The Usage of Taboo Words in Dave Chappelle's "The Closer" Stand-Up Comedy

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Abstract	:	Taboo words are the primary notion in this study. There are two objectives of this study, which are to classify the types of taboo words in the show and categorize their functions. The analysis was conducted based on the theories proposed by Battistela (2005) and Wardaugh (2005). Battistela (2005) differentiated taboo words into 4 categories; Epithets, Profanity, Vulgarity, and Obscenity. Wardaugh (2006) formulated the function of taboo words into four types: to draw attention to oneself, to show contempt, to be aggressive or provocative, and to mock authority. The analyzed data are taken from a comedy show Dave Chappelle's The Closer Stand-up Comedy. The collected data is analyzed by using the descriptive qualitative method since it did not involve any numerical data. Through the analysis, the use of taboo terms in a speech is revealed; it helps the speaker deliver his points despite its rude and barbaric connotations. The comedy performance that mostly criticizes racial and LGBTQ+ phenomenon in America stimulates the speaker to use epithets as a tool for labeling the community member and making jokes. Through this comical performance, it can be concluded that taboo words can convey satire and critics to the current society, which the speaker considered as judgmental yet biased and unmerciful towards comedians. For this reason, it can be concluded that the use of taboo terms in a speech can help the speaker deliver his points despite their rude and barbaric connotations.

Keywords	:	*Taboo words, Stand-Up Comedy, Taboo word's function, LGBTQ+, Insult*

1. Introduction

The use of taboo words as a medium to express emotions in literature and cinema is increasing. Along with the cultural development in decades, societies have considered that expressing several emotions such as anger, anxiety, and frustration, by using taboo words is more effective. It slowly became a habitual behavior that can be used to identify the cultural background of the language itself. Taboo words also operate their function as an instrument of strong expression in the universal language, English. Indeed, using taboo or swear words is highly prohibited in public, but its existence is undeniable and inevitable from the language in daily social activities. Restriction of using specific words has begun since ancient times (Jay, 2009: 154). For instance, the act of blasphemy (terms or expressions against religion) is punishable by death in medieval times.
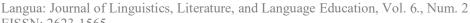
Although the usage had been associated with religious rebellion, nowadays, the usage of taboo words is easily heard in public as an impolite yet friendly way to cast a joke between friends of the same age instead of blasphemy or profanity. The use of taboo words emerged for many different reasons and objectives. The outcome may be positive or negative, or in some cases, inconsequential, though many disputes by mentioning that there is not any positive output of the usage (Jay, 2009: 155).

Literature itself is the projection of the language and culture of societies, therefore it has to represent these aspects in the truest form. Novels, movies, songs, and even stand-up comedy became more aware of the importance of taboo words in scripts and lyrics, hence the increasing number of taboo words in media these days. The various aspects of cultural background, motivation, and psychological condition that penetrated the usage of taboo words to a wider context attract the writer to analyze the usage of taboo words in Dave Chappelle's The Closer Stand-up comedy.

2 solid arguments encourage the writer to choose the show as the object of research. The first reason is the recency of the object. The Closer is recorded for Netflix in 2021 after the show was brought live in Detroit from August 10-15 in the same year. The imminent distance of time allows us to understand the use of taboo terms since it is still used in current society. Furthermore, the issue that was chosen in the comedy special is a controversial matter until this day. Conflict in societies happens around these issues and one of the main reasons is the use of taboo words to classify and degrade specific racial communities. These racial and gender-related slurs are frequently used in the show and will be the primary focus of this study.

Second, because it is a stand-up comedy, it allows the comedian to freely apply taboo words to attract attention. According to Seizer (2011: 211), utilizing taboo words as a way of playful communication is important to entertain the crowd to show the originality of the comic's act. She explains that stand-up shows and their relation to bars or nightclubs legitimized one to expect a loosened social behavior and expressive linguistic acts.

The writer is interested in this specific topic since generally, the outcome of the usage of taboo words in stand-up comedy is positive. These positive outcomes signified by the laughter of the audience are opposing the basic understanding and norms in societies that in most cases declare swear words are profane and inclement. Taboo words as the theme of the study of the object "The Closer" stand-up comedy is proper to analyze the recent linguistic phenomenon since the issues that were raised in the show relate to current society. The numerous amounts of disrespectful swear words enable the writer to utilize previous studies

regarding the topic to analyze the objectives of the speaker and its impact on the audience. Dave Chappelle bluntly and explicitly uses various swear words to build an interaction with the audience, which dissolves them into laughter.

Based on the topic that had been appointed, the problem is formulated as:

1. What type of taboo words are used in Dave Chappelle's The Closer Stand-Up Comedy?

2. What is the function of taboo words used by the speaker in Dave Chappelle's The Closer Stand-Up Comedy?

Thus, the writer could conclude that the objectives of this study are:

1. To classify and describe taboo words behind the usage that was used by the speaker in Dave Chappelle's The Closer Stand-Up Comedy.

2. To identify and understand the function behind the usage of taboo words that were used by the speaker in Dave Chappelle's The Closer Stand-Up Comedy.

2. Method

The data source of this study is Dave Chappelle's The Closer a stand-up comedy show whose duration is 72 minutes. There are four steps of data collection. First, the writer has to watch the entire show to understand the circumstances and the interaction between the comic and the audience. Sudaryanto (1993: 133-135) proposed a technique to achieve data understanding by applying simak and catat. Simak is meticulous listening, while catat means note-taking. It is obligatory for determining whether the show has adequate data to be used as the object of this study. The second step is inspecting the transcript of the comedy monologue from https://scrapsfromtheloft.com/ comedy/dave-chappelle-the-closer-transcript/ and copying the transcript to Microsoft Word for the convenience of the editing process. Third, the writer compares the transcript and the actual monologue from the show. It is possible to conclude both are identical and sufficient to be processed. As the final step, the writer noted all the terms and utterances that had been classified as taboo in the comedy performance. The thorough discussion and findings regarding the data will be presented further in the next chapter.

The collected data is analyzed by using the descriptive qualitative method since it did not involve any numerical data. First, the writer classified the data by using Battistela's (2005: 72) categorization of taboo words. The writer input the utterance and sentences that are spoken by the comic before and after taboo terms appearance so the situation and context are perceptible. Then, the data that had been categorized was classified again according to each intention of taboo speech function. Wardhaugh's (2006: 239) statement suggesting four functions of speech is used in this study along with the further explanation of Sitohang et al (2021) are the primary theories that helped the writer doing this analysis. Third, the writer requested guidance and correction from the lecture as the official linguist to validate the classification. The revision is expected to perfect this study.

To present the data that has been analyzed, the writer chose the tabular method which presents the collected data in rows and columns. The proposed thesis consists of three chapters. The first chapter is the introduction which comprises the background of the study, literature review, problems of the study, aims of the study, scope of discussion, theoretical

approach, and research methods. After the introduction of this thesis is done, the discussion and findings concerning the taboo terms in "Dave Chappelle's The Closer Stand-Up Comedy Show" are explained in the second chapter. In the last chapter, the writer will note the conclusion of the whole study. Each monologue from stand-up comedy contains taboo words which emerge from different perspectives and reasons will be presented in this format:

Data 1 (00:42:44): *"... punching down. What the **fuck** does that mean?"*

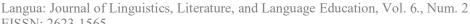**Data 2 (00:52:55):** *"I didn't even know what the **fuck** that was"*

To analyze the linguistic phenomenon in the object, 2 theories are used. This study will use Battistella's (2006) theory to analyze the types of taboo words in the show a specific classification related to the object is needed. He differentiated taboo terms into four types:

a. Epithets: Variegated types of slurs that generally refer to race and ethnicity, or gender and sexuality (e.g. bitch, fag) The usage of epithets may as well refers to physical characteristics or disabilities (e.g. midget, retard)

b. Profanity: Offensive cursing related to religious matters. Jay (1992) stated that the usage of profanity is based on the ignorance of religious guidelines, instead of denigrating holy affairs. .(e.g. hell, goddamn, for the love of christ!)

c. Vulgarity: Battistela (2005) stated that the similarity between obscenity and vulgarity is tangible because both cover entire sexual and excretory functions. Sugiarti (2020) based on Battistela's (2005) study, differed Vulgarity by defining the term as the raw street language. She noted that words such as dick, ass, etc., are categorized as vulgarity.

d. Obscenity: Similar to vulgarity, Sugiarti (2005) proposed that obscenity can be identified and differed from vulgarity by its degree of prurience. Obscenity includes all terms that are considered offensive but more standardized language, such as "fuck, shit, etc."

Wardhaugh's (2006: 239) theory is also used to analyze the function of taboo word usage by the speaker in Dave Chappelle's The Closer Stand-Up Comedy. He mentioned that violation of linguistics taboos is frequently conducted "to draw attention to oneself, or to show contempt, or to be aggressive or provocative, or to mock authority."

Further explanation is required to reach the illumination of the subject. Therefore, this paper will also refer to Sitohang et al. (2021: 119) explanation which has elaborated Wardaugh's (2006: 239) theory in their study by comparing other research regarding the topic. The formulated explanation of the Wardaugh (2006: 239) theory is:

a. To draw attention to oneself: Sitohang et al. (2021) base the explanation on McGuire's (1973) statement which argued that attention is gained through powerful and enthusiastic language. To amplify the explanation, the authors also enclose Krizan et al (2008: 88) study on business communication. It confirmed that a powerful message which repeals unnecessary words and implicates powerful words is important to construct a mental image.

b. To show contempt: According to Cambridge Dictionary, contempt (n) is " a strong feeling of disliking and having no respect for someone or something". Sitohang et al (2021) explained that contempt functions as a signal of superiority or unwillingness to accommodate.

c. To be aggressive or provocative: Bostrom (cited in Sitohang et al, 2021) asserted that taboo words and offensive language provoke people into confrontations. It presents the cathartic function as speakers could verbally release their emotions or frustration. This finding is similar to Montagu's commentary on swearing which emphasizes that it is a verbal aggressiveness fulfilled with frustration

To mock authority: McGuire (1973) in Sitohang et al (2021) mentioned that offensive language discredits leadership in a position that is considered dominant and authoritative. It is also used to express repulsion against social norms and sacred matters.

3. Discussion

This study aims at presenting and discussing all kinds of taboo terms found in "The Closer" stand-up comedy and its function. The taboo terms were classified into four categories proposed by Battistela (2005: 84). The data are presented by displaying the specific time when the taboo word is used in the show and the whole utterance which contains the taboo words to fully comprehend the context of the usage.

A. Epithet

Battistella (2005:72) defined epithet as the type of slur that addressed particular ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, also the physical appearance or disabilities. The epithet term that is mostly used in the show is a racial slur without an insulting manner. The African-American community is commonly associated with their culture where the members tend to use the vulgar terms nigga or nigger to address each other. In the 17th century, the word evolved from negro to nigger and was used intentionally as derogatory. Therefore, it is inextricably linked with violence and brutality when used by people outside the community. Here are the utterances that contain epithets found by the researcher.

> **Data 1 (00:03:26):** *"I don't want you to worry about me, I'm… vaccinated, I… [audience laughs] got the Johnson & Johnson vaccine."[audience laughs]; "I got to admit, that's probably the most **niggaish** decision I've made in a long time."[applause]; "I walk into the doc like, "Give me the third best option."[audience laughs]; "I'll have what the homeless people are having…"*

The monologue started with Dave Chappelle explaining that he was already vaccinated. It is important to know that vaccination sparked political controversy because of the government involvement that is assumed as a non-democratic compulsion by a large group of citizens.

To emphasize his comedic intention, the speaker then utilizes the word" niggaish" to describe his action. The word itself is an adjective slang that originates from the word" nigga" and could be interpreted as action, attitude, or behavior that could delineate an African-American community member. In this way, it is accurate to categorize the utterance as one that contains an epithet. Epithet characteristic is also prominent in the next utterances, "Give me the third best option." and "I'll have what the homeless people are having…". By saying this, the speaker tries to entertain the audience with a joke that portrays cheap behavior as part of the African-American majority's life.

B. Profanity

Another type that Battistela (2005) proposed is profanity. Profanity occurs when someone utters offensive cursing related to religious matters. Jay (1992) stated that the usage of profanity is based on the ignorance of religious guidelines, instead of denigrating holy affairs. (e.g., Jesus, hell, goddamn, for the love of Christ!) According to Sugiarti (2013), the use of profanity in an uncaring manner is more likely to show irreverence to God. These are the cases where the researcher found the usage of profanity in the show:

> **Data 2 (00:10:51):** *Sad story! DaBaby was the number-one streaming artist until about a couple of weeks ago. Took a nasty spill onstage, and said some… said some wild stuff about the LBGTQ community during a concert in Florida. Now you know, I go hard in the paint but even I saw that shit was like, "**God damn**, DaBaby." He pushed the button, didn't he? He pushed the button. Punched the LBGTQ community, right in the AIDS.*

The comedy show theme mostly revolves around the LGBTQ movement and the member behavior and actions that are considered vexing and irritative by the speaker. DaBaby is an African-American rapper with a career and popularity that has rather significantly risen in a short period. His words that came out in public took by the LGBTQ+ community as a humiliating affront and sparked a debate in social media which resolved with him giving a formal apology on Instagram. The speaker is trying to convey a feeling of surprise and chose the term "God damn" to entertain the audience.

Dave Chappelle also uses himself as a comparison, that even he, a comedian who jokes a lot about the topic is startled. Oxford Learner Dictionaries define the term as a swear word that many people find offensive, used to show that you are angry or annoyed and categorize it as taboo, offensive, or slang. The speaker himself is showing neglect to religious manner when using the term, therefore it is reasonable to categorize the utterance as profanity.

C. Vulgarity

Vulgarity covers entire sexual and excretory functions that are used roughly. Jay in Anggita (2015: 22) stated that Vulgarity can be defined the term as the raw street language. Jay (1992) stated that after a long time of language development, to be vulgar is acknowledged equal as to be common, not necessarily bad or evil. The same case happened in this comedy show, where the speaker makes use of vulgar terms as a tool to entertain, without the negative intention of anger or disdain. Here are the utterances that are used by the speaker in the show.

> **Data 3 (00:04:54):** *I hadn't felt that dirty in a long time. The last time I can remember, feeling dirty like that, man, I must have been a little boy. I was being molested by a preacher. [laughter] But don't feel bad for me, I liked it. [laughter] I used to get a kick out of **cumming** in that fellow's face.*

The word "cumming" is a slang term for having an orgasm or achieving a sexual climax. The noun form," cum" is defined as semen and orgasm by Merriam-Webster Dictionary. In this case, the speaker tells the audience about his experience of being molested by a religious leader. Pointing out that he did not feel any resentment for the perpetrator, the speaker uses the term "cumming" to express enjoyment. The term itself is a non-formal slang that describes sexual functions; hence it is categorized as vulgarity.

D. Obscenity

Obscenity includes all terms that are considered offensive but more standardized language, such as "fuck, shit, etc." Argasetya (2009) stated that to be obscene, the expression must be made in an explicit (non-euphemistically) way that it could expose what should be hidden. Moreover, obscenity is a thing that is not only dirty but also offensive things. Jay (1992) links obscenity to legal terms. Obscenity laws protect listeners from harmful language in public media. Words such as fuck, motherfucker, cocksucker, cunt, or tits gain a universal restriction. However, technically, what is obscene must be determined by the courts and what is indecent may be determined by the discretion of those in control of media content.

> **Data 4 (00:23:48):** *If I had a strip club in Yellow Springs, I would have called that shit "Strippies." All naked hippies, all the time. And I would only hire girls with long titties and long **vagina** head that looks like they slept on them.*

The speaker makes a joke about strip clubs where he said that he would hire based on a specific physical condition. Based on Jay's (1992) definition, we could categorize the word "titties" as obscenity since it is the plural form of the word "tits" that gain a universal restriction. Nevertheless, Battistela's (2005) classification is the main theory that is used in this study, and it indicates that the term is classified into vulgarity since it is a non-formal, raw street language. On the contrary, the word "vagina" (female genitalia) suffices both of the requirements; an explicit, standardized language that is restricted universally.
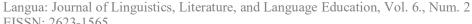
According to Wardaugh (2006), there are four functions of taboo words; to draw attention to oneself, to show contempt, to be aggressive or provocative, and to mock authority. However, since the speaker is concerned with racial and LGBTQ+ community topics without including politics and governmental issues, there are no signs of taboo terms that function as an instrument to mock authority. The data are also presented by displaying the specific time of the usage and the whole utterance to completely understand the context.

1. To draw attention to oneself

One tends to demand more attention from the hearer when delivering essential information. Mc Edward in Mc Guire (1973) explains that to gain a reaction from the audience, the speaker should use strong, powerful language. By using taboo words in a conversation, the speaker exploits their strong connotation to stimulate instant attention from the interlocutor. Below are the chosen utterances to represent the function in this show and its explanation.

> **Data 5 (00:13:47):** *"You guys are confusing your emotions. You think I hate gay people and what you're really seeing is that I'm jealous of gay people. I'm jealous, I'm not the only Black person, that feels this way. We Blacks, we look at the gay community and we go "**God damn** it! Look how well that movement is going."*

Since the term "God damn" is related to religious matters and used outside the formal occasion in a profane manner, it is categorized as profanity according to Battistela's (2005) categorization. However, profanity usage can be varied depending on the context of a speech. The speaker, Dave Chappelle receives notoriety for being offensive to most of the LGBTQ+ members because he teased their behavior many times.

In this utterance, the speaker attempts to persuade the audience to think that he is misinterpreted, that he just being jealous of the rapid growth of the movement. Based on the explanation before, strong powerful taboo language enables the speaker to gain a reaction from the speaker. To reassure the audience of the point he tries to convey, the speaker utilizes the taboo term "God damn" which declares amazement and a feeling of surprise. Compatibility between the result of the usage and the previous statement strengthens this analysis as well since the audience shows a positive reaction to this utterance in the form of applause.

2. To show contempt

Wardaugh (2006) stated that one of the functions of taboo words is to show contempt. Taboo words themselves can be used as a tool to verbally attack others. It could be related to facial, ethnic, or social and may indicate stereotyping or prejudice of the speaker. These are the examples and explanations of each case that represents the function in this show

> **Data 6 (00:17:28, 00:17:51):** *This happens when you're famous. People will come over and try to rattle your cage and get you to say something stupid or dumb so that their buddies can film it and get a video of you embarrassing yourself. And clearly, I said, "This is what is happening." And these dumb motherfuckers thought, it was my first rodeo [laughter]; [applause]; Sadly, it worked [audience laughs]; I ran right over there, I said… I pointed right in the camera I said, "You is a **bitch-ass n*gga** for doing this to me."*

The speaker explains that he was in a situation where someone try to frame him into saying things that might dishonor his reputation. As expected, the reaction of the speaker contains taboo words to show contempt for the interlocutors and set boundaries for their behavior.

2 taboo terms are used in the utterance. First, the speaker addresses the interlocutors as "dumb motherfuckers" to signify their ignorance. Cambridge Dictionary defines the term as "an extremely offensive name for someone you hate or for someone who has made you angry". Adding the word "dumb" to the term, the speaker expresses his assumption about their foolishness for expecting a naïve and deceivable response. In his conversation with them, he also mentioned "bitch-ass nigga" to address the interlocutors.

The term "bitch-ass" itself was a taboo word that is used to describe weak, cowardly, or unmanly behavior. As explained before, the speaker frequently uses the term" nigga" to address others. Combining the word shows his contempt and anger towards the interlocutors and points out their cowardly behavior. Hence, the function of the taboo words in this utterance is to show contempt.

3. To be aggressive or provocative

This function happens when a speaker utters taboo words to provoke a certain response from the listener such as violation or anger. The application of taboo words in someone's utterance is believed to be the most effective method for inviting a chaotic reaction. The cases in which taboo words are used to be aggressive or provocative are shown below.

> **Data 7 (00:41:54):** *"I went too far, I said things like **tranny** and shit I didn't know these words were bad, and a woman stood up and just gave me the business. Started screaming*

at me, and I'm sure it was a woman. But she kept calling me transphobic and all this shit I had never even heard these words before, it was really weird"

This utterance is one of the cases where the function of being aggressive or provocative can be indicated by the hearer's response. The speaker tells his experience when a woman is offended by the words he was using in his show. "tranny" is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as an extremely offensive word for a person who is transgender. The anger and emotional violation that is shown by the woman is sufficient evidence to prove that the taboo term in this sentence has a provocative function.

4. Conclusion

After analyzing the speaker's usage of taboo terms in the show, two conclusions can be drawn. The first conclusion of this research reveals that the usage of taboo words in this show involves each of the four types that are suggested by Battistela (2005). Nevertheless, the usage of epithets is the most dominant if compared to other categories. Epithets itself covers the terms that refer to race and ethnicity, which the speaker repeatedly use to describe or indicate another person. The reason why these racial epithets (nigga, nigger, niggaish) are the most frequently found is because of the racial background of the speaker. It is commonly known that in the African-American community, the usage of this term is natural and reasonable. However, epithets referring to sexuality and gender (bitch, dyke) in the show cannot be neglected. The comedy performance that mostly criticizes the LGBTQ+ phenomenon in America stimulates the speaker to use sexual epithets as a tool for labeling the community member and making jokes.

The second conclusion of this study traverses the inquiry of taboo terms' diverse functions in the data. Four functions are proposed by Wardaugh (2005), yet the speaker seemingly utilizes only three of them (to draw attention to oneself, to show contempt, and to be aggressive or provocative). Mocking authority is the function that is not displayed in the show since the speaker chose to criticize the community rather than the government which supervises the condemned behavior. Based on the analysis that has been proposed, the speaker frequently used sexual epithets to draw attention to himself. Although profanity (God damn) usage exists in his utterances, the speaker more often gains the reaction from the interlocutor by using strong powerful language in a conversation, in this case by addressing the interlocutor with epithets (bitch, nigga). Expressing contempt towards someone is another function that dominates the speaker's usage of taboo terms. Similar to the previous function, the speaker tends to insult the interlocutor's sexuality to show his contempt. However, there are few expressions that distinct the usage. In the sampled data, we can observe that the speaker insistently pairs a taboo term with another word to describe another expression (dumb motherfuckers, bitch-ass). To be aggressive or provocative is the less used function if compared to the other two. However, its effect on assisting the speaker to express his emotions is significant and critical. In the analysis we can find this function is occurred and have a prominent role in initiating a conflict.

Aside from the function proposed by Wardaugh (2005), we have to remember that every taboo word is used in a comedy performance. Seizer (2011) stated that a comedian's artistic uses of obscenity serve to intensify the expression of the speaker's perspective and makes a performance that feels like a colloquial, quotidian talk. Comedians must be able to signal to the audience that any formality need not hold there, that the comics are letting themselves loose in the relaxed environment. The speaker, through his comical performance, also

conveys satire and critics to the current society, which he considers as judgemental yet biased and unmerciful towards comedians. For this reason, it can be concluded that the use of taboo terms in a speech can help the speaker deliver his points despite their rude and barbaric connotations.

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