

MALAY LINGUISTIC TABOOS: A STUDY ON SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AND GENDER DIFFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of linguistic taboo has not been fully explored in Malay society. This paper attempts to bring this phenomenon into focus by investigating it in terms of social acceptance and gender differences. It examines the Malays' perceptions of the concept and the use of linguistic taboos to express emotions. The paper also identifies and analyses which of the chosen categories of taboo words are deemed highly offensive and which are not. Besides that, it scrutinizes the extent to which there is a correlation between gender communication stereotypes and the use of taboo language. The study employs a qualitative approach where the researchers interviewed four respondents who study at the International Islamic University Malaysia. The data collected shows that linguistic taboos are accepted as a norm to express emotions, provided they do not offend the listeners. The results showed that among the studied categories of taboo words, the sexual act category is the most offensive while the death category is the least offensive. These findings make it clear that the ways these linguistic taboos are treated are conditioned by the culture and norms of the society. The study also dispelled the widely cited proposal by Robin Lakoff (1973) that women use politer forms of language. The findings indicate that it is acceptable for women nowadays to use linguistic taboos.

Keywords: Linguistic taboo, Malay language, Malay taboos, Gender and taboo, Religion and taboo.

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