



TABOO AND EUPHEMISMS IN BATAK TOBA CULTURE

Reka Simangunsong¹, Tasnim Lubis^{2}, T. Thyrhaya Zein³*

^{1,2,3}Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan - Indonesia

Abstract. Even though both are prohibitions, the terms taboo and taboo are two different things. Taboo causes violators to be plagued, while taboo only causes physical sanctions or social sanctions. To avoid violating the pronunciation of taboo words, substituting words or sentences that are considered taboo is carried out. Suppose spoken in a context to change the connotation of the consequences of the mention (euphemism). This study focuses on finding out what taboos and euphemisms are in the Toba Batak culture. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative by using observation and interview techniques. The study results found that there were five types of taboos and euphemisms found in the Toba Batak culture. First, taboos and euphemisms on gender {*boru-boru* > *ito* (woman), *ripe* > *parnijabu* (wife)}. Second, taboos and euphemisms are related to body parts {*mapampang* > *hahurangan dipamatang* (disabled)}. Third, taboos and euphemisms related to death {*mate* > *monding* (death)}. Fourth, taboos and euphemisms are related to philosophy, religion or customs, such as the taboo on marrying a clan.

Keywords: Taboo, Euphemism, Batak Toba.

Received 13 April 2021 | Revised 25 June 2021 | Accepted 27 August 2021

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia as a country has many cultures, tribes, customs, regional languages and upholds cultural norms and rules adopted by the community itself. Culture affects the way a person speaks in every line of life. Culture can be said to be something that has been passed down from generation to generation by its predecessors, both in the form of language, norms that apply in society agreed on rules as guidelines in social life. The young generation has the right to get knowledge about the way of life and socializing in the community and how to treat the surrounding environment [1]. Indonesia is known as a pluralistic society that upholds the value of politeness both in language and in communication.

The Batak Toba is one of the tribes that upholds language and culture in every activity of their life. The Batak Toba tribe has taboos in their language and communication when faced with every activity of their life, be it personal

*Corresponding author at: Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan - Indonesia

E-mail address: tasnimlubis@usu.ac.id

communication, normal behavior, or conveying thoughts to others. They are faced with communication or language [2]. Some rules are used to communicate to older, younger, relatives, age, and daily communication (euphemism).

Taboo is a prohibition against something according to custom, religion, or local custom. "A prohibition, which, if violated, leads to an automatic penalty inflicted by magic and religion," when a taboo is violated, it will cause a disaster, misfortune or punishment for those who deliberately violate it. Taboo is applied to language and in the form of behavior, attitudes, and words. Taboos to refine the meaning or make it more positive conveyed are replaced with other words or sentences that are more polite. Euphemism can be interpreted as a good word based on the morphological process. Euphemisms are often referred to as preferred expressions because they are considered expressions that do not hurt the hearer [3]. The form of euphemism itself can be in the form of grammatical units. Taboos and euphemisms are two common and closely related language phenomena, and they are also a common cultural phenomenon [4].

Batak Toba, in their language, has various perspectives, both in language, culture and a point of view on activities and social values. The Batak Toba people agree to replace the taboo words with meaning. Words and expressions that are more subtle or have a more positive meaning is conveyed by the speaker to the recipient of the speech. Besides, the community also has the perspective that when faced with the social society, it is not allowed to use arbitrary language or manners in language so that there is harmony in culture in the Batak Toba society.

Research on taboos and euphemisms in the Toba Batak society is interesting because it deals with describing their character. This study focused on mapping what is considered taboo and what euphemisms are contained in the Batak Toba culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language in aspects of human life, including cross-cultural communication, also examines language in society—the relationship of language to culture and related aspects in it. Different cultures may have different expectations about stylistic choices, language use, and other preferences in the same genre [5]. There are nine levels of analysis that are focused on cross-cultural communication research, which culture can be seen in the following explanation; (1) propagated mythic ideals; (2) mainstream promotion of mass trends; (3) societal norms prevailing in society); (4) expected behavior mechanics; (5) integrated meshworks which include real arrangements or job descriptions (7) mindless personal

responses to familiarity; (8) personal matrix options, such as recognizing that binary theories at each end of a spectrum must realize that instead, some cultures are both traditional and modern at the same time; and (9) personalized meaning.

Taboo and Euphemism

"Taboo is the prohibition or avoidance in any society of behavior believed to be harmful to its members in that it would cause them anxiety, embarrassment, or shame. Wadrugh said that taboo is a prohibition or avoidance by community groups from behavior that is believed to be harmful to society individuals because it will bring anxiety, shame or something embarrassing. It is an extremely strong politeness constraint. Consequently, so far as language is concerned, certain things are not to be said or certain objects can be referred to only in certain circumstances, for example, only by certain people, or through deliberate circumlocutions, i.e., euphemistically" [6].

This is an emphasis on courtesy that applies in society. Thus, some words or utterances should not be spoken in a community group. Of course, the object can be replaced or exchanged only on something that has been determined or agreed upon as an utterance worthy of being spoken or spoken (euphemism). At the same time, euphemism is a subtle expression that substitutes expressions considered rude or unpleasant.

Taboo is a very broad subject to know as in taboo on gender, death, excrement, bodily functions, religion and politics. Taboo words are divided into two, namely positive taboos (words or expressions that are prohibited because of harmful powers and negative taboos (words or expressions that are prohibited because of forces that pollute or damage a person's life force [7]. These expressions are those that are agreed to be considered good by the community for certain reasons, such as not violating society's morals, philosophy, religion, and social norms.

Taboos and euphemisms are linguistic phenomena that are very interesting to study and explore because the study of euphemisms can describe various changes in language cultural perspectives in a pluralistic society. People resort to euphemisms either because they want to be polite or do not want to utter words deemed too harsh by the speakers or hide unwanted realities. One of the essential functions of euphemism is to make the other party forget about the taboo [8].

Batak Toba

Batak Toba is one of the tribes in Indonesia. The Batak tribe consists of 6 parts including; Toba, Karo, Simalungun, Pak Dairi, Angkola and Mandailing. Batak Toba lives in the northern part of the Tapanuli district. The factors that influence their language are; attitudes, language addressing and metaphorical expressions. Batak Toba is known for upholding three philosophies of life, namely *dalihan Natolu*. They uphold this philosophy, namely the *dalihan natolu* social relationship system, manifested in very thick kinship relations based on blood and marriage descent, which have been passed from generation to generation until now.

The cultural system, *dalihan natolu* or often also familiar with the term 'three stoves', has a principal meaning. The three stoves in Batak culture have different duties and power from other cultural values in Sumatra, such as three *sejarangan* stoves, three *sepilin* threads, three *umbrellas*, *sekaki*, etc. It functions as a guide that regulates, controls and gives direction to the behavior and actions (attitude or pattern of action) of the Batak Toba people. Therefore *dalihan natolu* is a cultural system which, for the Toba Batak people, the values it contains are used as a way of life and at the same time become a source of motivation to behave. Batak Toba people live *dalihan natolu* as a cultural value system that provides guidelines for orientation, perception, and definition of reality [9].

METHOD

This research uses the descriptive qualitative method. The qualitative descriptive aims to describe and summarize various conditions, situations, or phenomena of social reality that exist in society or the object of research. The data were in the form of oral and written data, where oral data is the primary data. They was supported by written data which is secondary data to find taboos and euphemisms in the *dalihan natolu* in Batak Toba culture. Oral data was obtained from an interview with a native speaker of the Toba Batak language, M. Silaen (59 years), who is a native of Batak speaker in the village of Situa-Tua, sub-district. Sigumpar Kab. Toba. Secondary data were obtained from written sources regarding the lingual context written by Subroto 1992. To obtain primary data in analyzing obtained by using observation and interview techniques, namely by interviewing one of the sources who is a native speaker of the Toba Batak language. In the interview process, the researcher first asked questions non-structurally and then recorded and transcribed the results or with the listening and note-taking technique. The first interview technique was a list of taboo words,

phrases or sentences in *dalihan natolu*. Then the results of interviews and literature studies will be described [10].

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

All cultures and languages have taboo rules that control the community in making their communication [11]. The terms taboo and taboo are two different things, even though they are prohibitions/abstinences. This difference can be seen through the taboo sanctions that cause violators to be hit by a plague. While the taboo only causes physical sanctions or social sanctions. Thus, to avoid violating the pronunciation of taboo words, substitution or replacement of words or sentences that are considered taboo in a context to change the connotation of the consequences of the mention. For example, a word that should not be said in a situation or the word or utterance is used with a speech that has a more positive meaning (euphemism).

The Toba Batak people, who uphold politeness and politeness, believe that every ancestral heritage is a guide in living life so that it is in harmony with social life, kinship, and life outside the group. So that when they mingle with other people, they will be more accepting and adapt quickly. Some prohibitions or prohibitions are agreed upon in the culture of the Toba Batak people in carrying out their role in society. There are words, sentences, or actions that should not be spoken to the interlocutor or even the closest people or are often called taboos. However, to convey their intentions and goals, they will use more appropriate or polite (positive) speech to be spoken. So that it does not bring reinforcements, shame, disaster or anxiety when saying the meaning.

The following words sentences are taboo in the Toba Batak society and are classified based:

- a. Taboo related to gender address terms. This type of taboo is a prohibition or a word that is prohibited from being said to the opposite sex, and if violated, it will have fatal consequences, such as offending feelings and conflict)

Tabel 1. Taboo related to gender address terms

| No | Taboo | Euphemism | English |
|----|-------------------|---|-------------------|
| 1. | <i>boru-boru</i> | <i>ito</i> | Girl/woman |
| 2. | <i>ripe</i> | <i>parnijabu/ parsonduk boru niraja</i> | wife |
| 3. | <i>Ho</i> | <i>Hamu</i> | you (male/female) |
| 4. | <i>Abang/kaka</i> | <i>iboto</i> | Brother/sister |

| | | | | |
|----|--------------------|----------------------------|------------------|---|
| 5. | <i>abang/kakak</i> | <i>amang</i> <i>bao</i> | <i>bao/inang</i> | term for father-in-law (from mother of the male side) |
| 6. | <i>adek</i> | <i>Anggi</i> | | Term for young brother in law from women's side. |

In Toba Batak culture and culture, it is very taboo to say the word "*boru-boru*" if it is directed at a woman who is first met or older to her. However, it is better to increase it with the word "*ito*" because it is more polite and respects someone we mention. The word *boru-boru* is a word with derogatory connotations because it also mentions the sex of animals such as chickens and others. Then the word "*ripe*" is a taboo word to be mentioned to the family, for example:

"ai laho do ripeku tu jabu ni inong "
(my wife is going to her mother's house)

The word "*ripe*" is very taboo to mention to the family of our wife/husband because the word is words that are not polite or respect the wife in front of her family. So it is better if the word wife is changed to:

"parnijabu/parsonduk bolon atau boru ni raja".

- b. Taboo is related to the function of the body. There is a prohibition on words to be spoken or spoken by one person to another related to body parts (body functions).

Table 2. Words taboo related to the function of the body

| No | Taboo | Euphemism | English |
|----|----------------|--------------------|---------|
| 1. | <i>ulu</i> | <i>simanjujung</i> | head |
| 2. | <i>butuha</i> | <i>siubeon</i> | stomach |
| 3. | <i>baba</i> | <i>pamangan</i> | mouth |
| 4. | <i>igung</i> | <i>parniangoan</i> | nose |
| 5. | <i>pinggol</i> | <i>parbinegan</i> | ear |

If in the form of a sentence in the Batak language, it is very taboo to say the following sentence:

Table 3. Taboo is related to the function of the body

| No | Tabu | Euphemism | English |
|----|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 1. | <i>sipappang do haroa i</i> | <i>adong saotik hahurangan na di pamatangna</i> | he has flaws in his body |
| 2. | <i>sirabun on</i> | <i>Ndang boi simalolongna marnida"</i> | can't see clearly |

The word above shows a taboo sentence in the Toba Batak cultural language because it is insulting or mocking other people's body parts intentionally by the speaker to someone. If these words are deliberately spoken, the Toba Batak people believe that it will result in punishment for the speaker, such as bringing

misfortune or getting the same bad thing to his descendants in the future or to his family.

- c. Taboo related to death. Utterances related to death or forbidden words related to death.

Table 4. Taboo related to death

| No. | Taboo | Euphemism | English |
|-----|----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. | <i>mate</i> | <i>monding</i> | dead |
| 2. | <i>hamatean</i> | <i>mabalu</i> | widow/divorcee/bachelor |
| 3. | <i>hamatean anak</i> | <i>tilahaon</i> | somebody who lost his/her child |
| 4. | <i>mate matua</i> | <i>saurmatua/sarimatua</i> | died in old age |

For example:

- *Nunga mate be natoras nai*
(his her parent were dead) it is taboo to say.

It should use euphemism as follows:

- *Nungga jumolo monding natua-tuai*
(his/her parent passed away)

In Toba Batak culture, in mentioning words related to death, one must pay attention to speech to others. It is very taboo when the speaker when talking about death to other people with the word "mate" which is a taboo word in Toba Batak because this word can be used on Other living things are animals, so to replace them, the speaker can use the word "Monding" so that when spoken the meaning is softer and more polite. The taboo sentence that is strictly prohibited is "sai mate maho" this is a strictly prohibited word because it means swearing someone to die and has a very bad connotation.

- d. Taboo dan euphemism related to philosophy, religion and tradition.

In Batak culture, it is very taboo to marry someone of the same clan as us. This is motivated by the fact that they are still bound by family and clan kinship or clan units. If this is violated or intentionally violated, it will bring disaster, shame and exclusion in some communities because it is an agreement of the predecessors in the past so that it is passed on to their children and grandchildren. Therefore, if we want to marry someone who is still close to the Batak family, we can marry the "pariban" cousin, the son of the *naboru* (father's sister). This is a philosophy that is still closely related to the Toba Batak culture so that you can continue the family lineage.

In the Toba Batak culture, there is a relationship between *dalihan natolu* or the three main furnaces of culture. The Batak people highly respect the Natolu

pretext, both in their social life, society, and customs. *Dalihan natolu* is "somba marhula-hula, manat mardongan tubu, elek marboru". In the sense that it is very taboo if someone does not respect the hula-hula (family of the wife, or if we are a woman who does not respect our parents, brothers and sisters), the Batak people love their daughters so that when a woman gets married, she will have stages in the path to success. The wedding and hall customs are proof that "boru" has a special position in the Toba Batak culture.

e. Taboo related to action. Taboos relate to one's life activities or habits.

Table 5. Taboo related to action

| No. | Taboo | Meaning |
|-----|---|--|
| 1. | <i>pantang do mangan di halang ni ulu</i> | it is forbidden to eat at the entrance |
| 2. | <i>marsitijur diaek na tio</i> | it is forbidden to spit to the clean water |

It is very taboo to eat near the house entrance because it will eliminate the fortune that will come to the family. Furthermore, it is forbidden to spit into clean water, such as lakes, wells, and rivers. Doing so will result in the well water being dry and dirty. The Batak people believe that water is the source of life. Water can meet human needs, so it is highly conserved, especially in the Tapanuli area of Lake Toba.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the Toba Batak culture has taboo words and sentences, and their pronunciation is replaced with euphemisms or refinements. The meaning of euphemisms in this study as a whole can be concluded into five types, namely: (1) taboo related to gender address terms {*boru-boru* > *ito* (women), *ripe* > *parnijabu* (wife)}, (2) taboo related to the function of body {(*mapampang* > *hahurangan dipamatang* (disable)}, (3) taboo related to death {(*mate* > *monding* (dead)} (4) taboo dan euphemism related to philosophy, religion and tradition, means taboo to marry in the same clan but can marry *pariban* (cousin), and (5) taboo related to action, which concerns the life of the Toba people where it is very taboo to pollute clean water by throwing saliva carelessly because it will cause disasters such as water drought. Thus taboos and euphemisms were created to regulate the system of order and harmony in the Toba Batak society. Although over time, these cultural values are increasingly being shifted. However, as Toba Batak people, we must know that every speech and speech act is part of the culture and social life that must be preserved.

REFERENCES

- [1] T. Lubis, "Learning Nandong in schools as a medium to inform the Simeuluese local wisdom: An anthropolinguistics approach," *Stud. English Lang. Educ.*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 262–272, 2019.
- [2] T. Lubis, "Tradisi Lisan Nandong Simeulue: Pendekatan Antropolinguistik," Universitas Sumatera Utara, 2019.
- [3] Zulkarnain *et al.*, "Nandong as a culture-based effort to overcome food security toward COVID-19 pandemic situation in Simeulue Island," *IOP Conf. Ser. Earth Environ. Sci.*, vol. 807, no. 2, p. 022007, Jul. 2021.
- [4] Y. Hua, "A Comparative Study of English Taboos and Euphemisms," *Int. J. Humanit. Soc. Sci. Educ.*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2020.
- [5] T. Lubis and A. Purba, "Metaphor and parallelism in political advertisements," *Cogency*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 71–88.
- [6] S. Shaumiwaty *et al.*, "Teacher performance toward students' mathematical literacy in teaching linear program mathematical models," *J. Phys. Conf. Ser.*, vol. 1663, p. 012066, Oct. 2020.
- [7] H. Kridalaksana, *Pembentukan Kata dalam Bahasa Indonesia*. Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2010.
- [8] M. Mocanu, "Taboo and Euphemism in the Religious Language," *Int. Lett. Soc. Humanist. Sci.*, vol. 75, pp. 1–9, Jan. 2017.
- [9] N. Saputra, T. Lubis, and F. Setiawan, "Politeness Strategies for the Speech Acts of Indonesian Language Education Students in Pidie Regency," *Tradit. Mod. Humanit.*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 33–40, 2021.
- [10] N. A. Hasibuan and T. Lubis, "Teknik Mind Mapping dalam Pengajaran Bahasa di Sekolah Dasar Muhammadiyah 18 Medan," in *KOLITA 15: Konferensi Linguistik Tahunan Atma Jaya Kelima Belas*, 2017, pp. 660–664.
- [11] J. Barus, R. Sibarani, A. Saragih, and . M., "Linguistic Taboos in Karonese Culture," *KnE Soc. Sci.*, vol. 3, no. 4, p. 411, Apr. 2018.