

**EFL LEARNERS' COMPREHENSION
OF ENGLISH TABOO WORDS IN INTERNET MEME**



Submitted As a Partial of the requirement for the Master Degree in Department of
Language Studies at Graduate School of Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta

by

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GRADUATE SCHOOL
UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH SURAKARTA
2016**

APPROVAL

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PUBLICATION ARTICLE

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The Manuscript Publication has been approved by Supervision
Surakarta, October, 2016

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APPROVAL OF PUBLICATION ARTICLE FOR SUBMISSION

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Has been examined for all revisions and correction recommended
By the board of examiners on October, 2016
And is certified to be accepted for submission

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini adalah penelitian deskriptif kualitatif mengenai bahasa tabu. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi tipe-tipe bahasa tabu yang terdapat pada internet meme dan mengukur kemampuan pembelajar bahasa Inggris dalam memahami bahasa tabu yang terdapat di internet meme. Data yang digunakan dalam penelitian adalah internet meme yang didapat dari berbagai sumber seperti *twitter, facebook, instagram, pinterest, path, tumblr* dan hasil jawaban pembelajar bahasa Inggris yang didapat dari menyebarkan kuisioner kepada 50 pembelajar bahasa Inggris pada level universitas. Teknik pengumpulan data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah dokumentasi. Data dianalisis berdasarkan taksonomi dari Batistella. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa semua tipe bahasa tabu berdasarkan taksonomi Batistella muncul dalam penelitian ini, yaitu *profanity, obscenity, vulgarity* dan *epithet*. Tipe *epithet* adalah tipe yang paling banyak muncul dan tipe yang paling sedikit muncul adalah tipe *profanity*. Hasil penemuan kedua dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa pembelajar bahasa Inggris masih asing terhadap bahasa tabu yang terdapat dalam internet meme. Hasil tersebut mengimplikasikan perlunya mengajarkan tentang bahasa tabu kepada pembelajar bahasa Inggris.

Kata kunci: bahasa tabu, internet meme.

Abstract

This study was descriptive qualitative study concerning with taboo words. The objects of this study were to identify type of English taboo words in internet meme and measure the students' understanding of taboo language in internet meme. The data for this study is internet meme taken from some internet source, such as *twitter, facebook, instagram, pinterest, path, and tumblr*, and the EFL learners' responses about taboo language in internet meme. The technique of collecting which used by the researcher is documentary method. Data were analyzed based on Batistella taxonomy. The result of this study showed that all the types of taboo words based on the taxonomy of Batistella were appeared in internet meme, such as *profanity, obscenity, vulgarity, and epithet*. The most dominant type of taboo language is *epithet* and least frequent of taboo words is *profanity*. The second finding of this study was most of EFL learners had almost no experienced in taboo words. The result implied that teachers need to teach about taboo words to the EFL learners.

Keywords: taboo words, internet meme.

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of language has brought up many ways in expressing the language itself. There are bad language and good language that usually used by people to express their feeling, idea, and emotions. According to Chaika (1982: 2) people use language to reveal or conceal personal identity, character, and background without realizing that they are actually doing so. Therefore, every person has their own way to choose the language variation which can confirm one's identity. Some people may prefer to use language that has a strong connotation to express certain feeling, for example sad or angry. To achieve this, they sometimes use certain kind of words that are considered as bad or inappropriate to use such as taboo language.

Nowadays, we can find taboo language easily. We can hear from conversation on television, real life, books, song, etc. The phenomenon of taboo language also can easily found in internet meme. Internet has made some people overshoots in using language to communicate. For example internet meme become phenomenon because it increases rapidly in cyber world. Meme is well known as a means of communication to express our feelings to others. Internet memes give the chance to many people to be more creative, and people show their memes through social media such as facebook, twitter, instagram, tumblr, pinterest, etc. Brunelo (2012:56) stated that Internet-memes are, for certain, no examples of high-arts, and neither of scientific innovation. They involve, nevertheless, a more 'mundane' and 'ordinary' kind of creativity, one that is often referred to as 'everyday-creativity'.

Meme become something that very familiar in the world, most of people know about meme because of the rapid movement of the internet. Memes provide a powerful new way to combine few things such as, creativity, art, message, and humor in the internet culture. For Leight (1996:51), memes are "actively contagious ideas" memes as information patterns infecting human minds. One of the few cultural anthropologists to actively consider memes as units of culture describes them as "self-replicating [cultural] representations". According to Juzza

(2011:3) internet memes is most commonly used to describe certain kinds of information disseminated among the Internet users by themselves. This information may include pictures, films (usually short), and video clips, graphics, texts, quotes, animations, as well as their various combinations (e.g. captioned pictures). Diaz (2011:83) stated that meme has gone beyond the academic definition; this due to the expansion of the computer usage and the exponential growth of the Internet, particularly forums, chats, blogs and social networks; the concept was coined to a new form of internet communication.

Some study investigated types of taboo language and students' understanding of taboo language. Anggita (2005), Febrianuswantoro and Iragiliati (2003) investigated about the types of taboo language in movie. Anggita (2005) the researcher investigated taboo words uttered by the characters in Bad Teacher movie using sociolinguistic approach. Febrianuswantoro and Iragiliati (2003) the research was aimed at identifying taboo word or linguistic taboo which is defined as any word that are generally related to sexual organs, the supernatural, excretion, religious matters, and death. On the other hand, Burduli (2010) conducted the research about students' acknowledgement about the meaning of taboo language. the study examined whether the students had a general knowledge about taboo words, taboo expressions; if they knew its meaning, usage, how much do they understand English taboos and how frequently they used them. The similarity with this study is on analyzing the student's understanding of taboo language but this study used the students from junior high school and this current study used the students of English from the university and the teacher of English.

This study intended to extend previous work. It attempted to answer the following questions; what are the types of taboo language in internet meme? And How do the EFL learners' understanding about taboo language in internet meme?.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, the writer used descriptive qualitative research, since it involved the collection of data for the purpose of describing the existing

condition. The objects of the research are the taboo words used in internet meme and students' understanding of taboo language in internet meme. The total number of the EFL learners was 50. The data were collected by using documentary method and analyzed using theory of types of taboo language developed by Batistella (2005).

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data analysis all the types of taboo words based on taxonomy of Batistella were found in this research, these being: profanity, obscenity, vulgarity and epithet. Examples of each types of taboo language are explained in the following section:

1. Profanity

According to Batistella (2005: 72), profanity can be categorized as religious cursing because it usually includes the foul-mouthed use of what is considered to be sacred. The aim of the speaker is not to vilify God or anything connected with religion but it may be used to express emotional response to certain motives. The words that belong to this type are J*s*s Chr*st, h**l, d**n, godd**n. Jay (1996) Profanity is the use of religious expressions and terminology in an unrespectable manner. To know clearly about this type, here is an example:



There is a picture of Jesus in meme with the caption “**Jesus** says you’re an **idiot**”. The word “**Jesus**” in meme is used to make the word “**idiot**” stronger for people who read the meme. The intention of the speaker is not to denigrate God or anything associated with religion but may be rather to express emotional reactions towards certain stimuli.

Profanity is the lowest types of taboo language that appear in internet meme. In internet meme, profanity appears 7 times with the percentage of 6.48%. Profanity occurs when someone is using religious terminology in a profane, secular, or uncaring manner such as J*s*s, Christ, h**l, d**n, and Godd**n.

2. Obscenity

Batistella (2005: 72) obscenity is defined as words or expression which involves sex differentiating anatomy or sexual and excretory function that usually uttered in rough manner. The words that belong to this type are f**k, s**t and a*us. According to jay (1999: 25) obscenity is words or expressions that are prohibited from public use because it is considered as lack of morality since they mention sexual activity and excretory functions which can generate disgust. Here the example of this type:



This meme is belonging to the type of obscenity, because it characterized sexual activity. This meme shows the picture of an old lady seeing the computer with shock and confuse expression about what she found in the computer. With the caption “oh **shit**, is that my granddaughter?,**fucking slut**..”. The word “**shit**” use to express her shocking towards the fact of her granddaughter that she found in the computer. The word “**fucking slut**” use to express her annoyed towards her granddaughter after knowing something about her granddaughter. This picture is a photo credit with the title “grandma finds the internet” taken on 21 December 2005. However, in this meme the sentence “**fuck slut**” does

not actually mean “to have sexual intercourse” but it is used to intensify the sentence “oh **shit**, is that my granddaughter?”.

Obscenity becomes the second highest type found in internet meme. Obscenity is described as a term which characterized sex differentiating anatomy or sexual and excretory function in a crude way such as f**k and s**t.

3. Vulgarity

Vulgarity and obscenity have the same reference especially to words or expressions that contain sexual anatomy and excretory function in a rough manner. (Batistella, 2005: 72). The difference between vulgarity and obscenity is usually related to the level of prurience. In other words, vulgarity demonstrates the raw expression of street language (Jay, in Doyle, 2009: 1). Here the example:



This meme is showing the picture of legendary meme figure called “Rich Baby”. This meme uses the caption “when you suck your mom’s **tit** with your **dick**”. There are two vulgar words in this meme “tit” and “dick”, the expression of the baby is describe satisfied and proud expression because he can do something successfully.

Vulgarity refers to words or expressions that contain sexual anatomy and excretory function in a rough manner such as a*s, t*t, c**k, d**k, and c**t. Vulgarity is believed to demonstrate the raw expression of street language. Therefore the use of vulgar language is usually to

humiliate or bring down the thing or individual referred to. In the findings, the researcher finds 32 vulgar words that occur in internet meme.

4. Epithet

Batistella (2005: 72) epithet includes a variety of slurs that are connected to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, one's appearance, and disabilities such as b**ch, f*gg*t, n*gg*r, m*dg*t, r*t*rd, motherf**ker, tit-man and son of a b**ch. Epithet can occur because the one who utters the word is motivated by frustration or anger. Here the example:



This meme is a picture of “**Syndrome**”, he is an antagonist character from Incredibile movie. The caption “you, dense **motherfucker**” with angry expression of syndrome and the use word “**dense**” clarify the word “**motherfucker**”. This meme can be used to express the annoyance to someone.

Epithet becomes the highest type of taboo language appearing in internet meme. It occurs 35 times and gets the percentage of 32.40%. Epithet includes a variety of slurs that are connected to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, one's appearance, and disabilities such as b**ch, f*gg*t, n*gg*r, m*dg*t, r*t*rd, motherf**ker, tit-man and son of a b**ch.

Table 1
Types of Taboo Language

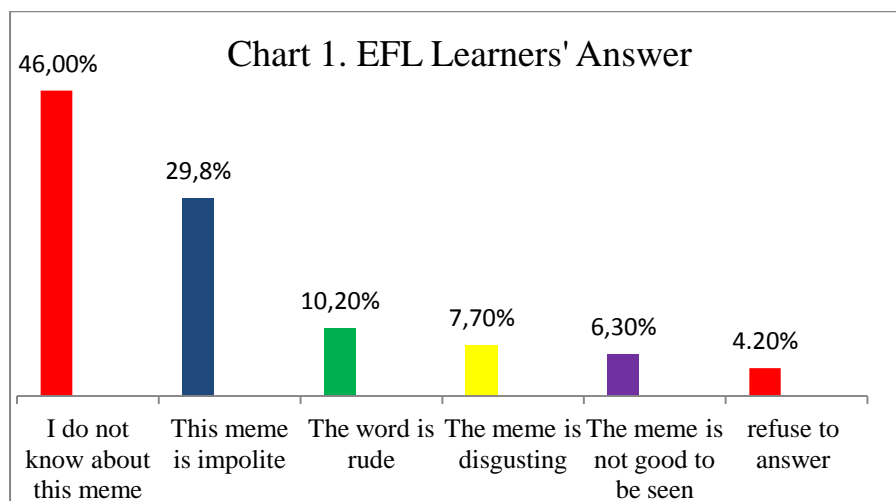
Type of taboo	Frequency	Percentage
Pfn	7	6.48%
Ept	35	32.40%

Vul	32	29.62%
Obs	34	31.50%
Total	108	100%

From the table above, it can be seen that all categories of taboo language based on theory of Batistella (2005) is found in this study. These being: profanity, obscenity, vulgarity, and epithet. From the table above, it can be noticed that the most dominant type used by the characters is epithet, which appears 35 times. Then, the second highest frequency is obscenity which appears 34 times and vulgarity which appear 32 times .Finally, the least to occur is profanity which appears 7 times.

Based on the result of giving the questionnaire, the frequency of EFL learners' understanding of taboo language in internet meme can be illustrated in the following chart:

Chart 1
EFL Learners' Answer



From the chart above, it can be seen that the EFL learners mostly answer that they did not know about the meme increase 45.92%, then EFL learners who

answer that the meme is impolite increase 29.85%., 10.22% of EFL learners answered that the word is rude, 7.72% answered that the word is disgusting, and the last EFL learners who answer that the meme is not good to be seen increase 6.26%.

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the data using Batistella theory of the types of taboo language, the study draws several conclusions. First, all the type of taboo language were found in internet meme. There were profanity, obscenity, vulgarity, and epithet. Secondly, the writer found that most of EFL learners had almost no experience in taboo language. Some of them familiar with the word but have no idea about the meaning. This caused they never get lesson about taboo language in the class. Teachers did not teach taboo words in the English classroom because they think that it is not necessary. In fact, it depends on students' needs, People think that taboo words should not be allowed to be taught in the English classroom because it's rude and inappropriate especially teacher and older. Taboo words are used in many form not only used to insult or abuse. In the present, taboo words are used more openly, publicly and with more confidence than ever before (Hoster, 2005).

Acknowledgement

This research is dedicated to her parents.

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