

Analyzing Taboo Words in Tenganan Pegringsingan Village as Preliminary Insight Into Cultural Change

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Abstract—This study examines the use of taboo language within the Desa Tenganan Pegringsingan (DTP). DTP is a Bali Aga village known for strict customary norms. Traditionally, DTP's taboo lexicon carried strong moral, religious, and social sanctions, functioning as a linguistic boundary marker. Generational change, digital media exposure, and cultural contact have led to significant reinterpretations of the past. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with ethnolinguistic and socio-pragmatic orientations. Taboo words are analyzed as culturally embedded expressions reflecting transformations in social norms, generational values, and ritual practices. Data were collected from ten indigenous respondents across three age groups. Findings reveal widespread semantic bleaching. Formerly offensive terms such as *kawah*, *bangsat*, and *bedogol* are now used in humorous, hyperbolic, or solidarity-building contexts. Non-native borrowings, such as *jancuk*, have entered youth speech through media and tourism. Even once-unspeakable genital-related terms now appear in casual or online discourse. These shifts demonstrate pragmatic diversification, as taboo language expands from serving as an insult or source of anger to also function as humor, emphasis, and cultural indexing. Politeness norms in DTP are increasingly context-dependent, challenging classical universality claims in politeness theory. Traditional forms, such as *Samodana*, remain in ceremonial contexts, but the control of language has shifted. Instead of external customary enforcement, internal moral awareness now prevails. Ultimately, these changes represent not a regression of tradition but an adaptive strategy for preserving cultural identity amid modernization and globalization.

Index Terms—cultural shifting, intergenerational shift, linguistic change, socio-pragmatic, taboo words

I. INTRODUCTION

Taboo words are often seen as impolite because they can threaten a person's face or self-image in social communication (Culpeper, 2005). People frequently use taboo language to attack or belittle others, directly threatening the listener's social face (Hasibuan, 2018; Pradnyani & Suastini, 2023; Sukarini et al., 2024). In many cultures, speakers employ taboo words to undermine the rights and status of listeners, showing the close relationship between taboo words and violations of politeness norms (Angkunsinthana & Lerlertyuttitham, 2019). Therefore, to avoid negative effects, people often use euphemisms to maintain relationships and protect their image (Crespo-Fernández, 2014). Studies of literature and film also reveal that taboo language can lead to conflicts in social interactions (Allan & Burrige, 2006; Mulana & Mahendrayana, 2024). Breaking taboos can also result in social exclusion or stigmatization, since taboo words often contradict cultural and moral values (Allan & Burrige, 2006). While these studies emphasize the negative and impolite functions of taboo words, fewer have examined how taboos shift toward socially acceptable or even polite usage. This gap leaves unexplored the question of how communities reinterpret and recontextualize taboo expressions in line with changing cultural values.

In this context, Desa Tenganan Pegringsingan (DTP) illustrates how taboo language is perceived as impolite and face-threatening. In DTP, speakers may intentionally violate cooperative principle by uttering taboo words for specific social effects (Sari et al., 2025). However, unlike urban communities such as Denpasar, where modernization and globalization drive the free use of taboo words as contemporary expression (Mahayana et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2024), DTP

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represents a unique case because it has preserved a highly regulated linguistic system within a traditional cultural framework (Subawa et al., 2019). Studying taboo words in this setting reveals how deeply embedded cultural norms interact with new social influences such as tourism, social media, and external education (Pradnyani & Suastini, 2023).

These changes have triggered new impoliteness strategies, such as bald-on-record speech, and have reframed taboo expressions that were once deemed offensive. In some settings, taboo words are now accepted, even considered polite, especially in intimate peer interactions, social humor, or solidarity-building. Dynel (2012) asserts that swearing online does not inherently imply impoliteness; much depends on the speaker's intent and the norms of the community. Crespo-Fernández (2014) demonstrates that euphemisms can turn taboos into tools for social harmony. Allan and Burridge (2006) maintain that the meaning and effect of taboo language are highly context-dependent. Thus, examining DTP provides an opportunity to demonstrate how context mediates between impolite and polite functions of taboo expressions in a culturally specific environment.

The shift from taboo as impolite to acceptable, or even polite, reflects changes in societal values. Politeness is no longer absolute; it depends on context, speaker relationships, and changing norms. Among younger generations, previously avoided taboo words now signal solidarity, familiarity, or shared humor. This blurs the traditional lines between polite and impolite communication and challenges classical politeness theories, such as Brown and Levinson's, which assume that taboo expressions always threaten face.

In DTP, these dynamics are especially visible. The Bali Aga community bases its linguistic and social systems on customary norms and relational hierarchies. Historically, the use of taboo language was regulated. Words like *kling* 'male genitalia' were once avoided due to their perceived offensiveness. Now, young people often use them casually as greetings or jokes, signaling familiarity and shared cultural identity. This shift is influenced by social media, cross-cultural encounters, and changing intergenerational relationships. It also challenges Grice's (1975) maxims of manner and relation because previously forbidden expressions can now appear relevant and even polite in certain contexts.

Although numerous linguistic and pragmatic studies have explored the impolite uses of taboo language, research on their polite usage remains limited. Focusing on DTP provides a rare and valuable case because it is a traditional community negotiating between preservation of cultural heritage and exposure to modern influences. Investigating how taboo words lose their offensive force and acquire new functions in this context allows us to understand both the dynamics of politeness and the adaptability of language in shifting cultural landscapes. Ultimately, this study aims to describe the meaning and functions of taboo words and examine semantic and pragmatic shifts in the use of taboo language within the DTP community.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Taboo words have long been the subject of cross-disciplinary studies due to their complex functions in social and cultural life (Muscianisi, 2024). Taboo serves as a mechanism of social control that regulates linguistic behavior in accordance with moral and cultural norms. However, various studies have shown that the boundaries of taboo are shifting alongside modernization, globalization, and changing social values. Therefore, the analysis of taboo words can be used to understand the dynamics of cultural change, particularly within societies undergoing intercultural contact. According to Locher and Watts (2005), taboo is also understood as part of broader "relational work", wherein evaluations of linguistic behavior, including taboo, are contextually negotiated rather than universally fixed. This perspective emphasizes that taboo functions not merely as a prohibition system but as an index of social relations and identity.

According to Buffagni (2024), the use of taboo words functions to assert social identity and to represent the reality of modern urban communities that are increasingly permissive toward coarse language. This phenomenon indicates a relaxation of politeness norms and the emergence of new forms of expression that are more honest and spontaneous. A similar finding is reported by Alqahtani et al. (2022) in Saudi Arabia, who observed a shift from the use of euphemisms toward the explicit acceptance of taboo words, reflecting egalitarian and open values in modern society. Both studies demonstrate that changes in attitudes toward taboo correspond to shifts in communication patterns and value orientations within society. These examples align with discursive approaches to (im)politeness, which view politeness and impoliteness not as inherent properties of words but as the outcome of situated evaluative practices (Haugh, 2013). Such shifts highlight how speakers adopt taboo terms to index stance, perform identity, and align with particular communities of practice.

In the Indonesian context, Purba et al. (2022) found that most taboo words in the Simalungun language have been preserved across generations because they serve to uphold norms of politeness and customary values. However, some have lost their social function due to modernization and migration. Aziz et al. (2020) also noted that in Aceh, taboos function to maintain the community's religious and moral values. Violating a taboo may lead to social sanctions, demonstrating the strong role of taboo as a moral regulator. Both studies emphasize that taboo remains an integral part of local cultural systems, while also indicating that changes within the taboo system can reflect the level of social transformation within a community.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, Reilly et al. (2020) showed that the power of taboo words does not lie solely in their meaning but also in their phonological form and the emotional responses they evoke. Meanwhile, Khaghaninejad et al. (2020) revealed that foreign language learners tend to become more sensitive and cautious toward taboo words in their first language, suggesting that intercultural contact reshapes perceptions of politeness and linguistic prohibition. Alzubaidi

and Hatoss (2025) further found that bilingual speakers, particularly Saudi women, perceive taboo words in a foreign language as less offensive due to emotional distancing. The finding underscores that social context and linguistic identity play a key role in determining how taboos are perceived. Meanwhile, Yaacob et al. (2024) expanded this perspective by showing that taboo words can be recontextualized as an educational tool through the Taboo Word Game, which enhances students' motivation and vocabulary competence.

The previous studies above thus demonstrate that taboo words are dynamic and adaptive to changes in social values. In the context of traditional societies such as DTP, taboos remain closely linked to sacredness and customary systems; however, interaction with tourists and modern media may gradually weaken these boundaries. Therefore, changes in the use of taboo words in DTP can serve as an important indicator for predicting the direction of cultural transformation from traditional to modern orientations. This dynamism supports contemporary claims that (im)politeness is not universal but negotiated within specific cultural conditions; thus, shifting taboo practices may reflect emerging stances and the re-indexing of social identities.

Changes in how taboo words are used in traditional communities reveal the complexity of social and cultural dynamics. Taboo words are words that represent social rules. They are deeply rooted in a society's values and cover topics like sex, death, religion, bodily functions, and power structures (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Perangin-angin et al. (2024) demonstrated that children in rural areas don't use taboo words because they are naturally creative with language; instead, they do so because they are copying what they see and hear around them. This means that taboo language serves as a means for cultural norms to be passed down from one generation to the next (Ulfa et al., 2023).

Modernization and globalization are two key factors driving changes in how people perceive and use taboo words. Junxuan et al. (2025) noted that cultural friction, particularly between older and younger generations, has diminished the once-sacred significance of taboos, especially in areas increasingly exposed to global cultural influences. Balinese communities, such as *Menyali* and *Sesetan*, have also undergone similar changes. There, taboo expressions have been grouped into three areas: spiritual (Parhyangan), social (Pawongan), and environmental (Palemahan). This shows a shift from sacred meaning to more practical, everyday language use (Mahayana et al., 2023; Mulana & Mahendrayana, 2024). These shifting patterns further illustrate how taboo forms undergo pragmatic diversification, whereby their meanings and functions expand according to sociocultural context.

Young people's views on taboo language are a key sign of changing cultural norms (Khairullina et al., 2020). A study by Suha and Sudarwati (2021) on popular media reveals that younger generations increasingly view taboo words not as moral violations, but as means to express their feelings, shape their identities, and connect with others. In traditional Balinese villages, youth groups such as *Sekaa Teruna Teruni* in Bugbug and Pejeng Kangin demonstrate how young people preserve ritual language and cultural practices. This occurs despite their increasing exposure to modern values (Mayari, 2024). Changes in how taboo language is used reveal changes in attitudes and behavior. Viewed from a cultural psychology perspective, taboo language serves as a tool to express shared identity and beliefs. Salija et al. (2018) found that shifting attitudes toward taboo language demonstrate the flexibility of language and a community's changing worldview and moral compass. In indigenous Balinese contexts such as Bali Aga communities, these transformations raise critical concerns about cultural erosion. This concern is heightened by external forces, such as tourism, digital media, and urbanization, which introduce conflicting values that may displace local linguistic taboos (Dhanawaty et al., 2020; Kusumaningrum et al., 2024). These studies underscore that changes in perception and use of taboo language are not isolated phenomena. They are part of broader shifts in cultural identity, intergenerational values, and local-global dynamics. In-depth studies of linguistically and culturally unique communities such as DTP are essential. In sum, integrating discursive (im)politeness, relational work, and indexicality allows a more nuanced interpretation of how taboo forms are negotiated and re-functionalized, highlighting that such transformations challenge universal models of politeness and underscore the context-dependent nature of linguistic meaning.

III. METHODS

A. Settings

This research was conducted in DTP, Karangasem, Bali, Indonesia. DTP, a Bali Aga village, is inhabited by indigenous Balinese people with distinct culture, customs, and traditions (Maria et al., 2007). These cultural differences, particularly the village's strict norms, provide the foundation for studying how local use and interpretation of taboo language have evolved.

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in ethnolinguistics and socio-pragmatics (Abdel-Jawad, 2000). Taboo words are treated as culturally embedded expressions reflecting shifts in social norms, generational values, and rituals, rather than as isolated terms. Content analysis with an interpretive lens helps uncover sociocultural dynamics and the meanings of taboo expressions. Data come from ethnographic questionnaires, categorization of taboo word types and meanings, and thematic interpretation by socio-pragmatic category. Verification through cultural consultation and conclusions drawn from observed patterns form the final steps of analysis.

To support the analysis, the researcher interviewed ten native residents of DTP about taboo language: TR, AN, DS, WK, IM, NR, MT, GR, YD, and KS.

TABLE 1
LIST OF RESPONDENTS

No	Initials	Age	Gender	Education	Role in Community	Interview Date
1	TR	49	Male	High School	Krama Desa	29 May 2025
2	AN	19	Male	High School	Truna / Truni	29 May 2025
3	DS	46	Male	Bachelor	Krama Gumi Pulangan	29 May 2025
4	WK	23	Male	Bachelor	Truna / Truni	29 May 2025
5	IM	30	Male	Bachelor	Krama Desa	29 May 2025
6	NR	28	Female	Diploma	Truni	30 May 2025
7	MT	55	Male	High School	Krama Adat	30 May 2025
8	GR	20	Male	High School	Truna	30 May 2025
9	YD	36	Male	Bachelor	Krama Desa	31 May 2025
10	KS	42	Female	High School	Krama Istri	31 May 2025

The selection of respondents above was based on several criteria: individuals who are indigenous to the DTP and represent three age groups: youth (15–29 years old), adults (30–49 years old), and elders (50+ years old); actively use the Balinese language in social, familial, or traditional interactions; possess sufficient understanding of regional linguistic customs, such as the use of taboo words; and are recommended by community networks and cultural advisors.

B. Materials

This study employed structured interviews as the primary method for data collection. The interviews were conducted directly with selected respondents in DTP and were guided by a predetermined set of open-ended questions designed to explore the use and perception of taboo language. The interview guide included demographic questions such as age, gender, educational background, and the respondent's role within the adat community. In addition, participants were asked to identify and explain taboo words they were familiar with, describe the contexts in which those expressions were used or avoided, and reflect on their relevance in contemporary settings, particularly in relation to generational change and the impact of modern communication channels, such as social media. The interviews were conducted in the local language to maintain cultural authenticity and were recorded with the participants' consent. The primary material collected consisted of lexical items identified as taboo, while secondary materials included respondents' narrative explanations, usage examples, and sociocultural insights that provided a richer understanding of the meanings and functions of the taboo expressions in everyday life.

C. Data Collection

The process of data collection began with an extensive review of existing literature concerning taboo language, Balinese sociolinguistics, and the use of ritual speech in traditional communities. This foundational step provided the theoretical grounding necessary to design culturally sensitive and contextually relevant research instruments. Subsequently, a structured questionnaire was developed, piloted, and distributed across generational cohorts, ranging from adolescents to elders, through established social and community networks within the DTP. The primary method of data gathering involved face-to-face interviews based on the structured questionnaire. In addition, informal interviews were conducted with selected key informants, regarded as custodians of cultural knowledge, to validate interpretations and clarify expressions that appeared ambiguous or context-dependent, particularly those linked to sacred rituals such as *meajar-ajar* and *nganyunang loka*. To complement the verbal data, non-participant observation was also carried out in various communal and ceremonial settings, allowing the researcher to unobtrusively observe the actual use of taboo expressions within natural social interactions. This method provided crucial insights into behavioral norms and pragmatic cues that might not have been articulated explicitly in interviews. The entire data collection process was conducted over the course of two months, from May to June 2025, ensuring sufficient time to reach a diverse and representative group of participants across generational lines.

D. Data Analysis

A qualitative content analysis was conducted using an inductive coding technique, allowing patterns and themes to emerge directly from the responses. The analysis began by identifying the lexical frequency of taboo words mentioned by participants, followed by categorizing these expressions into distinct semantic domains, such as references to genitalia, religious taboos, animal comparisons, and curses. The contextual usage of each term was also examined, particularly in relation to its appearance in ritual settings, everyday domestic life, public interactions, and digital or online communication. The analysis further traced semantic shifts, capturing how the meanings of certain taboo words have evolved from traditional interpretations to more modern-day connotations shaped by generational and technological influences. Beyond lexical and semantic patterns, the study employed a socio-pragmatic approach, drawing on the frameworks (Al-Hamzi et al., 2024). This lens was used to analyze the functions of taboo expressions such as their roles in conveying insult, humor, resistance, or social solidarity, and to explore (im)politeness strategies, indexicality, and the cultural meanings embedded in the use of taboo language within the DTP community's communicative practices.

IV. RESULTS

This study describes the meaning and the function of taboo language and also examines semantic and pragmatic shifts within the indigenous community of DTP, serving as a preliminary insight into cultural change. Through qualitative analysis of interview data, several sociolinguistic patterns were found that reflect generational dynamics, changing values, and external influences on the use of taboo words in DTP community.

A. The Meaning and Functions of Taboo Language Found in DTP Community

TABLE 2
TABOO WORDS FOUND IN DTP COMMUNITY

DATA	TABOO WORDS	MEANING
1	<i>kawah</i>	hell/cursed
2	<i>Sundel, panjak</i>	bitch
3	<i>bedogol</i>	Dumb, useless, inconsiderate
4	<i>Bangsai, brengsek, sialan</i>	bastard
5	<i>amah</i>	Eat that (serve you well)
6	<i>pantet</i>	Eat that (serve you well)
7	<i>banteran</i>	jerk/bastard
8	<i>Panak bojog</i>	baby monkey
9	<i>jancuk</i>	F*ck (exclamative)
10	<i>Salang betare</i>	I swear to God
11	<i>Kawah incuk/nas kawah</i>	Damn (lebih kasar dari kata <i>kawah</i>)
12	<i>dakinteli</i>	Vag*na (vulgar)
13	<i>lengget</i>	Pen*s
14	<i>segaon</i>	eat greedily (expletive)
15	<i>ngamah</i>	Eating (impolite: eating like a pig)
16	<i>manted</i>	To eat (impolite: eating like a pig)
17	<i>Dakin jit</i>	Feces on the butt
18	<i>Naskeleng/kleng</i>	D*ckhead
19	<i>bajingan</i>	bastard/crook
20	<i>bojog</i>	monkey (used insultingly)
21	<i>Nas gon</i>	Expletive

Source: researchers

Table 2 above presents the taboo words used by the community of DTP. In general, these taboo words can be classified into several semantic categories: (1) Religious or cosmological-based curses, such as *kawah* (hell/cursed) and *kawah incuk/nas kawah* (damn, with stronger intensity), which reflect the influence of local belief systems on expressions of anger. (2) Animal-based insults, such as *bojog* (monkey), *panak bojog* (baby monkey), and *banteran* (jerk/bastard), which associate negative human traits with animal behavior. (3) Body and biological function-based insults, such as *dakinteli* (vagina), *lengget* (penis), *dakin jit* (feces on the butt), and *naskeleng/kleng* (dckhead), which are considered highly vulgar in politeness norms. (4) Negative social behavior-based insults, such as *bedogol* (dumb/useless), *bajingan* (bastard/crook), and *sundel, panjak* (bitch), which position the target as a person of poor character. (5) Expletives and oaths, such as *jancuk* (f*k), *nas gon* (expletive), and *salang betare* (I swear to God), which serve to mark emotional intensity or emphasis in interaction. From a pragmatic perspective, these taboo words are not only used for direct insults but also serve as emotional expressions, markers of playful intimacy, or emphasis in social discourse. For instance, “*amah*” and “*pantet*,” although literally meaning “eat that,” can function as sarcastic mockery or responses to provocation (Culpeper, 2019). From an ethnolinguistic standpoint, the presence of this taboo word reflects the interaction between the strict traditional norms of the Bali Aga community and the dynamics of everyday language use. Semantic shifts may occur, in which words that were once sacred or highly offensive are now used jokingly among friends (e.g., *kawah*). These findings align with Allan and Burridge’s (2006) view that linguistic taboos reflect social values that continually evolve in response to cultural context.

B. Semantic and Pragmatic Shifts in the Use of Taboo Language Within the DTP Community

To understand the changes in meaning in the taboo language above, the following is a clear explanation through sentences and interpretations of their meanings then and now.

Data 1

Kawah, bes liunan munyi cai (Damn, you talk too much). The word *kawah* used to be taboo when directed at someone as an insult, but now it is more commonly used to express anger or even in a joking manner.

Data 2

goban caine care sundel (you bitch). The word *sundel* used to refer to a profession that was highly despised, but now it is used as an insult, especially toward women.

Data 3

Nak metulung ye nongos care bedogol (look, people are working, how could you just sit back and do nothing?). The word *bedogol* used to be highly offensive if mentioned carelessly, but now it has become a common term in conversations among the younger generation.

Data 4

bangsat cai dadi jeleme (curse you!). The word *bangsat* used to be considered disgraceful and shameful, but now it is used to express anger.

Data 5

Amah kude! (Serves you right!). The word *amah* used to be highly taboo for violating norms of politeness, but now it is used as an expression of annoyance, and even in informal or humorous contexts.

Data 6

Pantet (Serves you right). The word *pantet* used to be harsher than *amah* and violated norms of politeness, but now it is used as an expression of annoyance.

Data 7

Banteran ko cai! (you jerk). The word *banteran* used to be taboo to call fellow villagers, but now it is often used by young people either to attack or to joke.

Data 8

Bane, jeneng ci ne care panak bojog (I wonder you are like an infant). The word *bojog*, meaning “monkey,” used to be directly employed as an insult, but now it is used to mock someone’s physical appearance.

Data 9

Jancuk! (f*ck it). The word *jancuk* was never used in the past because it originated from Javanese, but now it is used by young people in a humorous tone.

Data 10

Salang betare wake sing ade nyemak (I swear to God that I didn’t steal it). The expression *salang betare* used to be restricted because it could damage its sacredness, but now it has become a common phrase to convince the listener.

Data 11

Pih, kawah incuk! (god damn it). The phrase *kawah incuk* in this context used to be taboo when insulting someone, but now it is used to express anger or jokingly.

Data 12

Kawah dakinteli (what the fuck). The word *dakinteli* used to refer to female genitalia in a vulgar way, but now it is uttered as a spontaneous expletive or in moments of surprise.

Data 13

Itendas caine care lengget (You d*ckhead). The word *lengget* used to be highly taboo because it referred to the male genital organ, but now it is used as a daily insult in emotional situations.

Data 14

Segaon ko cai (god damn it). The word *segaon* used to be used to insult or attack someone, but now it is employed to tease or joke.

Data 15

Bane cai ngamah care kaung! (you can just eat like a pig). The word *ngamah* used to be common, but now it is considered rude and uncivilized; however, it is now used jokingly among young people.

Data 16

Manted kude cai malu (eat that sh*t). The word *manted* used to be highly taboo for violating norms of politeness, but now it refers to create disharmony.

Data 17

Dakin jit ko cai (You asshole). The phrase *dakin jit* used to be very vulgar and taboo because it referred to female genitalia, but now it often appears on social media.

Data 18

Naskleng cai (you d*ckhead). The word *naskleng* used to directly insult someone’s intellectual capacity, but now it is used as friendly banter among friends, influenced by urban Denpasar culture.

Data 19

Bajingan! (bastard). The word *bajingan* was not commonly used in the past, but now it has become an expression of mild annoyance.

Data 20

Sing nongos-nongos care bojog (Stop behaving like a monkey). The word *bojog* used to equate humans with animals and was considered degrading, but now it is used in jest or to mock.

Data 21

Nas gon cai (damn you). The phrase *nas gon* did not exist or was not commonly used in the past, but now it is employed humorously or to express annoyance among young people.

The analysis of the 21 data items illustrates a clear semantic and pragmatic shift in the use of taboo language. Historically, these words and expressions were perceived as harsh, disgraceful, and offensive, often tied to violations of social, cultural, or religious norms. However, in contemporary usage, especially among younger generations, many of these terms have undergone a process of semantic softening, refunctionalization, and even humorous appropriation. For example, the word *ngamah* has undergone a change in meaning. As stated by TR:

Kata ngamah tergolong tabu atau kasar saat digunakan dalam situasi tertentu. Sebenarnya, kata ngamah

dulunya tidak Tabu, bahkan sering digunakan dalam percakapan sehari-hari khususnya orang tua ke anak muda, misalnya “sube ngamah cai?” “Kamu sudah makan?” Namun, sekarang menjadi tabu dan memiliki makna negatif jika digunakan oleh. Setiap orang yang menggunakannya akan dianggap tidak santun karena di daerah lain kata ngamah digunakan untuk mengumpat atau mengutuk seseorang dalam konteks tertentu. Hal inilah yang memengaruhi bagaimana kata ini menjadi tabu, dan tentunya tidak bisa digunakan secara sembarangan, kecuali pada seseorang yang memiliki hubungan kekerabatan yang sudah saling mengenal satu sama lainnya dengan niat baik [The word *ngamah* is considered taboo or rude when used in certain situations. The word *ngamah* was not actually taboo in the past; in fact, it was commonly used in daily conversations, especially by older people when speaking to younger ones, e.g., *sube ngamah cai?* (Have you eaten?). However, it has now become taboo and carries a negative meaning when used by others. Anyone who uses it is considered impolite because, in other regions, the word *ngamah* is used to swear at or curse someone in certain contexts. This is what has influenced how the word became taboo, and it should not be used carelessly, except among people who share close kinship ties and are familiar with one another, with good intentions]. (Interview, May 29, 2025)

The data show that taboo language in this community is experiencing a profound pragmatic and semantic evolution. What was once socially prohibited, vulgar, or religiously forbidden has now become normalized in everyday interactions, particularly among younger speakers. DS emphasized that:

Kalimat Banteran ko cai yang biasanya digunakan oleh anak muda DTP tergolong tabu. Penggunaan kalimat ini memang menggambarkan kedekatan antara penutur namun tidak boleh diucapkan secara sembarangan karena bisa fatal akibatnya. jika diucapkan oleh penutur muda kepada orang tua, maka penutur muda dianggap sebagai orang yang tidak memiliki etika dan tidak mematuhi norma sosial yg berlaku. Hal ini pastinya akan mencederai dan mengotori kesakralan desa DTP [the expression *Banteran ko cai*, which is commonly used by the youth in DTP, is considered taboo. Although this expression reflects a sense of closeness between speakers, it should not be used carelessly, as it may have serious consequences. If it is uttered by a young person toward an elder, the young speaker will be regarded as someone lacking in ethics and failing to observe prevailing social norms. This, undoubtedly, would harm and desecrate the sacredness of DTP village]. (Interview, May 29, 2025)

This change is driven by factors such as generational shifts, urban influence, peer-group solidarity, humor practices, and the desensitization of taboo through repeated use. KS emphasized that:

Secara literal kata Dakin teli/Dakin jit memiliki arti sebagai “kotoran vagina” atau “kotoran pantat”. Namun kata ini memiliki makna konotasi negatif, khususnya apabila digunakan untuk mengumpat atau menyerang seseorang. KS menegaskan bahwa jika diucapkan sembarangan maka akan menimbulkan konflik, kecuali digunakan oleh teman akrab dengan tujuan bercanda. Kata ini dulunya jarang ditemui di DTP, namun dewasa ini umum digunakan oleh generasi muda [Literally, the words *Dakin teli* or *Dakin jit* mean “vaginal dirt” or “fecal dirt.” However, these words carry a negative connotation, especially when used to insult or verbally attack someone. if spoken carelessly, they could provoke conflict, unless used jokingly among close friends. In the past, these words were rarely heard in DTP, but nowadays they are commonly used by the younger generation]. (Interview, May 31, 2025)

In conclusion, taboo words no longer function solely as markers of aggression or insult but also as linguistic tools of identity, humor, and relational bonding. This reflects a broader sociolinguistic trend where language adapts to the changing values and interactional norms of its speakers.

V. DISCUSSION

A dynamic shift is occurring in how the DTP community interprets and uses taboo words. Traditionally, these words had strong negative connotations that were linked to moral, religious, or customary sanctions. Many were associated with violations of *karma*, the sanctity of speech, and social harmony, placing their use within the realm of verbal prohibitions. This supports Allan and Burridge’s (2006) idea that taboo words act as linguistic markers of social boundaries. Their transgression risks moral and cultural sanction. While these findings are meaningful, it is important to note that the interpretations presented here are drawn from a small group of participants and thus should be understood as exploratory rather than conclusive. In line with contemporary discursive approaches, these prohibitions can also be viewed as a form of relational work (Locher & Watts, 2005), in which taboo functions not solely as prohibition but as an index of social alignment within the community.

Semantic bleaching of taboo terms in DTP has significantly shifted their communicative roles. Once strictly offensive, these words are now commonly used in casual, humorous, and solidarity-building contexts. For instance, *kawah* (curse/swearing) and *bangsat* (bastard) previously entailed karmic damage or shame but now appear in jest or hyperbole on social media. As stated by MT, a traditional *Krama* (customary community member), “*Kata kawah sebaiknya tidak digunakan sembarang, namun masyarakat DTP khususnya anak muda sering mengungkapkannya dalam hal bercanda, terutama dalam situasi berkumpul santai sembari menikmati minuman tuak. Kata kawah dulunya dapat menimbulkan konflik, namun saat ini kata ini mulai kehilangan makna tabunya, sehingga sering digunakan untuk bercanda dan mencerminkan kedekatan sosial antar pemuda*” [The word *kawah* should not be used carelessly. However, the people of DTP, especially the youth, often use it jokingly, particularly in relaxed gatherings while enjoying *tuak* (palm wine). In the past, the word *kawah* could provoke conflict, but today it has begun to lose its taboo meaning. As a result, it is now

often used in jest and reflects social closeness among young people] (Interview, May 30, 2025). This transformation supports Crespo-Fernández's (2014) argument that context and intention can convert taboo language from impoliteness to a pragmatic tool for positive politeness. Similarly, *bedogol* (stupid/dumb), *bojog* (monkey), and *ndaskeleng/naskeleng* (empty-headed) have evolved from insults to playful banter among peers, reflecting Jay and Janschewitz's (2008) findings on the positive social uses of taboo words. Dynel (2012) observes that face-threatening expressions are increasingly reinterpreted within groups as closeness markers. The adoption of non-native taboo terms, such as *jancuk* from Javanese, further illustrates how cultural contact and media exposure facilitate linguistic borrowing. *Jancuk*, absent from DTP tradition, has entered youth speech via digital media and tourism, often with humorous rather than hostile undertones. Mahayana et al. (2023) note that modernization and globalization spur this lexical innovation and shift in Bali Aga communities. However, given the limited number of respondents, these observations should be viewed as preliminary trends that would benefit from comparative validation with other Balinese or Indonesian communities.

The evolving use of genitalia-related words (*pantet*, *dakinteli*, *dakin jit*) reflects a shift from previous unspeakable to their appearance on social media. This transition marks a breakdown of traditional taboos due to increased online exposure. As a result, tension now exists between ritual purity-based norms and the liberal expressive styles of digital platforms. The roles of these taboo words have diversified; previously used mainly to insult, shame, or express anger (clearly performing a face-threatening act, FTA), they now serve broader social functions. For instance, they are used for humor, solidarity, and to build in-group identity (*kleng*, *bojog*, *bedogol*). They can also intensify expressions of surprise, frustration, or excitement (*bangsat*, *brengsek*, *sialan*), and signal Bali Aga identity even humorously. The shift suggests that politeness norms in DTP are increasingly context-dependent. This supports the view that politeness is negotiated, not fixed (Al-Hindawi & Alkhazaali, 2016; Eelen, 2001). Nevertheless, this cultural-linguistic shift should be interpreted cautiously, as broader data across similar traditional communities would be needed to confirm whether this tendency represents a larger regional or generational pattern.

This linguistic transformation indicates an ongoing cultural shift within DTP. Taboo restrictions are weakening, reflecting a loosening of customary controls over language, influenced by generational change, media exposure, and external education. Older generations may still consider these words socially dangerous; by contrast, younger speakers increasingly treat them as elements of casual and creative linguistic play. From a cultural anthropology perspective, this shift signals a reconfiguration of value systems. Now, maintaining relational intimacy and peer solidarity may take precedence over traditional notions of ritual purity and hierarchical respect. Language serves as a sensitive barometer of cultural change, revealing shifts in social ideology before they become visible in other domains. In this respect, the present study provides an initial glimpse into how linguistic practices in a small, closely bonded community may indicate early stages of cultural transformation, though further comparative studies are recommended to substantiate this claim. Accordingly, this process can be viewed as pragmatic diversification, in which the functional load of taboo expressions expands beyond prohibition and becomes intertwined with identity performance, stance expression, and relational alignment.

These findings challenge the universality of classical politeness frameworks, such as supposed by Brown and Levinson (1988). While these frameworks assume that taboo language inherently constitutes an FTA, in DTP, the same lexical item can oscillate between impolite and polite functions, depending on context, speaker relationship, and intent. This variability underscores the importance of a context-sensitive, culture-specific approach to politeness and impoliteness research. This supports calls within relational work and discursive politeness study to treat (im)politeness as emergent, negotiated, and indexical rather than universally prescribed. However, the erosion of traditional taboo meanings raises concerns for cultural preservation. In Bali Aga society, these linguistic taboos have historically functioned as moral regulators and markers of collective identity (Tristiani et al., 2024; Wibawa et al., 2024). As these functions weaken, there is a risk that part of the community's intangible cultural heritage will be lost. If these changes are not accompanied by documentation and language education efforts, the cultural values embedded in traditional vocabulary may erode. This finding underscores the importance of language preservation, not only in formal forms but also in informal varieties such as taboo language.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the use and understanding of taboo words in the DTP have undergone a complex transformation due to the clash between traditional values and modern forms of communication. Taboo language was once sacred and forbidden, but its meaning and purpose have evolved to fit the social and generational context. Younger generations, especially the *truna/truni* group, tend to use taboo language only in certain situations, like when they're online or with friends. Changes in meaning occur gradually as social values and norms develop within a community (Traugott & Dasher, 2009). They don't completely stop using ritual forms like *Samodana*, which are still used in sacred ceremonies. Social media has become a key factor in normalizing taboo language, driving shifts in linguistic norms, and weakening the once coercive symbolic control of traditional customs. The findings also indicate that factors such as family environment, formal education, peer interaction, and globalization contribute to the acceleration of this change. However, most of the community still considers customs as regulators of verbal ethics, even though the form of control is now more internal and based on moral awareness. This demonstrates that taboo regulation increasingly operates through relational work, in which evaluations of appropriateness are negotiated within specific relationships and contexts. In this context, traditional

education is viewed as the primary mechanism for preserving cultural values, which need to be formally and informally imparted to younger generations so that these values can be passed down sustainably through language. Furthermore, the emergence of pragmatic diversification indicates that taboo expressions no longer function solely as prohibitions but as flexible resources for relational alignment and affective positioning. Changes in the taboo language system cannot be understood as a regression of tradition but rather as an adaptive process reflecting the community's strategies to maintain cultural identity amid the currents of modernization and globalization.

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