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## Language Taboos in Social Activities of the Acehese Community

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### Abstract

This study aims to describe language taboos in the context of social activities within the Acehese community. The research design employed is field research, utilizing a qualitative approach. The method employed is descriptive-analytical. The data for this research focus on language taboos within the Acehese community in the Pidie Regency. The data sources are informants, comprising Acehese individuals residing in the Pidie Regency, spanning three sub-districts, with a total of 21 informants. Data collection involves structured and unstructured interview techniques, supported by the participant observation method with face-to-face conversations and the baiting technique. The data analysis technique used is qualitative analysis with stages such as selection, description, grouping, and data analysis. The research findings reveal language taboos in the social activities of the Acehese community as follows: (a) language taboos in hunting activities; (b) language taboos in farming activities; (c) language taboos in carpentry activities; (d) language taboos in trading activities; and (e) language taboos in courtship activities.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the core elements of culture is language. What humans learn and think is expressed verbally through language. This aligns with Rahyono's opinion that language is used to overcome human limitations in interaction and communication (Rahyono, 2009, p. 76). He further explains the relationship between language and culture, describing that when language is used in the context of communication, it becomes intricately linked with culture in a complex manner.

Culture, as a complex whole, encompasses knowledge, beliefs, laws, art, and traditions. Language also refers to how supporters of that culture think, feel, and act, and how the worldview of those supporters is shaped. In this regard, the relationship between language and culture essentially refers to two principles. First, the principle of language determinism: how people think is determined by the language they speak. Second, the principle of linguistic relativity, which is the connection between language and worldview: differences among languages are reflected in the differing worldviews of their speakers (Laksana, 2009, p. 12).

Thus, it can be said that culture is a portrait of interactions between humans and other humans, humans and objects, and humans and the Creator. Language serves as a crucial tool in the process of interaction and communication, both between individuals and among groups

in society (Junaidi et al., [2021](#)). Culture is developed, disseminated, and passed down to the next generation through the use of language. The culture of a community cannot evolve without the existence of language.

This rationale is grounded in the study of language in anthropolinguistics, the combination of anthropology and linguistics, in line with Duranti's opinion, "Language narrates about the world/cosmos, through language expression in the form of natural language or language used to express something in accordance with reality, and language expression. The intended language expression takes the form of a metaphor, a language used to express something different from its natural state. This metaphor is formed due to cultural constraints, such as taboos." (Duranti, [1997](#), p. 6).

Related to this, Douglas explains that "Good mad people. He also made the rules by which they should deal with one another, and he made the rules of ritual for dealing with the cult: the word taboo articulates the interactions of persons in all these contexts. Some things are forbidden and disasters will ensue if they are said or done. Seen in this light taboo is not an irrational belief." (Sutarman, [2004](#), p. 14).

Wardani states that "Taboo" essentially means 'prohibition' or 'something forbidden' to do. It can refer to specific actions or utterances. Moreover, "taboo" on one hand means 'sacred' or 'sanctified,' but on the other hand means 'mysterious,' 'dangerous,' and 'unclean.' The combination expressing the meaning of taboo is 'sacred and dreadful.' In conclusion, certain prohibitions, whether actions or words, can bring danger or disaster to the violator (Wardani & Nuraiza, [2021](#), p. 11).

Freud further states that initially, the term taboo referred to sacred things or objects that could not be talked about or touched. When Cook arrived in the islands of the South Pacific (Polynesia), he observed many peculiar social phenomena. For example, some objects could only be used by their leaders or only by God, some other objects could only be used by the general public, and others could only be used for special or specific purposes. The local community referred to these phenomena as taboo (Ningjue, [2010](#), p. 4).

For instance, in Indonesia, people do not directly mention the name of a deceased person. Directly mentioning the name of the deceased is considered inappropriate because the spirit of the deceased is considered sacred. Indonesians will refer to the name of the deceased as "*mendiang*," "*almarhum*," or "*almarhumah*." Even if there is a mention of the deceased's name, it will be preceded by "*mendiang*," "*almarhum*," or "*almarhumah*" (Junaidi et al., [2021](#)).

The term taboo continues to evolve in line with scientific discoveries put forth by experts. Taboo is no longer just about speaking about things related to the fear of supernatural spirits, but it also relates to manners and social etiquette. Avoiding or prohibiting certain words, phrases, or discussing topics that make others uncomfortable is also part of language taboo. Considering politeness and courtesy is fundamental to language taboos. Words outside the realm of politeness are forbidden to be spoken or used.

In line with the scientific discoveries put forth by experts, the term language taboo has evolved beyond being merely associated with fears of supernatural spirits. It now also pertains to etiquette and social manners. Avoidance or prohibition of certain words, phrases, and discussions that make others uncomfortable are integral aspects of language taboos. Considering politeness and courtesy is a key element of language taboos. Words outside the boundaries of politeness are forbidden to be spoken or used.

Individuals who wish to be perceived as "polite" will avoid using certain words. In Indonesian society, especially in regional languages, women often refrain from using words

related to genitalia or other 'vulgar' terms. These words seem to be tabooed by women or appear to be the monopoly of men (Sumarsono & Partana, [2002](#), p. 107).

Social activities involve dynamic relationships between individuals, groups, and individuals with groups of people. Social interactions are not always cooperative; for example, conflicts are considered social interactions because they involve reciprocal relationships despite taking the form of disputes. Agitta further distinguishes two forms of social interaction: associative (strengthening social bonds, being positive or bringing people closer) and disassociative (damaging social bonds, being negative). Social contact is the initial stage of social relationships, and communication involves conveying information and providing interpretations and reactions to the conveyed information (Sagitta, [2017](#)).

Therefore, it can be said that social activities are part of the daily activities performed by humans. Successful individuals are those who engage in social activities in their environment. Examples of daily activities related to social activities, as proposed by Marthuranath include interacting with the surrounding environment along with other people or close associates, pursuing hobbies, and being active in individual or group professional activities (Sagitta, [2017](#)).

Social activities are activities carried out together with the community in the surrounding environment (Junaidi & Wardani, [2019](#)). In the context of social activities, language plays a crucial role in all social dimensions, including conflict resolution, where language serves as an essential tool in mediating and resolving conflicts (Mujiburrahman, [2018](#)). Therefore, one of the intriguing aspects to be investigated in this research is language taboos related to social activities within the community, specifically within the Acehese society. Thus, the purpose of this study is to identify the forms of prohibitions or language taboos in various social activities within the Acehese community.

This research employs a qualitative approach, specifically the field research method. The phenomena in focus for this study are the forms of language taboos in various social activities within the Acehese community. The research method used is descriptive-analytical. The data sources for this study are informants, specifically Acehese individuals residing in the Pidie Regency, spanning three sub-districts, with a total of 21 informants. The data in this research consist of oral language taboos in various social activities within the Acehese community obtained from the informants.

Data collection for this research is carried out using the interview technique. The interview involves face-to-face question-and-answer sessions between the researcher and the informants (Nazir, [1998](#), p. 193). In this study, structured interviews with the use of recording tools are employed. Structured interviews follow predetermined questions organized systematically. During the implementation, the interview process to gather research data is also supported by the baiting technique. Using baiting techniques, the researcher attempts to engage the informant in discussions about the research object, eliciting potential data while recording the conversation. Data analysis is performed through qualitative analysis techniques, involving stages such as data selection, data description, data grouping, data analysis, and drawing conclusions.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After conducting research, it was found that language taboos in various social activities in Acehese society are as follows.

## Language Taboos in Hunting Activities

Taboo language related to hunting activities includes the prohibition of saying something while someone is hunting anywhere. The prohibitions are as follows:

(1) "*Bah icok keudéh!*": 'Just take it!'

(2) "*Bah icok kawé-kawé keudéh!*": 'Just take its hook!'

(3) "*Bah jipuplueng taren-taren keudéh!*": 'Just take its trap and run away!'

In hunting activities, whether at sea, on land, or in the forest, hunters are prohibited from saying, "*Bah icok keudéh!*" Additionally, fishermen fishing at sea are prohibited from saying, "*Bah icok kawé-kawé keudéh!*" Hunters in the forest setting traps for deer and similar animals are prohibited from saying, "*Bah jipuplueng taren-taren keudéh!*" Uttering these expressions by hunters during hunting is feared to bring bad luck, and the expected hunting results may become nil. Even the possibility of the tools used by hunters, such as hooks and traps, to capture the prey may completely disappear, taken away by the hunted animals.

(4) "*Hana eungkôt sang.*": 'Seems like there are no fish.'

Fishermen searching for fish at sea are not allowed to say "*Hana eungkôt sang*" before departing for the sea or while at sea. This statement is believed to cause a complete absence of fish in the sea.

(5) "*Hana yö sisat.*": 'Not afraid of getting lost.'

While in the forest, one should not casually say this phrase, such as expressing no fear of wild animals or getting lost. It is believed that what is not feared will happen to the speaker. Animals that are not feared may likely appear before the speaker. A dense forest that the speaker claims not to fear getting lost in might make them lose direction and truly get lost.

(6) "*Ho meujak?*": 'Where are you going?'

In Acehese tradition, "*ho meujak*" is commonly mentioned as a friendly greeting. However, asking this question is prohibited for someone about to go hunting, fishing, or both. This question is forbidden because it can bring bad luck to the hunter, causing them to be unsuccessful in their hunt. In certain situations, hunters may become angry when asked this question.

(7) "*Jai that awé!*": 'So many rattans!'

(8) "*Jai that eungkot!*": 'So many fish!'

People searching for rattan are prohibited from saying, "*Omin jai that awé!*" Such utterances are believed to make the hunted objects disappear suddenly. Rattans that seemed plentiful suddenly become uncertain in their location. It is not uncommon for the hunter to get lost and lose direction in the wilderness. Another taboo phrase, "*Omin jai that eungkot!*" is believed that a large school of fish, when about to be netted, will vanish.

(9) "*Jéh hai ata tanyoe!*": 'That's ours!'

This statement is usually uttered when someone sees an object that is already in front of them. In the context of hunting, saying this statement is strongly prohibited, even if the prey is in plain sight and already in hand. The hunter believes that an animal or hunted object that is almost obtained and already in sight will not be obtained again, and it may even disappear suddenly.

(10) "*Jéh ilèe cok!*": 'Take that one first.'

If someone is noisy and unsettled when getting a lot of prey and utters this phrase, it is believed that the abundant prey will disappear and vanish on its own.

(11) "*Kacok ureung sidroe!*": 'Take one person!'

This statement should not be uttered when someone is hunting, whether at sea or in the forest. Saying this statement during hunting, even in jest, is feared to invite unpleasant incidents. For example, while in the middle of the sea, one should not say, "*Rôh beu le eungkôt ka cok ureung sidroe*" (Enter where there are many fish, take one person). This statement is considered bad and must be avoided because it is feared that someone may be used as a sacrifice, and disaster will truly befall them.

(12) "*Keubah dua boh beh!*": 'Leave two.'

When someone is about to hunt, one should not say to those who are hunting, "*Keubah dua boh beh!*" This statement implies that everything to be hunted is already clear. Therefore, the utterance is believed to bring bad luck, and the expected results for the hunter will be nil.

(13) "*Meunyona rôh peubloe keu lân.*": 'If you can sell it, sell it to me!'

Saying such a sentence to someone who is about to hunt is feared to bring bad luck and misfortune. The expected hunting results may turn out to be nil.

(14) "*Rô lam laôt/Böh lam laôt keudeh!*": 'Just throw it into the sea!'

If a fisherman wants to release a caught fish back into the open sea because it exceeds the boat's capacity, whether the fish is still alive or dead, it is not good to say that phrase. If the fish indeed has to be poured back into the sea, the fisherman should express it more politely, such as saying, "*Khauri u laôt keudéh!* (Release it into the sea!)."

### Language Taboos in Farming Activities

Acehnese society is predominantly dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. In farming, there are several expressions that are considered taboo. The prohibited expressions include the following:

(15) "*bijèh*" – 'rice paddy seed'

In Acehnese society, it is highly forbidden to mention "*bijèh*" when other farmers are cultivating their fields. Uttering "*bijèh*" while planting rice paddy in the fields is believed to remove the blessings of the rice seeds. The community believes that the rice seeds being planted will shrink and will not be sufficient to cover the available land, even though initially a farmer predicted that the seeds would be enough or even more (Ismawirna et al., [2023](#), p. 8).

For example, one should not mention, "*Meunyo na leubèh bijèh neubi keu lôn*" (If there are extra seeds, give them to me.) or "*Meunyona leubèh bijèh neupeubloe keu lôn*" (If there are extra seeds, sell them to me.), and so on. In this context, the community may use alternative words to express requests for the surplus seeds, such as "*Neukalôn-kalôn lôn*" (Please, look at me) or "*Neubi keu lôn bacut bu*" (Give me a little bit of the rice [seeds]).

(16) "*membaca hikayat Teungku Malem*" – 'reading the epic of Teungku Malem'

The epic of Teungku Malem comprises poems that narrate the legendary life of Teungku Malem. In traditional villages, these epics have become well-known for entertaining and connecting people. The poems are often sung to alleviate loneliness and serve as a means of self-entertainment. Additionally, they convey moral messages to the Acehnese generation (Junaidi, 2019:7). However, when in the fields as the rice starts to turn yellow and approach harvest time, it is strictly prohibited to recite or sing epics related to Teungku Malem. Reading these epics while in the fields with the rice turning yellow is believed to bring negative consequences to the nearly ripe rice. For instance, the rice harvest is believed to decrease or be less than usual.

(17) "*Luhu that/Rampak that!*" – 'So fertile!'

This expression is also not allowed to be uttered when observing lush and blossoming plants. For example, one is forbidden to say, "*Luhu that camplinyoe!*" (So fertile are these chili plants!) or "*Luhu that padé nyan!*" (So fertile is that rice!). Such words are believed to cause the lush plants or crops to wither easily or be susceptible to pests and diseases.

### **Language Taboos in Carpentry Activities**

For someone whose profession involves carpentry, there are certain expressions that they must not utter. Such expressions include the following:

(18) "*ka leubèh/ka sép*" – 'enough/already sufficient'

In carpentry work, anyone involved in it must not utter "*ka leubèh*" or "*ka sép*" ('enough' or 'already sufficient') regarding the materials needed. For example, someone is prohibited from saying, "*Sang ka leubèh batèe nyoe*" (It seems like there's enough of this stone) or "*Sang ka sép kayèe nyoe*" (It seems like there's enough of this wood). The materials required for constructing a building are needs that cannot be limited in sufficiency as long as the work is still in progress. Therefore, saying "*ka leubèh*" or "*ka sép*" regarding the needed materials in carpentry is feared to be insufficient for the necessary materials, even if the items seem abundant.

### **Language Taboos in Trading Activities**

Language taboos related to trading involve prohibitions on specific words spoken by traders during buying and selling activities. The forbidden expressions include the following:

(19) "*Gulông lapak-lapak keudéh!*" – 'Just roll up the stalls!'

In any challenging situation, if a merchant's goods are not selling well due to a lack of buyers, expressing such a statement is not allowed. The abundance or scarcity of one's

sustenance is ultimately determined by Allah. Uttering such words when the merchandise is not attracting buyers reflects a negative attitude and shows ingratitude to the Provider. Moreover, it is feared that the statement will lead them towards misfortune.

(20) "*Hana lagôt sagai.*" – 'Not selling at all.'

Such a statement is also believed to bring negative consequences to the merchandise, namely a reduction in buyers. Traders are encouraged to always be enthusiastic about their trade. If someone asks how well their merchandise is selling, they should respond with joy, saying, "*Lee raseuki Allah bri.*" (A lot of sustenance from Allah).

(21) "*Le that lagôt.*" – 'Selling a lot.'

A merchant actively selling should not say such words. Uttering such expressions is considered ungrateful for the sustenance provided by Allah. Moreover, it is feared that such words may reduce the merchant's sales in the future.

(22) "*Tet keudè-keudè keudéh!*" – 'Just burn the shop!'

Every merchant struggling with their business is strictly prohibited from saying this. Often, without realizing it, when a merchant is frustrated due to slow sales, they may blurt out frustrations. However, no matter how frustrated a merchant is, it is strictly forbidden to say, "*Kacok katet keudè-keudè keudéh!*" (Just burn the shop). Such a statement is impolite and reflects a lack of gratitude for the fate determined by God regarding their livelihood. Uttering such words while selling is highly feared, as it is believed that their shop might truly catch fire at any time.

(23) "*Dumnoe pangkai*" – 'this is the amount of the capital'

Revealing the initial capital or cost price of an item to a buyer is strictly prohibited in trading. The cost price in trading is the minimum price at which an item will be sold. A trader will not sell an item below its cost price, as it would result in a loss. In buying and selling transactions, buyers and sellers often engage in negotiating the desired price for each party. Buyers will offer the lowest possible price for the item they want to purchase, while the seller must maintain the selling price of the item above the cost price to make a profit.

However, in religion, a trader is strictly forbidden from disclosing the initial cost price of an item to the buyer. This is to prevent inflation of the cost price communicated to the buyer, which can lead to sin. For example, a trader should not say, "*Hanjeut lôn bri, pangkai limong ribèe saboh nyoe.*" (I cannot sell it for less; the capital is five thousand here.), even though the initial cost is only four thousand. This is where the risk of usury sin can occur. Therefore, if pressured to make the item sell, the trader can simply say to the buyer, "*Hanjeut lôn bri, meu hai lôn bloe.*" (I cannot sell it for that price; I bought it at a high cost.)

### Language Taboos in Courting Activities

In the tradition of courtship, the Acehnese community is adept at preserving the feelings of others. Therefore, there are specific expressions that must be avoided during the courtship ceremony. The prohibited expressions are as follows:

(24) "*Dara barô/aneuk dara*" – 'marriageable young woman'

"*Dara barô*" (also known as "*aneuk dara*") refers to a young woman ready to accompany a man as his wife. In Acehese society, there is a pre-marriage tradition called "*cah reu'ueh*" or "*ba ranueb*" meaning 'to court.' The purpose of this tradition is the initial step to propose to a girl who will become the bride of the prospective groom. During this process, if a prospective groom wishes to propose to a woman, certain specific rules must be observed. For example, when representatives of the groom are sent to inquire about a prospective bride, they are prohibited from mentioning "*dara barô*" directly to the girl. Uttering phrases like "*Kamoe deungo na sidroe dara barô bak rumoh nyoe?*" (We heard there is a girl in this house?) is strictly forbidden.

Similarly, during this tradition, representatives from the groom's side are also not allowed to say, "*Kamoe deungo inoe na aneuk dara si droe nyoe*" (We heard there is a girl here?). This taboo is observed to respect the girl's family and to ensure the girl's easy approval by not using direct expressions considered rude, disrespectful, and unethical. Violating this taboo may lead to internal conflicts, resulting in the rejection of the proposal from the groom's side.

Hence, individuals delegated by the groom's side to court a girl should be carefully chosen and reputable in this matter. Such individuals are referred to as "*seulangké*" or 'mediators.' To express delicate matters and replace the taboo expressions above during courting, euphemisms can be used, such as "*na bungong*" meaning 'there is a flower (girl).' For instance, "*Kamoe deungoe na saboh bungong bak rumoh nyoe, peujeut kamoe pöt?*" (We heard there is a flower in this house; may we pluck it?).

(25) "*Ba tanda*" – 'proposal'

"*Ba tanda*" is a tradition carried out by men who wish to propose to a woman. In the Pidie region, it is a long-standing tradition. The purpose of "*ba tanda*" is to 'bind' the prospective bride to be married by the prospective groom. However, during its implementation, the representative of the groom is strictly prohibited from mentioning "*ba tanda*" when proposing to the prospective bride. Therefore, the person proposing to the girl is forbidden from saying, "*Meukeusud kamoe jak keunoe keneuk ba tanda.*" (Our purpose for coming here is to propose). This restriction is due to the unfavorable and unpleasing nature of the expression, which can create a negative impression on the prospective bride. A more refined expression to convey the same intention is "*peupageu*" meaning 'to fence.'

(26) "*Jeulamèe*" – 'dowry'

Directly mentioning the amount of dowry to be paid by a prospective groom to the bride during the courtship process is considered impolite and unpleasant. For example, during the courtship process, the person proposing is prohibited from saying or asking, "*Padum jeulamèe nyang haruih kamoe ba?*" (How much dowry should we pay?). In such moments, the person proposing must use subtle expressions for negotiating the dowry to avoid offending the recipient of the proposal. One appropriate expression to replace "*jeulamèe*" during the courtship process is "*peuneuwoe.*"



## CONCLUSION

In specific activities like social interactions in Acehese society, language taboos are observed. Based on research findings, language taboos in the social activities of Acehese society consist of: (a) language taboos in hunting activities; (b) language taboos in farming activities; (c) language taboos in carpentry activities; (d) language taboos in trading activities; and (e) language taboos in courtship activities. Certainly, it can be concluded that there are four forms of language taboos in the social activities of Acehese society, namely in hunting, farming, craftsmanship, and trading. One strategy employed by the Acehese community to minimize direct utterances of these language taboos is through the use of euphemistic expressions. This approach aligns with Kridalaksana's perspective, which states that euphemism involves using words or alternative forms to avoid forbidden or taboo expressions (Kridalaksana, 2013, p. 59). Words deemed taboo, typically prohibited and considered vulgar, are substituted with more refined expressions. In addition to using euphemisms, the Acehese community can also avoid direct pronunciations of language taboos by whispering and remaining silent, especially in cases where the explicit utterance of certain taboo language is strictly prohibited. Thus, the Acehese people demonstrate wisdom in communication, adhering to social norms, and preserving harmony in their social interactions.

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