you off your high horse!'* (40:10), *'hey, you better know where you at, fuckboy!'* (50:17), *'this dude sees the scorpions bowl, and like, he grows hair on his chest, like, his balls drop'* (48:32), and *'I fuckin' flippin the middle finger to feeling irrelevant'* (1:25:50).

The Functions of Taboo Words in The Film *Blindspotting*

Ronald Wardhaugh, related to the function of using taboo words, mentioned taboo words used on occasion for several motives, such as: showing contempt, drawing attention, being provocative or aggressive, and mocking authority. After the analysis process, it was found that there are all four functions of taboo words in the film *Blindspotting*. Here are some samples from the dialogue in the film *Blindspotting*:

First Sample:

Collin : *How much (juice)?*

Cashier : *10\$*

Collin and Miles : *What?!*

Miles : *What is this, the blood of fucking Jesus?! (Blindspotting, 15:57)*

In the conversation above, there are two taboo words spoken by Miles' character, 'fucking' and 'Jesus'. The word 'fuck' itself can be said to be the most obscene word in English which means 'to have sex', but in this conversation, Miles' character intends to condemn the unreasonable price of juice. While Jesus is God in Christianity. The word is a sacred word that should not be said carelessly let alone combine in a sentence with a word that means obscene because it is included in indecency.

The two taboo words above are used to **show contempt** that Miles aimed at the seller of the juice. He thought that the juice doesn't taste good at all yet has an unreasonable price. Miles thought that for ten dollars he should have had a really good drink, unlike that juice.

Second Sample: *Collin: this dog ain't millionaire but just as rare. (Blindspotting, 43:11)*

The word dog means a four-legged animal that is a human's best friend. The dog referred to by Collin's character is not a dog in the real sense, but intended to refer to someone he saw in the photo and slightly insult the life he lived. The word

dog in the film uttered by Collin character used **to show some contempt** aimed at the man in the photo by insulting and name-calling him.

Third Sample: Collin: **Nigga**, I got three days left on this probation, Miles, so let me on out of the car! (Blindspotting, 04:28)

In Collin's expression above, there is a taboo word 'Nigga'. The word 'Nigga or Nigger' means negro or black race. Nigga, nigger or N-word, is probably America's most taboo word. Having a long history, this word refers to black people or negroes. If the word is spoken by black people to each other or non-blacks, then it will not be a problem. However, if the word is spoken by a non-black person to a black person or a negro, then it can be interpreted as an insult, even though it is not. It is a common belief in the black community that the N-word is a word that should be used exclusively by black people only. This perspective generates double standards—blacks can say it, non-blacks can't (Harkness, 2008). The taboo word 'Nigga' itself has indirectly shown the social culture and identity of film characters.

In the expression above, Collin used the word nigga to **draw attention** from his friend Miles to let her out of the car. As he is still on his probation days, he shouldn't have done anything bad or considered crime as his friend planning to do, or the police will not release him from jail. He shouldn't have been in the car in the first place, so he hopes Miles will let him out.

Fourth Sample: Miles: Take your **motherfucking ass** over there and take the ... (Blindspotting, 06:20)

There are two taboo words in the expression above uttered by Miles. The expression is aimed at the kwikway burger employee who tells him to specify the meat he wants so that kwikway doesn't give him the vegan burger he got. In other words, the employee is trying to tell that it's not kwikway fault that he got the vegan one. Miles, who doesn't agree, said the expression above to try **to be aggressive or provocative** and wanna start a fight with the employee.

Fifth Sample: Miles :why **the fuck** is he (the cop) wearing his hat all low? (Blindspotting, 15:21)

The expression above was said by Miles when he saw a picture of a white cop with a full uniform on the television news. He wants **to mock the cop (authority)** whom he thinks strangely wear a hat. Besides that, the cop on the news was the one that his friend Collin saw has shot a black man in the street. The news wasn't true, it's made up just because the victim was a black man.

Sixth Sample: Collin: what? **Nigga**, can I better myself? (Blindspotting, 39:20)

In the sample above, found another taboo word 'Nigga'. The word 'Nigga or Nigger' means Negro or black race. The word as previously mentioned is the most taboo in general in America. This word was an exclusive word that only black people

could use. Collin's character in the film is a black man with big braids and he said the above expression to call his white friend, Miles. As Collin wants to tell ask about something important, he tries **to draw attention** by saying the nigga word to Miles who questions his efforts to improve himself for a black man like him.

CONCLUSION

Taboo Words, although it raises a lot of debate it is widely used, especially in informal situations. This type of word is very difficult to separate from everyday interactions. In the film or play, taboo words used by the characters proved to add a lot of colours and make the storyline even more interesting. Through the taboo words used, it can be identified level of interpersonal closeness between characters, educational or even their cultural background, and so on. Nevertheless, for the sake of language politeness, one must always pay attention to where he is talking, with whom, and what about. It has to always be remembered that every place has its own language rules and norms. Not all words can be used to express ideas and feelings. In order of language politeness, several things can be said directly, but some others can only be said indirectly or even not at all. Taboo words that have a strong meaning, are too emotional or even offensive need to be replaced with more friendly words.

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