

Javanese Taboo Language as Social Interaction among Teenagers from Different Socioeconomic Backgrounds

Fajar Susanto¹, Claudia Fira Inne Purwantoro², Tri Indrayanti³

Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya

fajarsusanto@unipasby.ac.id¹, claudiafirnp@gmail.com², indrayanti.trie18@unipasby.ac.id

Corresponding Author: fajarsusanto@unipasby.ac.id

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explain why teenagers from different socioeconomic backgrounds use the Javanese taboo language and how taboo language influences the teenagers' social interaction. This study employed a qualitative case study design with ethnographic techniques, including observation, interviews, and voice recordings of teenagers' daily conversations and online gaming interactions. The participants in this study were four teenagers, two from the upper-middle class and two from the lower middle class. Data were taken with direct observations, recordings, and interviews. The findings indicated that a cursing word 'cok', a sort of Javanese taboo language, is most commonly utilized by teenagers. The taboo language has become a common part of adolescents' communication, particularly among lower middle-class teenagers. Family environment and peer groups strongly influence the normalization of taboo expressions in everyday speech. Lower middle-class participants tended to use taboo language as a symbol of intimacy, solidarity, and emotional expression, while upper middle-class participants showed greater awareness and control in avoiding taboo expressions due to stricter parental guidance and social norms. The study concludes that taboo language among teenagers is closely connected to socialization, identity, and interactional context rather than simply impolite behavior. Socioeconomic background significantly shapes teenagers' perceptions, habits, and regulation of taboo language in daily communication.

Keywords: family influence, peer influence, socioeconomic background, taboo language, teenagers

Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini untuk mengkaji latarbelakang penggunaan bahasa tabu Jawa oleh remaja yang berasal dari latar belakang sosial ekonomi yang berbeda, serta menganalisis pengaruh penggunaan bahasa tabu tersebut terhadap interaksi sosial di kalangan remaja. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif dengan pendekatan etnografi, yang melibatkan teknik observasi, wawancara, serta perekaman suara terhadap percakapan sehari-hari dan interaksi dalam permainan daring para remaja. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini terdiri atas empat orang remaja, yaitu dua berasal dari kelas menengah atas dan dua dari kelas menengah bawah. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi langsung, dokumentasi berupa rekaman, serta wawancara mendalam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kata umpatan "cok", sebagai salah satu bentuk bahasa tabu dalam bahasa Jawa, merupakan ekspresi yang paling dominan digunakan oleh para remaja. Penggunaan bahasa tabu telah menjadi bagian yang terinternalisasi dalam praktik komunikasi sehari-hari remaja, khususnya pada kelompok kelas menengah bawah. Lingkungan keluarga serta kelompok sebaya berperan signifikan dalam proses normalisasi penggunaan ekspresi tabu dalam interaksi verbal sehari-hari. Remaja dari kelas menengah bawah cenderung memanfaatkan bahasa tabu sebagai sarana ekspresi keakraban, solidaritas kelompok, serta pelepasan emosi, sedangkan remaja dari kelas menengah atas menunjukkan tingkat kontrol dan kesadaran linguistik yang lebih tinggi dalam menghindari penggunaan ekspresi tabu, yang dipengaruhi oleh pola pengasuhan yang lebih ketat serta norma sosial yang lebih restriktif. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penggunaan bahasa tabu di kalangan remaja tidak semata-mata merefleksikan perilaku tidak sopan, melainkan merupakan bagian dari proses sosialisasi, pembentukan identitas, dan konteks interaksi sosial. Latar belakang sosial ekonomi



terbukti memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk persepsi, kebiasaan, serta regulasi penggunaan bahasa tabu dalam komunikasi sehari-hari remaja.

Kata kunci: *pengaruh keluarga, pengaruh teman, latarbelakang ekonomi, Bahasa tabu, anak muda*

INTRODUCTION

The use of taboo language or cursing words among Javanese teenagers has become an increasingly noticeable phenomenon in everyday social interaction, particularly within informal communication such as friendship conversations and online gaming activities (Jay, 1999). Teenagers from different socioeconomic backgrounds appear to demonstrate different attitudes, levels of awareness, and patterns of swearing in daily communication. Teenagers tend to use taboo expressions more openly and frequently as part of casual interaction, emotional expression, humor, and solidarity with peers. However, there are teenagers that generally show greater control and awareness regarding the social appropriateness of taboo language because of stronger parental supervision and family values emphasizing politeness.

In addition, teenagers often adopt taboo expressions as markers of group identity, social belonging, and emotional expression, making such language a salient feature of youth interaction within Javanese communities. Teenagers from different socioeconomic backgrounds may encounter varying degrees of exposure to taboo language. Teenagers from lower socioeconomic settings may experience more frequent use in informal, peer-dominated spaces, while teenagers from higher socioeconomic contexts may face stronger institutional or familial regulation (Ningjue, 2010). These differences influence not only the frequency with which taboo language is used, but also the functions it serves, whether to assert solidarity, display social toughness, negotiate status, or signal affiliation with particular peer groups (Basuki & Hartati, 2017). Teenagers across all social strata may employ taboo language for various pragmatic and interpersonal purposes, such as articulating frustration, attracting attention, signaling contempt, or strengthening group solidarity within peer interactions (Guillot, 2023). The use of taboo language among teenagers, consequently, reflects not merely socioeconomic background but also the complex social emotional dynamic that shapes teenagers' communication (Shek et al., 2017).

Dynel (2012) examined the functions of swearing and taboo expressions in interpersonal communication. The study found that taboo language is not always used aggressively, but can also function as humor, solidarity, and a marker of group identity among speakers. Dynel emphasized that swear words often help reduce social distance and create intimacy within peer interaction. However, the study mainly focused on the pragmatic functions of taboo language in general communication and did not specifically explore how socio-economic background and family environment influence adolescents' use of taboo language in everyday interaction. Jay (1999) investigated the psychological and social dimensions of taboo words among adolescents and adults. The study revealed that teenagers frequently use swearing as emotional expression, especially in informal contexts such as friendship interaction and stressful situations. Jay also explained that repeated exposure to taboo language in social environments contributes to the normalization of swearing behavior. While Anggita (2015) focused on identifying the types and functions of taboo words used by characters in the movie *Bad Teacher*. She found four major types of taboo words in the movie: obscenity, profanity, vulgarity, and epithet. The study revealed that taboo expressions were mainly used to show contempt, draw attention, provoke others, and mock authority. The study emphasized that taboo

language in movies reflects social interaction and emotional expression within particular contexts.

Although previous studies have discussed taboo language from various perspectives, there is still a significant gap in understanding how socio-economic background influences the use of taboo language among Javanese teenagers in real-life social interaction. The previous studies did not specifically examine how socio-economic background, family environment, and peer interaction influence the use and regulation of taboo language among teenagers in everyday communication, particularly within the Javanese cultural context that strongly values politeness. Based on this reason, the purpose of this study is to examine the reasons why the teenagers use the taboo language in their social interaction and how socioeconomic backgrounds influence their social interaction in using taboo language.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study with an ethnographic approach to explore the taboo language among teenagers from different socioeconomic backgrounds. By using ethnography approach, as described by Brennen (2025), the researchers can obtain precise and holistic descriptions of phenomena through participant observation, interview, and documentation. In this study, the researchers immersed themselves in daily environment of the participants to observe naturally occurring instances of taboo language use, while maintaining sensitivity to context and representation, as recommended by Marvasti (2004). As a case study, the participants – four teenagers from Sawotratap Village in Sidoarjo – were intentionally selected based on their socioeconomic classifications: two from the upper-middle class and two from the lower-middle class. Over approximately two months, from July to September, the researchers conducted sustained interaction with the participants, allowing for in-depth documentation of their linguistic behavior and the socio-cultural factors shaping it. Socioeconomic categorization was determined using Basrowi's (2005) criteria, which consider indicators such as wealth, knowledge, honor, and power, as well as monthly expenditure ranges used to classify individuals into economic strata.

The data for this research were obtained from four teenagers participants who were identified as capable of providing rich and relevant information aligned with the purpose of the study, following Creswell's (2014) guidance on purposeful selection. Here is the participants' information

Table 1. Participants' information

No	Name	Gender	Age	Educational Background	Social Status	Parents' Income
1	Juan	Male	13	Students of Junior High School	Lower-middle class	IDR. 1.600.000
2	Satria	Male	14	Students of Junior High School	Lower-middle class	IDR. 2.170.000
3	Rama	Male	12	Students of Junior High School	Upper-middle class	IDR. 15.000.000



4	Izham	Male	12	Students of Junior High School	Upper-middle class	IDR. 15.000.000
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Multiple data collection techniques were employed, including participant observation, indirect audio recordings, semi-structure interviews, and documentation. Participant observation allowed the researchers to engage directly with participants while maintaining professional distance, consistent with Sangasubana's (2011) definition of ethnography observation. Semi-structured interviews followed Spradley's (2016) interview framework, beginning with the identification of key informants and progressing through descriptive questioning, domain and taxonomic analysis, contrast questioning, and componential analysis. Documentation served as an important supplementary technique for validating observational and interview data. All data were then analyzed using thematic analysis, which is widely used in anthropological and qualitative research to identify patterns within cultural phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involved an interactive cycle of familiarizing the data, generating codes, constructing tentative themes, refining theme structure and ensuring alignment with the study's objectives. Through this methodical analysis, the study sought to develop a comprehensive understanding of how socioeconomic factors influence teenagers' use taboo language within their socio-cultural context.

RESULTS

Reasons Why Teenagers Use Taboo Language in Social Interaction

Taboo language functions as a marker of intimacy and solidarity

Juan is a teenager and comes from lower-middle class status in which he always uses cursing word and a familiar term in Javanese language. The data showed that a key finding in this dataset is the functional shift of taboo language from offensive expression to a marker of intimacy. Juan's statements and recorded interactions provided strong evidence that words typically categorized as offensive (e.g., "cok" – Javanese cursing word equivalent to "fuck") are recontextualized in peer-group settings as affiliative tools. Rather than signaling aggression, these expressions serve to reduce interpersonal distance, foster solidarity, and create a relaxed conversational environment. His repeated use of such cursing word "cok" during gameplay demonstrated that taboo language becomes embedded in spontaneous, high-engagement interactions where emotional involvement and peer bonding are intensified. In this sense, taboo language operates as a form of in-group linguistic capital and taboo language signals membership and closeness.

This cursing word 'cok' has two functions. The first is used for releasing strong emotions (offensive expression) and the second is used for signaling intimacy and group belonging rather than hostility. Therefore, the word 'cok' in this situation is not intended to offend but rather to reduce social distance and create a sense of closeness. Juan stated in excerpt 1 that using taboo language makes him feel more comfortable and eliminates boundaries in conversations with his friends. However, this use is context-dependent, as some teenagers only use taboo language with close friends and avoid it in more formal or distant relationships. Here is the excerpt 1 to describe that the cursing word uttered when Juan chatted with his friends is to decrease the distance between them.

Excerpt 1

"So when I meet my friends, I always use taboo language. It's because I feel more familiar when chatting with them. The use of taboo language when talking to my friends makes

me feel more comfortable, because I feel there is no distance between my friend and me when chatting” (Juan)

Juan’s use of taboo language can be understood as a natural and meaningful way of expressing closeness with his friends. For him, speaking with taboo words does not carry a negative or offensive intention. Instead, it creates a relaxed and informal atmosphere that allows him to feel more at ease and unrestricted. When he interacts with his peers using expressions like “cok,” the language functions less as an insult and more as a shared code that signals familiarity and mutual understanding. In this context, taboo language becomes a linguistic tool that removes social distance, making conversations feel more genuine and unfiltered, as if there are no boundaries separating him from his friends.

This interpretation is strongly supported by the recorded data from Juan’s gameplay interactions. In Excerpt 2, Juan repeatedly used the word “cok” in various utterances such as:

Excerpt 2

“Sek ta cok, arek kok”	(Just a moment, fuck)
“Sek a cok”	(Wait a minute, fuck)
“Ndang mlaku cok”	(Hurry up, fuck)
“Cok rinio cok”	(Come here, fuck)
“Apes cok”	(Too bad, fuck)
“Yo mati aku cok”	(Obviously, I’m dead, fuck)
“Cok mlayu cok”	(Go away, fuck)
“Mati cok sumpah”	(I’ died, fuck, swear)

Rather than expressing anger or hostility, these phrases appear to accompany moments of excitement, urgency, and engagement during the game. The high frequency of these expressions – occurring more than five times within a short interaction – demonstrates how deeply embedded this form of language is in his spontaneous communication style. It reflects not only his emotional involvement in the activity but also the comfort he feels in speaking freely among friends who share the same linguistic norms.

However, Satria’s data introduce an important nuance by showing that the use of taboo language is context-dependent and relationally selective. Satria is from lower middle class. Unlike Juan, Satria does not universally utter taboo expressions across all social interactions. He restricts the use of taboo language to close friends while maintaining more formal or neutral language with less familiar interlocutors. This indicates an awareness of pragmatic appropriateness and audience design, where speakers adjust their linguistic choices based on the perceived social distance and relational intimacy.

Excerpt 3

It depends on my friends I meet. If they're not close friends, I'll only talk about important things. I only use taboo language with my close friends. So, not all of my friends use taboo language with me. (Satria)

Satria’s relatively lower frequency of taboo usage in recorded interactions reinforces this interpretation, suggesting that even within the same socioeconomic group, individual differences in communicative style and sensitivity to social norms play a



role. Data recordings show that cursing words were not found during playing games back up this theory.

Excerpt 4

Satria	"Rinio, rinio he"	(Come here, come on!)
	"Mati kon"	(I'm dead)
	"Sabar"	(Be patient)
	"Wes a?"	(Are you done?)
	"Loh kon iku over loh"	(That's over)
	"Yo apes lah"	(Yes damn it)
	"Rene loh"	(Come here)
	"Ayo loh rinio loh"	(Come on, come here)

Habit formation plays a significant role

This study showed that taboo language has become a daily habit for some teenagers, especially those from lower middle-class backgrounds. Their use of taboo words is not only influenced by emotions, but also by the people and social environments around them. The finding of this study indicated that taboo language has become a common part of teenagers' everyday communication. The data suggest that adolescents no longer use taboo expressions only in moments of anger or conflict, but also in ordinary conversations with friends, particularly in informal settings such as playing games. This frequent use showed that taboo language has gradually become normalized within certain youth communities. In addition, teenagers' use of taboo language is strongly influenced by their social environment, especially their family background and peer groups. Among these factors, friendship circles appear to play a particularly significant role in shaping habitual language use during adolescence. In excerpt 5, Satria clarified why he is used to cursing when he interacted with his friends:

Excerpt 5

"I used to use taboo language reflexively. It started in my circle of friends. In my circle, my friends often use taboo language in their daily lives. Someone who is often shocked like me feels the impact very much. So I always added taboo language when I was surprised, but now, without being surprised, I have been using taboo language in my daily life. And that's the reason why I reflexively use taboo language in my daily life."
(Satria)

Satria's statement clearly illustrates how peer influence contributes to the development of taboo language habits. According to him, his use of taboo expressions originally emerged from his social environment, where his friends regularly used such language in daily interactions. Because he spent a great deal of time with friends who frequently swore, he gradually adopted the same speaking style. This reflects the sociolinguistic idea that language behavior is often learned through repeated exposure and interaction within social groups. Teenagers tend to imitate the communication patterns of their peers in order to feel accepted and connected within the group. In Satria's case, taboo language became part of his linguistic identity because it was continuously reinforced in his friendship circle.

Another important aspect of Satria's explanation is the role of emotional reflex and spontaneity in the use of taboo language. He describes himself as someone who is easily startled, which initially caused him to produce taboo expressions automatically

whenever he was surprised. Over time, however, these expressions were no longer limited to emotional reactions. Instead, they became integrated into his everyday speech, even in situations where he was not shocked or emotionally triggered. This shift demonstrates how repeated linguistic behavior can eventually develop into habit. What initially functions as an emotional response gradually becomes normalized through constant repetition and social reinforcement.

The gameplay recordings further support Satria's claims and provide evidence of how taboo language appears naturally in his interactions. Some expression can be seen in excerpt 6:

Excerpt 6

Satria: "Reneo, ndang rene. Yah mundur, cok, gae taek a"
 (Come here, come here, soon. Yeah, back off, fuck, shit)
 "Hee ampun ampun. Ga kenek cok. Lo he kok mundur"
 (Oh my gosh.. It didn't hit, fuck. Hey, why do you step back?)
 "Cok nge-lag cok"
 (Fuck, lagging, fuck)

Those expressions in excerpt 6 "Yah mundur cok, gae taek a" "Ga kenek cok," and "Cok nge lag cok" are spoken spontaneously during moments of frustration, urgency, and excitement while gaming. These utterances suggest that taboo language serves multiple communicative functions. It acts not only as an emotional outlet but also as a conversational marker that intensifies reactions and maintains engagement with teammates. The repeated use of the word "cok" during gameplay indicates that the expression has become deeply embedded in Satria's communication style, especially in emotionally dynamic situations.

Interestingly, as shown in excerpt 3, the data show that Satria's use of taboo language is still relatively moderate compared to other participants such as Juan. Although Satria frequently uses taboo expressions, his usage seems more situational and emotionally driven rather than fully normalized across all interactions. This suggests that individual personality traits also influence the extent to which taboo language becomes habitual. Satria's tendency to become easily surprised contributes to his reflexive use of swearing, while the influence of his peer group reinforces and maintains the habit over time.

Family influence contributes to the normalization of taboo language

Juan reported that taboo language is commonly used within his family environment, so that this condition makes it a natural part of everyday speech. In such cases, Juan perceives taboo language as acceptable and do not associate it with impoliteness. The data from Excerpt 6 show that Juan's statement of using cursing words is strongly influenced by his family environment. Juan explained that the use of such cursing word has already become a normal part of communication within his household. Because taboo language is commonly used by family members, Juan grows up viewing these expressions as ordinary rather than offensive. As a result, he becomes highly accustomed to using taboo words in his daily interactions without feeling uncomfortable or restricted. This finding suggests that family plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' language habits, especially when certain expressions are repeatedly heard and normalized at home. In Juan's case, taboo language is not perceived as deviant speech, but as a natural



communicative style learned through everyday family interaction. see the following excerpt of interview:

Excerpt 6

The use of taboo language in my family is common, so I'm used to using taboo language in my daily life

This interpretation is further supported by the gameplay recordings (see, excerpt 2) where Juan repeatedly uses the word “cok” in almost every utterance during the game. Expressions such as “Ndang mlaku cok,” “Cok rinio cok,” and “Cok mlayu cok” demonstrate how naturally and spontaneously taboo language appears in his speech. The frequency of these expressions indicates that swearing has become deeply embedded in his conversational habits and emotional reactions. Juan appears more confident and unrestricted in using such expressions openly, even in social settings. This difference highlights how family upbringing influences not only the frequency of taboo language use, but also teenagers’ perceptions of what is socially acceptable in communication.

Influence of Socioeconomic Background on the Use of Taboo Language
Family Environment and Language Socialization

One important finding of this study is that the family environment plays a significant role in shaping how teenagers view and use taboo language in their everyday lives. Teenagers who grow up in environments where taboo expressions are commonly spoken tend to see such language as normal and acceptable. This can be seen clearly in the experiences of lower middle-class participants such as Juan and Satria. Their interactions show that taboo language is not treated as something shocking or inappropriate, but rather as an ordinary part of daily communication. Because these expressions are repeatedly heard in their surroundings, they gradually become naturalized within their speech habits and social interactions.

Juan’s data strongly reflect this influence of family background. Juan learned to use taboo language not only from peers but also from the communicative practices within his household. Since taboo expressions were already normalized at home, Juan developed a high level of comfort in using them openly. The frequency and spontaneity of these expressions indicate that taboo language has become deeply embedded in his communication style and emotional reactions. Similarly, Satria’s experience demonstrates how repeated exposure to taboo language within social environments can shape habitual speech patterns. Although Satria mainly attributed his use of taboo language to his friendship circle, his behavior also reflects a process of normalization through constant interaction. He explained that he initially used taboo language only as a reflex when surprised, but over time it became part of his everyday speech even when he was not emotionally triggered. This suggests that the more teenagers are exposed to taboo language in their immediate environment, the more likely they are to internalize and reproduce it unconsciously in daily communication.

In contrast, upper middle-class participants such as Rama and Izham were raised in families that strongly discouraged the use of taboo language. Their parents emphasized politeness and respectful communication, which influenced them to avoid swearing in daily interactions. This shows that socioeconomic background affects the process of language socialization, where family values and parental control shape how teenagers perceive acceptable and unacceptable speech.

Rama's experience shows how family environment and language socialization strongly influence teenagers' awareness and control of taboo language. Coming from an upper middle-class family, Rama was raised in a household where the use of taboo expressions was strongly discouraged both at home and in public.

Excerpt 7

"Awareness of using taboo language is quite high in my community, especially within my family. My family is not accustomed to using taboo language in everyday life. My parents strictly forbid me from using taboo language, either at home or in public" (Rama)

During the interview, he explained that his family had a high awareness of the negative effects of taboo language, and his parents strictly prohibited him from using such expressions in everyday life. Because of this upbringing, Rama developed the belief that using taboo language openly is disrespectful and socially inappropriate. This can also be seen in his gameplay recordings, where he consistently used calm and neutral expressions such as:

Excerpt 8

Rama	"Loh loh akehe"	(Ouch, It is too much)
	"Dalam perjalanan"	(On the way)
	"Eh ngremekno"	(Uh, underestimate)
	"Sori"	(Sorry)
	"Maju, maju Ferguso"	(Move forward, Ferguso)
	"Ngeselin ga kenek"	(Annoying, can't get it)
	"Haduh"	(Ouch)
	"Sabar sabar"	(Be patient)
	"Awas, awas"	(Watch out, watch out)
	"Yakin a?"	(Are you sure?)
	"Ayo maju"	(Come on, move on)
	"Cepetan"	(Hurry up)
	"Sebelah kanan bro"	(On the right side dude)
	"Tak bantu a?"	(Can I help you?)
	"Kiri kiri"	(Left side, left side)
	"Ya Tuhan"	(Oh God)
	"Eh sori sori"	(Sorry, sorry)
	"Kan bener kan?"	(I told you)
	"Kanan sek cepet"	(Right side first, hurry up)
	"Nah sip"	(That's good)
	"Saya menang"	(I won)

Those expressions were used, instead of swearing, even during emotionally intense situations. Rama's interaction style reflects how parental guidance and consistent family values can shape teenagers to communicate in a more controlled and socially conscious manner. Rama's parents have strongly emphasized the importance of polite communication and have strictly prohibited the use of taboo language both at home and in public places. This consistent guidance appears to have influenced Rama's awareness of appropriate language use and helped him develop self-control in social interactions. Even during emotionally intense moments while playing games, Rama tends to remain calm and avoids using offensive expressions. He chose supportive and neutral language.



His behavior suggests that his parents not only taught him to avoid taboo language, but also modeled a communication style that values respect, politeness, and consideration for others. As a result, Rama becomes more conscious of how language can affect social relationships and public perception.

Similarly, Izham demonstrates the strong influence of family socialization on the regulation of taboo language. Like Rama, Izham grew up in an environment where swearing was not normalized, and his parents strictly limited the use of taboo expressions. Although Izham admitted that he occasionally used taboo language while playing games to release tension and emotion, he also revealed that he felt uncomfortable, nervous, and awkward after saying such words. See the excerpt 9:

Excerpt 9

"Taboo language among teenagers has become common. In my own family, the use of taboo language is not allowed. My family is not accustomed to using taboo language at home. My parents strictly forbid the use of taboo language both at home and in public places. But sometimes I use taboo language when playing games. I mean, using taboo language when playing games is a spontaneous way to release emotions and tension. I'm scared and nervous when I realize I'm using taboo language. It feels strange to me because my family and friends aren't used to it. And I actually rarely use taboo language in my daily life." (Izham)

This emotional reaction shows that taboo language remains unfamiliar and socially unacceptable within his personal value system because of the way he was raised. Unlike lower middle-class participants such as Juan and Satria, who became accustomed to hearing and using taboo expressions regularly, Izham rarely used such language in daily life and remained highly aware of its social implications. His case illustrates that family environment does not only affect the frequency of taboo language use, but also shapes teenagers' emotional responses and moral awareness regarding what kind of language is considered appropriate in society.

Although Izham occasionally produced taboo expressions during emotionally intense moments in games, he admits that this happens only because of sudden emotional reactions. His recordings show that he mainly used ordinary conversational expressions while playing the game. Taboo language or cursing word is not found in his recordings.

Excerpt 10

Izham	"Nang tengah"	(In the middle)
	"Waduh ayo sini"	(Ouch, come here)
	"Maju kabeh"	(Everyone, Move forward)
	"Maju maju"	(Come on, go ahead, go ahead)
	"Gak, gak aman"	(No, not safe)
	"Waduh makin gerombolan"	(Wow, more crowded)
	"Sabar"	(Be patient)
	"Percuma"	(It's useless)
	"Kiri kiri"	(Left side)
	"Berisap?"	(Be ready?)
	"Lo lo nang ndi?"	(Hey, where are you?)
	"Gak jelas malah kabur"	(I don't understand why did you run away)
	"Kanan cepetan"	(Right side, hurry up)
	"Tengah tengah awas"	(In the middle, watch out)
	"Wah sangar"	(Wow, so cool)

“Sebelah kiri”	(Left side)
“Loh musuhe tambah akeh”	(Ouch, several enemies are coming)
“Ayo trobos terus”	(Let’s breakthrough)
“Sebelah kanan eh sebelah kiri”	(Right side, oh no, left side)
“Yaopo iki”	(What to do)
“Hebat hebat”	(Great)
“Sudah kuduga”	(I already guessed)

Izham’s gameplay recordings showed that he mainly communicates using ordinary conversational expressions rather than taboo language, even during intense gaming situations. Throughout the interaction, his utterances are mostly focused on giving directions, warning teammates, and responding to situations in the game, such as “Maju kabeh” (“Everyone, move forward”), “Kanan cepetan” (“Right side, hurry up”), and “Tengah tengah awas” (“In the middle, watch out”). He also frequently used emotional but non-offensive expressions like “Waduh” (“Ouch/Wow”) and supportive comments such as “Hebat hebat” (“Great”). These expressions indicated that Izham tends to manage excitement and tension without relying on swearing or harsh language. Although he previously admitted that he occasionally used taboo language spontaneously during emotional moments in games, the recordings themselves do not show any clear use of cursing or taboo expressions. This suggests that taboo language is not a habitual part of his communication style.

The absence of taboo language in Izham’s recordings reflects the strong influence of his family environment and upbringing. Since his parents strictly discouraged the use of taboo expressions both at home and in public, Izham appears to have developed a higher level of awareness and self-control regarding language use. Even in fast-paced and emotionally engaging gameplay, he remains relatively careful in choosing his words. Instead of expressing frustration through swearing, Izham communicates through instructions, reactions, and emotional comments that remain socially acceptable. This finding demonstrates that upper middle-class family socialization can shape teenagers to regulate their speech more carefully and avoid making taboo language a natural habit in everyday interaction.

Awareness of Social Norms and Self-Control in Communication

Another important finding is the higher awareness of social norms and stronger self-control shown by upper middle-class teenagers in using taboo language. Participants such as Rama and Izham demonstrated that they are more conscious of how language should be used appropriately in different social situations. This awareness is closely related to the values taught within their family environments, where politeness, respect, and proper public behavior are strongly emphasized. As a result, they tend to avoid using taboo language openly because they perceive it as impolite, disrespectful, and socially inappropriate. Even when they occasionally produce taboo expressions during emotionally intense situations, such as while playing games, they still feel uncomfortable or guilty afterward.

This pattern can be seen clearly in Izham’s statement in excerpt 9 when he admitted that he sometimes use taboo language spontaneously during games to release tension, but later felt “scared and nervous” after realizing he had said those words. Similarly, Ramas showed awareness from his statement in excerpt 7 and consistently avoided taboo language altogether because his parents strictly controlled and discouraged its use in both private and public settings. Their interaction styles show that upper middle-



class teenagers are generally socialized to regulate their emotions and maintain socially acceptable communication. Therefore, socioeconomic background influences not only the frequency of taboo language use, but also teenagers' awareness of social expectations, public image, and linguistic appropriateness in social interaction.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that taboo language among teenagers is not merely used to insult or express anger, but also functions as part of everyday social interaction. The data showed that taboo expressions such as “cok” and similar swear words are frequently used during conversations among peers, especially while playing online games. This finding supports the sociolinguistic perspective that language use is closely connected to social context and group identity. According to Holmes (2013), language choices are influenced by social relationships, social class, and interactional context. In this study, taboo language becomes a communicative resource that reflects intimacy, emotional involvement, and social belonging among teenagers. The findings also demonstrated that the meaning of taboo language depends heavily on context. For participants such as Juan and Satria, taboo expressions are not always interpreted as offensive, but often function as markers of familiarity and solidarity within their friendship groups.

One important finding concerns the influence of socioeconomic background on teenagers' attitudes toward taboo language. Lower middle-class participants, particularly Juan and Satria, are more accustomed to using taboo language in everyday interactions. Juan explained that taboo language was common within his family environment, making him feel comfortable using it both privately and publicly. His gameplay recordings support this claim, as the word “cok” appeared repeatedly in expressions such as “Nandang mlaku cok” and “Cok mlayu cok.” In contrast, upper middle-class participants such as Rama and Izham rarely used taboo language because their parents strongly discouraged it at home and in public. This difference aligns with sociolinguistic theories suggesting that social class influences linguistic behavior and language norms. Holmes argues that middle and upper social groups often emphasize more standard and socially accepted forms of language to maintain politeness and social prestige (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). The findings therefore indicated that family upbringing and socioeconomic background shape how teenagers perceive the acceptability of taboo expressions in social interaction.

The study also highlighted the important role of family environment in language socialization. Participants who grew up in households where taboo language was normalized tended to adopt the same speaking style in daily life. Juan clearly stated that his parents frequently used taboo expressions and did not react negatively when he used them himself. As a result, he perceived taboo language as normal communication behavior. On the other hand, Rama and Izham grew up in families that consistently prohibited swearing, leading them to develop greater awareness and self-control regarding language use. Rama emphasized that his parents strictly forbade taboo language both at home and in public, while Izham admitted feeling nervous and uncomfortable whenever he accidentally used taboo expressions during games. These findings support the idea that family is one of the primary agents of linguistic socialization, shaping children's understanding of appropriate and inappropriate speech behavior from an early age. The study therefore demonstrates that parental attitudes and communicative practices strongly influence teenagers' linguistic habits and awareness.

In addition, the findings of this study support and extend the research conducted by Jay (1999) who argued that taboo language among adolescents is often used as emotional expression and becomes normalized through repeated exposure within social environments. Similar to Jay's findings, the present study shows that Javanese teenagers frequently use swearing during emotionally intense situations, particularly while playing online games. Participants such as Juan and Satria often produced expressions like "cok" spontaneously when they were surprised, frustrated, excited, or emotionally involved in gameplay. However, this study goes beyond Jay's psychological explanation by showing that the normalization of taboo language is strongly influenced by socio-economic background and family environment. For example, Juan's habitual use of taboo language was shaped not only by emotional situations, but also by a family environment where swearing was commonly used and socially accepted. Therefore, while Jay emphasized emotional release and exposure, this study demonstrates that social class and family socialization also play an important role in determining how teenagers perceive and regulate taboo language in daily interaction.

This study also supports what has been found by Dynel (2012), in which Dynel explained that taboo language can function as humor, solidarity, intimacy, and group identity rather than purely offensive speech. This perspective is clearly reflected in the interactions of lower middle-class participants such as Juan and Satria, who used taboo expressions as part of casual communication with close friends. In many interactions, words like "cok" did not function as insults, but instead served to reduce social distance and create a relaxed atmosphere during conversation and gaming activities. This finding confirms Dynel's argument that swearing can have positive social functions within peer groups. However, the present study contributes a more critical sociolinguistic perspective by demonstrating that these interactional functions are influenced by differences in socio-economic background. Upper middle-class participants such as Rama and Izham did not use taboo language in the same way because they were socialized in families that emphasized politeness, self-control, and social appropriateness. As a result, this study positions itself as an extension of Dynel's work by showing that the social meaning and acceptability of taboo language are not universal, but shaped by family values, cultural expectations, and social class.

The findings additionally reveal that taboo language serves multiple pragmatic functions during gaming interactions. Participants used taboo expressions not only to insult others, but also to express surprise, excitement, frustration, panic, and emotional intensity during gameplay. For example, Juan's repeated use of "cok" accompanied instructions, reactions, and emotional responses while gaming. However, the study found that the communicative meaning of taboo language shifted depending on context and speaker relationship. This supports Culpeper's (2019) argument that taboo language is not always inherently offensive but can function as an emotional intensifier and interactional strategy depending on situational context. In this study, swear words often operated as conversational markers that strengthened emotional engagement and group interaction rather than as deliberate acts of aggression. This demonstrates the flexibility of taboo language within adolescent communication practices.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that upper middle-class teenagers demonstrate greater awareness of linguistic politeness and public appropriateness. Rama and Izham consistently associated taboo language with impoliteness and social discomfort. Even when Izham occasionally used taboo expressions during emotionally intense gaming moments, he immediately felt awkward and guilty afterward because such behavior



conflicted with the values taught in his family. This finding can be connected to politeness theory, particularly the idea that speakers regulate language to maintain social respect and avoid threatening social harmony (Holmes, 2005). Upper middle-class participants appeared more conscious of how language affects public image and interpersonal relationships, leading them to regulate their emotional expressions more carefully. In contrast, lower middle-class participants tended to perceive taboo language as a normal part of interaction and showed lower levels of concern about using it publicly.

The discussion demonstrates that teenagers' use of taboo language is deeply shaped by socioeconomic background, family socialization, peer influence, and interactional context. The study challenges the assumption that taboo language is always associated with aggression or impoliteness. Instead, the findings show that swear words among teenagers can function as symbols of solidarity, emotional expression, intimacy, and group belonging. At the same time, differences between lower middle-class and upper middle-class participants indicate that social class influences how taboo language is interpreted, controlled, and socially evaluated. Teenagers who are raised in environments where swearing is normalized are more likely to integrate taboo language into daily communication, while those raised in families emphasizing politeness and self-control tend to avoid it. Therefore, taboo language should be understood not simply as inappropriate speech, but as a sociolinguistic phenomenon closely connected to identity, socialization, and interpersonal interaction among teenagers.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study reveals that teenagers' use of taboo language is not merely a sign of impoliteness, but a meaningful part of their social interaction. For teenagers, taboo expressions function as a way to build closeness, express emotions, and create a relaxed and familiar atmosphere with peers. The findings showed that such language is often used intentionally within close relationships and spontaneously in emotionally charged situations, such as during games. At the same time, its use is not uniform, teenagers demonstrate different levels of awareness and control depending on the context and the people they interact with. Furthermore, socioeconomic background plays a significant role in shaping how teenagers perceive and use taboo language. Those from upper-middle-class families tend to be more selective and cautious due to stronger parental guidance and norms of politeness, while those from lower-middle-class backgrounds are more likely to view taboo language as a normal part of everyday communication influenced by both family and peer environments. This study highlights that taboo language is closely tied to social experience and interactional competence, suggesting that understanding context and appropriateness is more important than simply labeling such language as acceptable or unacceptable.

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