

## **Sociolinguistic Analysis of Taboo Words in Some American Songs**

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**Abstract.** *In every culture, there are many things that are believed to not suitable and appropriate to say on public conversation spoken or written texts. Large number of words are forbidden because they represent the hidden part that should not be tackled publically and give some insights of obscene when they are used in communication. These words are taboo words that is the main concern of this paper that investigates all the major varieties of English taboo words: body movement, death, disease, sex, privacy and discriminatory language. There are some ways to avoid this as using euphemistic and round about ways to deal with such situations.*

*This paper shows the different kinds of taboo words and how these forms can be different through some American songs as well as to show the different functions that taboo words have through using forbidden words in these songs. Through this paper, the findings show that many sociolinguists describe and explain this phenomenon and it is one of universal phenomena that no social group that use language quite at random and using such word are very hard because of their effectiveness emotionally and offensive to other to the public situation.*

### **1.1 Introduction**

Communication is one of the important parts of human life and the relationships that are built between people are through the bridge of communication. Communication is a thing that everyone needs to share their opinions, attitudes, feeling as well as sharing information through communication ,people can show their angriness, annoyance astonishment, hatred and then they used some words , gestures ,expression or others as rude, vulgar and insulting that is the part in linguistic analysis which is called Taboo words.

Many studies tackle taboo subjects that include: body functions, sex, private parts of the body, illness and death words that are believed to be blasphemy, income salary, and age of ladies. Some of them are forbidden to talk about; especially English specking communities and others are openly talked about.

There are some reasons for mandating specific parts of our lives out of rules. Communities remain healthier if human waste is kept at a distance or avoidance speech style prevents conflict in relationships.

The word (Taboo) is borrowed from long a language spoken by Polynesians in the Pacific archipelago, where any humble words are forbidden to talk about. (Taboo) doesn't use to refer this type of language use only, but as (GU, 2002, p.264) it is also used to refer holy or untouchable thing in the society.

According to (Wardhaugh ,2000 p.234) “ taboo is the prohibition or avoidance in any society of behavior believed to be harmful to its numbers in that it would cause them anxiety , embarrassment or shame “ taboo words and the subject that are related to it as death, illness, sex bodily functions and religious matters are the main concerns for applied sociolinguistics.

*The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (2001) says that taboo (tabu) is a social or religious custom prohibiting or restricting a particular practice or forbidding association with a particular person, place or thing. These many dictionaries agree on the opinion that taboo is the term that is used to avoid political, religious and social as well as sexual reason and replaced by a euphemism for example, (restroom) for (toilet). Through those definitions of dictionaries that is clear that taboo terms are basically the same, but they are different according to the society, situation, the producer's circumstances as well as gender.

The first appearance of taboo term in literary and non-literary texts was in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century by captain cook.

Taboo terms are always associated with inappropriate language and it is a hint to specific circumstances that cannot be used in every day communication conversations, (Alien and Begrudge, 2006, p.14). Therefore taboo words are offensive and savage words that are forbidden terms in a language around the world such as English. In previous times in America, there are many uses that are used to avoid using of taboo words in public; especially in printed media. The taboo words as (fuck, cunt) would lead to prosecution and imprisonment. However, nowadays the matter is changed toward the function of taboo words, these changes are the results of legal sanctions were disappearing and there is a bit acceptance in some societies because people are getting more relaxed to use taboo words. Using taboo words are different from one society to another as well as the norms of taboo words and the functions are used to express, are changed in one place to another.

## **English Taboo of all varieties**

### **1. Bodily Excretions**

In any language there are certain things which must be avoided of mentioning. It applies to the words with such connotations as well. In English, the first of these that occur to people are words dealing with excretions. In fact, except tears, all the words concerning bodily excretions are believed taboo. The earliest sayings of (move the bowels) and (pass water) are considered inelegant, (defecate) and (urinate) seem to be the words used in hospitals. Thus some euphemisms find themselves in replacing them, such as answer the call of a nature

We ask where the “rest room” is, although we have no intention of having a rest. (Powder room), (Loo) and (john) are other ways to say (toilet). Indeed, it is impossible to explain what a (rest room) is for without the use of roundabout ways or baby talk. It's (where you wash your hands) or (where you pee or poo), which are already euphemisms. Here we see a semantic change involved as the expressions used often have little to do with the referents.

### **2. Death and Disease**

The fear of death carries into fear of words having to do with death and certain diseases. Many people believe words have great relations with what they symbolize, therefore (If anything should happen to me) means (when I die). Instead of saying (die), they use substitute expressions such as (pass away), (go to his reward), (answer the call of God), (go home) to have a better place), (depart) and (go west). Some serious diseases are also taboo topics. Cancer is said in a roundabout way as Big C” or terminally ill. So it is with the disease of mental disorder and intelligence deficiency. Their euphemistic sayings

*“She is a little may be He is not all there/ eccentric / a little confused.”*

### **3. Sex**

According to (Deng: 1989, p.93), words having to do with anatomy and sex, and words even vaguely suggesting anatomical or sexual matters have remarkable connotations, especially in American culture. Ladies of the nineteenth century could not bring themselves to say (breast) or (leg), not even of chicken, so that the terms (white meat) and (dark meat) were substituted. It was thought inelegant to speak of (going to bed), and (to retire) was used instead in the United States, the sexual revolution of the 1960s began to make a great change. English-speaking countries tend to be freer and more tolerant on this in recent years. People, particularly younger ones feel freer than they once did to take

about sex-related subjects, masturbation, impotence, sexual activities of various kinds and human sex organs are more likely to be talked or written about than they were 15 or 20 years ago. It is the same with China in present day. Thus to make love, to have sex with, etc., which are slightly (dressed-up) terms, are not all uncommon writing now.

#### **4. Four-letter Words**

People are more tolerant with such words like (fuck, tits, damn ...) the so-called “four-letter words”. For instance, in the streets in London we could see the eye-catching shop name (FCUK), which in fact is the abbreviation of (French Connection United Kingdom). In spite of the sexual revolution, these words are still considered improper in most conversations, even in written form. In 1963, Eric Partridge included (fuck) in his Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English. Despite his use of an asterisk for the vowel “u”, the result was a storm of complaints to schools, libraries, and the police. Even today, the book is not always available on the open shelves of public libraries. An even greater frenzy took place in 1959, when the unabridged edition of D. H. Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover was published, which contained several instances of the word. The edition was banned because of obscenity, and court cases followed. Later, the word quickly appeared in the daily press, and it has become widespread in the literary works. Despite the development of liberal attitudes, there is still a strong antagonism to the use of four-letter words in public speech; and they are still not always to be found in dictionary.

#### **5. Swear Words**

A remarkable variety of linguistic forms can be considered as cursing and swearing. There are the complex and sophisticated expressions may be found in religious, legal, and other formal contexts. At the same, time, there are many daily examples of taboo language that express such emotions as hatred, frustration and surprise. The most common speech comprise single words or short phrases, conveying different levels of intensity and attracting different degrees of social approval. English examples range from the mild such as heck and dash, to the harshest one.

In these social contexts swearing can become a dominant linguistic feature with sentences often containing taboo words. Sex, excretion and supernatural power are the main sources of swear words. Half of them relate to words referring to body parts and functions that societies considered taboo, such as merd, ball, and other four-letter words.

#### **6. Privacy**

One of the reasons behind taboo on questions about personal matters is that English –Speaking people put a high value on privacy. The English has a saying (A man’s home is his castle), meaning a man’s home is sacred to him; no one should come in without permission, so it is the same with his life, personal affairs and private concerns. Asking questions concerning one’s age , weight, income , martial states ,politics, religion etc. would be considered prying into individual ‘s personal life which is another form of invading a person ‘s castle( Dang , 1989.p.96 )

Many topics are regarded as taboo and cannot be asked about and those are as (What’s tour income?)(How old are you?)(What’s your religion?)(Are you married?)(Where are you going?)and ( How much did you pay for this book? )

#### **7. Discriminatory Language**

In recent times, many people have a growing tendency to be sensitive to what is called sexist language and racist language.

## **A. Sexist language**

Sexist language in its present day means that language is prejudiced against the female. Studies of sexism in the English language began by American concerned with the effects of language with the effects of language on people's attitudes towards woman, which prejudice against woman and in favor of men. There is tendency which involves words that are clearly restricted in one sex or the other, with female words tending to have less favorable meanings. A class pair is master and mistress, where the male meanings are good and the female words and the female meanings are bad especially a mistress is a partner for extramarital sex (Hudson: 2000:p. 102).

## **B. Racist language**

Racism is the idea that some races are inherently inferior to other. Racist language is that shows the basic fundamental things against certain racial or ethnic groups. It is the language that degrades them (Dung, 1989, p. 100).

In English language, much of discrimination is against black people or black things in general while the color white generally refers to the purity, innocence, cleanliness as well as chastity, all the words with negative meanings as (black list, black mark, black guard). Even lies are accepted if it is white as the positive meaning of (white lie). As far as, there are some names that are related to racial and ethnic background as (poles, kikes, polacks). The same can be said for some jokes that have some touches with racism for stupidity or ignorance of certain group as (I am Dutch if I ....).

### **1.2 The aims of the research**

This paper is in tented to:-

1. Identify and describe the term of taboo and clarify its origins.
2. Describe using taboo words in some American songs.
3. Identify different types of taboo words and how they are used to in those songs.

### **1.3 Limits of the research**

This paper is limited to study taboo words and its different kind of it through some American songs (Super Bass and Cop killer) which are written and published in USA.

### **1.4 Methodology**

This paper is based on Bastteilla (2005) and how he divides taboo words into different types and each one has its own function as epithets, profanity, vulgarity and obscenity as well as the different functions as Wardhaugh (2006) for drawing attention to oneself, to show contempt, to be provocative and to mock authority.

### **1.5 Major categories of Taboo words**

Taboo words are words that are used in appropriate way in certain contexts. (Nordquist 2018 p.2) identifies major categories of taboo words and phrase in English as :-

1. Dirty words that are concerned with sex and excretion as (bugger, shit).
2. Words that have to do with religions and Christian origin as (Christ) and (Jesus.)
3. Words which are used in animal abuse (calling certain person by the name of animal such as bitch, cow)
4. There are other categories of taboo words that are forbidden because of their social norms in certain society as well as there are some words that are considered taboo words because of political use.

## **1.6 Types of Taboo words**

According to Battistella (2005), there are four types of taboo words that each one has its own functions and are said or used in certain circumstances and specific condition:-

### **1-Epithets**

Epithets is the first type of taboo words that are characterized by the existence of references to race, ethnicity ,sexuality , gender as well as the appearance of the individual. This kind of taboo words are connected to frustration and anger that are short, but strong last of passionate language.

### **2- Profanity**

Profanity is the type that is characterized by religious cursing because it usually mouth with the use of what is considered to be sacred and holy. According to Battisella (2005), profanity is the using of expression involving using religious terms in certain situations that are not related to religious terms; that means there is no match between religious words and non-religious situation. The purpose behind using profanity is not to show blasphemy or to vilify god or anything connected to with religious, but it may be used to show the emotional reaction toward certain situations

### **3- Vulgarity**

Vulgarity is another type of taboo words that are some interrelationships with the fourth type, obscenity that both of them have the same reference. They have sexual expressions in very clear manner. According to (Battistella, 2005), vulgarity is the term that is used to refer to expressions that have some insights into humiliation referred to or desired.

### **4. Obscenity**

Obscenity is the fourth type that is used to refer to expressions that are avoidable from public use as they involve impolite, rude, unionist and detestable to morality. According to the model of this paper, obscenity can be defined as words which deal with sexual excretory and sexual differentiating anatomy.

## **1.7 Functions of Taboo words**

There are many reasons that may be the source of using taboo words and absolutely , this use of taboo words are different according to the cultural and social norms of society that are different from one society to another then the functions are different depending on the differences in cultural and social norms of certain societies.

There are some functions of Taboo words:

### **A .To draw attention**

The main function of using taboo words in the literary and non-literary texts is the ability to show the attention to oneself or something from the listener. People use this kind of words to make their listeners believed that they have more power because their words have a strong connotation.

### **B. To show contempt**

The use of taboo words in conversation between two people can also show contempt (Al- Farisi: 2019: p.148). According to *Oxford Advance Leaner's Dictionary* (1995) which states that the individual may be useless totally or something is needless, cannot be regarded in. Using this type of word person tries to show a kind of insult to the addressee by using some taboo word that cannot utter in public, but they are used to show offence to the addressee's pride.

### **C. To be provocative**

This function of taboo words is to show some attitude to the addressee to have certain reaction such as anger and violation. This was the main core for the study of (Roth well: 2007) who states that verbal obscenity can be the most important process in using taboo words. Taboo words are considered as the means that the individual uses to get the response from the addressee as a reaction upon what

is said. So in this situation, using taboo words are successful if the response is suitable with the spencer's expectation.

#### **D. To mock authority**

Through this function, people use some taboo words when they try to criticize public images government and institution. The main study for this is that is done by (McGuire: 1973) who states that the verbal obscenity for society's rule a rebellion against power as uses as impertinence for thing that are considered dangerous .Taboo words are used to express the disappointment about reality that is very different from what they have expected .The use of taboo words to mock in this situation ,is the way that people prefer that are directed to the public authority to show the dissatisfaction about governmental stuffs .

#### **1.7 Data Analysis**

This paper concerns some American songs that contain some taboo words. The song of Nicki Minag's (Super Bass) is one of the songs that this paper tackles. It is released in 2010. It is solidified the singer as a force to be reckoned with both of pop and rap music. The singer was born in 1982 in Saint James from African and Indian descent, this makes her to tackle the songs that contain taboo words as a way to express her attitude toward her place that she lived in, USA.

This paper concerns the song of the group of Body Count's (Cop Killer).It is released in 1992. It is one of the most controversial songs that was “the subject of much criticism from various political figures, although many defended the song on the basis of the groups ‘rights to freedom of speech’”. [WWW.Wikipedia.org](http://WWW.Wikipedia.org)

#### **Extracts**

In these songs, There are different types of taboo words are found, they are epithets, profanity, vulgarity and obscenity. Each one of them has its own function as to show Contempt, to mock authority, to draw attention to one and to be provocative:

##### *Extract 1*

*I got my black shirt on*

*I got my black gloves on*

In this part of the song of (Cop killer), the singer uses many words that are taboo in their use because of the way of using as (black shirt, black gloves) which are the type of taboo words as Epithets that refer to different appearance of the individual as well as the actions that are involved within. The colure (black) refers to the black skin of original Africans who suffer from their color skin as a symbol of humiliation by White people in many English societies.

The function behind using the word (black) to refer to the dissatisfaction toward the public governmental views about the discrimination toward black people in America

##### *Extract 2*

*I can't tell that you're in touch with your famine side, uh*

*Yes, I did, yes, I did*

In this part of the song, the singer uses other kind of taboo words that are called as profanity which are used implicitly with words as (touch); this word is used to refer to religious meanings not as making blasphemy, but as something normally which is taken in the everyday speech. Using the word (famine) is a way to declare that the singer agrees with point of view that the muscular human being has a feminine side which should be invisible and unseen ,but the singer dares to declare that when she sings (*Yes, I did, yes, I did*).

The function behind using this word is to show contempt since it shows the offence to the muscular human being's pride.

### *Extract 3*

*Cop killer, I know your family grieving (fuck, em)*

*Cop killer, but tonight we got even, Hahahaha, yea*

*Fuck the police*

*Fuck the police*

*Fuck the police*

*Fuck the police*

In this part of the song, the singer uses other type of taboo words which are vulgarity that refers to using taboo words with sexual meanings as (fuck) and the type is represented implicitly when the singer uses certain words with more than one meaning as (family, tonight), these words are used to mean something that are contextualized implicitly to refer to sexual connotations since the word (tonight) means doing something in hidden situations.

The function of using this type of taboo words is to draw attention to him since he feels that the government doesn't respond to his calls.

### *Extract 4*

*Cop killer, I am a mutha fucking, cop killer.*

In this line, the singer uses the word (fucking) to indicate that he is humiliated in this place and no one does anything to save him so he uses the word (mother).the mother is more sensitive person in the family that all societies respect her because of her great role in building human and society. The offence to the mother is other type of taboo words that the singer uses to make a relationship between the situation (fucking) and the person (mother).

The function of using this type of taboo words is so clear when the singer wants to show the offence to the mother as a reaction to his dissatisfaction toward governmental stuff and mock the authority of the governments in USA.

### *Extract 5*

*Excuse me, you, re a hell of a guy*

*You, know, I ready got a thing for America guys.*

This part of the song shows the religious word (hell) as the type of profanity in using taboo words since the singer uses the religious word in non-religious situations.

The function behind using this type of taboo words is to be provocative since the singer wants to attract the attention toward her but; she has no power to do that.

### **Conclusion:-**

The aim of research is to describe and identify what is that happens with an aspect that taboo and euphemism affects us. All taboo words are refused to talk about, but still there is other who does that indirectly.

Taboo words are used to express the emotions and attitudes toward love in the world recently .the use of taboo words are very hard because they are offensive, every social group has its own groups of taboo words that are different in its type and function from the other societies.

This research is to investigate all the different types and different functions of taboo words. The analysis of some American songs (Super Bass, Cop killer) shows that the profanity which deals with bodily movement and sexual point of view is used more than other types. The last function of taboo words which is to mock authority is presented implicitly when such social relationships between people are with no clear treatment from governmental rule and society punishment toward those group of people .

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