

Lexicalization of profanity in Tausug and Kagan languages, Mindanao, Philippines

Sajed S. Ingilan

University of Southeastern Philippines, Davao City

Email: ajedingilan@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

Profanity, in its different manifestations, is always labeled as taboo in various settings. In this ethnographic research, it aimed to present an analysis on the lexicalization of profanity used by Filipino Muslim speakers in Davao Region, Philippines. The Filipino Muslim speakers are Tausug and Kagan who are believers of Islam. In this study, profanity includes cursing, swearing, and all expressions considered taboo, sexual, and vulgar. There were 10 Tausug and 10 Kagan speakers who participated through face to face interview and focus group discussion. Through lexicological analysis, findings revealed that Islam played an immense role in the lexicalization of profanity in Tausug and Kagan languages. It functioned as an identity marker of Tausug and Kagan as Muslims. Animal references formed the part of profanity in Filipino Muslims. Cursing in Tausug and Kagan also included expressions of destruction, sex, death, sickness and assault to the “face”. Both societies believe that profanity is not good, and causes discomfort and unhappiness. Filipino Muslims utter *Astagfirullah* ‘Forgive me God’ when profanity is used for it is considered *haram* in Islam.

Keywords: Profanity, Lexicalization, Tausug, Kagan, Philippines.

INTRODUCTION

Profanity is always considered taboo and is often prohibited in various societies. When profanity is equated with blasphemy, the direct connotation is that it is against anything holy or against any deity that any member of society worships, and the person who utters profanity is considered either secular, atheist, immoral, irreligious or downright evil. Where anything sacred is used in, acted upon, or become the target of profanity, such act can be construed as desecration and labeled as a crime against religion which can be punishable by stringent laws in many “religious” societies (Roberts & Yamane, 2012) such as in “political Islam” (Asad et al. 2013; Bibi & Tollet, 2013).

Aside from religion-based profanity, other forms of profanity deal with effluvia, which is the cover term for bodily secretions either in gaseous, liquid or solid forms. The level of profanity associated with various bodily secretions depends upon the society. Some words of bodily secretions are deemed more profane and elevated to the level of taboo (Holder, 2008). For Allan & Burrige (2006:11), “Taboo refers to a proscription of behavior for a specifiable community of one or more persons, at a specifiable time, in specifiable contexts.”

Equally forceful is the use of words associated with sex in profanity. From the purview of public morality, every conservative society can attest to the fact that uttering sexual terms in public is downright vulgar and detestable. So strong is the censorship that every time sexual profanity is uttered in a film, live telecast, TV programs, and other broadcast media, the predictable bleep censor is activated and heard to replace such utterance. Censorship is the natural and imposing reaction of the authority towards profanity in the broadcast media (Jenings, 2009; Silverman, 2007; Heins, 2001).

With words expressing profanity being taboo, social pressure makes members of the society resort to the use of euphemism due to censorship. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines euphemism as “the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something

unpleasant”. Language, which functions for communication, has its lexical provisions to be used when conservative societies require it to lessen the gravity of offensiveness of profanity.

As such, euphemism is devised to circumvent the repressive nature of censorship and social pressure against profanity (Allan & Burrige, 2006). Jay (2000:86) stated that “Euphemisms and circumlocutions are commonly used in order to talk about sex and taboo topics.” Proscriptions of all types of vulgarities, profanities, taboos and other lexicalized improprieties in a given society are a huge part of regulating social behavior to which politeness is one of the ultimate goals (Culpeper, 2011; Watts, 2003; Brown & Levinson, 1987). It is noteworthy to mention that taboo is culture-specific and time-constrained. What is considered taboo in some cultures may not be in the others, and what is considered taboo today may not be taboo in the future.

In this paper, the working blanket definition of profanity includes cursing, swearing, and all terms and expressions considered taboo, vulgar, lewd, blasphemous, pejorative, sexual, among others, which are directly proscribed or prohibited by the society. Within the Philippine context, since the languages studied in this paper are Bahasa Sug and Kagan, terms and expressions used against the “face” condescendingly and pejoratively are also included. By face, we mean the dignity, self-esteem, and self-worth of a person in particular and the community in general. The “face” holds too much importance which borders sanctity in the Philippine community. Assaulting the “face” is an injury not only to the person but also to his family. In closely knit clans in a community, offending a member means offending the entire family or the clan. An assault to the “face” is not easily forgiven or forgotten as those historical records of *juramentado*¹, *rido*², and *pangayaw*³ in the history and sociology of the Philippines could testify (Tan, 2009; Torres, 2007; Rodell, 2002; Majul, 1999; Jocano, 1998; Agoncillo, 1990).

As such, by using ethnographic approach, what is aimed in this paper is the attempt to present an analysis on the lexicalization of profanity used by speakers of Bahasa Sug, and of Kagan. The linguistic varieties these languages are those spoken in Davao Region in the Philippines. The Bahasa Sug speakers, called Tausugs, and Kagan speakers, who are also called Davawenyo Muslims, are believers of Islam. This research delves into the influence of Islam in the use of profanity among speakers of Kagan and Bahasa Sug from the sentential level to the conceptual structures associated with the expressions of profanity through lexicological analysis (Coleman & Kay, 2000).

The University of Mindanao METHODOLOGY

This ethnographic research utilized the anthropological tools such as interviews and focus group discussion from key informants. The informants of this study are pure-blooded Tausug and Kagan from the provinces in Davao Region, Philippines. The informants were selected through purposeful sampling. There are 10 informants from the Tausug tribe, ages 18- 74 years old, who are from Sittio Tacub, Barangay Zone I, Santa Cruz, Davao del Sur, while the 10 Kagan informants, ages 17-50 years old, hail from Sittio Bato, Barangay Matiao, Pantukan, Compostela Valley.

For easy access, the researcher who is a true-blooded Tausug acted as a gatekeeper in the Tausug community in Santa Cruz, Davao del Sur, while Mr. Ezzedin Manidoc, a pure Kagan, served as an insider in the Kagan community in Pantukan, Compostela Valley. With the help of the gatekeepers, the researchers asked permission from the *datu* in the Kagan community, and the *panglima* in the Tausug community. Then, a letter of permission was given to the informants, asking if they would share their time about the study.

For the face to face interview, the 10 informants from each tribe were interviewed using the questionnaire on swearing, cursing, and other forms of profanity. For the focus group discussion, five informants from each tribe were asked as to why they say these profane expressions and what they feel when uttering these. Questions were in English since the informants are literate in English but the answers must in their native language. The instrument was validated by university professors

specializing on Language and Linguistics. The questions were structured. The informants were asked to share the profane expressions that they knew in their own language. Digital cameras, pens, and papers were used for documentation.

The responses of the informants were transcribed and were translated with the help of the native speakers. The responses were categorized into themes, and lexicological analyses were subjected to peer debriefing by two university professors. Lexicological analysis deals with the interface between syntax and semantics (Coleman & Kay, 2000).

Profanity in Bahasa Sug

Discussing Tausug cannot be completely accomplished without touching the religion of Islam, which is the strongest identity marker of the Tausug community. Historical accounts celebrate the early unified political consciousness and religious identity of the Tausug when in 1450 the Sultanate of Sulu was declared a *Darul Islam* 'abode of peace' (Tan, 2010; Majul, 1999). The Islamized Tausugs were admitted to the universal concept of the *ummat al-Islamiyah* 'the Islamic community'.

Tausug informants were quick to offer a reason saying that "profanity is considered *haram* 'forbidden' in Islam" and forms part of the major sins (as compared to the concept of venial sin among Christians). Islam, for Muslims, is not just simply a religion but also "a way of life" (Houben, 2003: 149). Albeit, explicit expression of profanities exists in Tausug society, and Arabic religious terms are incorporated into the indigenous Bahasa Sug. Following sections present the samples of profanity in Bahasa Sug.

Swearing in Bahasa Sug

The Tausugs made use of words dealing with death and life endangerment when making a statement to prove the veracity of their utterance as shown in the following examples.

1. *Bunnal ba. Matay pa aku bihaun. 'That is true. I may die now.'*
2. *Way aku nagdadagang shabu. Bunnal ba. Matay pa aku bihaun. 'I am not selling methamphetamine. It is true. I may die now.'*
3. *Kita ku in anak niya budjang ha tabuh nagmimiting iban sin anak subul hi Bapa Kadil. Bunnal ba. Matay pa aku bihaun. 'I saw his daughter in the market talking to the son of Uncle Kadil. That is true. I may die now.'*

Sentences (1), (2), and (3) exemplify the common phrases of swearing among the Tausugs. To convince that they are telling the truth, Tausugs say, "*Matay pa aku bihaun*" 'I may die now'. Sample sentence (2) talks of the denial of selling methamphetamine, which is punishable by capital punishment in the Philippines, and the use of which is considered *haram*. Sample sentence (3) speaks of stealthy communication between unrelated man and woman seen in public, which is forbidden in the Tausug community. In these instances, informants asserted that the inclusion of the expression has a big impact on the part of the interactants because of the word "*matay*" 'death'.

Swearing as an oath is also expressed by direct mention of God and the angels to support the veracity of the utterance. Consider the samples (4), (5), and (6) below.

4. *Way ku siya siyum. Saksih ku in Allah. Wallahi! 'I did not kiss her. God is my witness. I swear to Allah.'*
5. *Miyatay na hi Jared. Bukun ku puting. La ilaha illallah! 'Jared is dead. I am not lying. There is no God but Allah.'*
6. *Saksi ku in mga malaikat. Way ku nahinang yan. 'Angels are my witness. I have not done that.'*

Sample sentence (4) mentions the word *Allah*, which the Arabic word for God, followed by the Arabic word *Wallahi*, which means 'I swear to God' in English. Sample sentence (5) talks about the death of a friend named Jared. To prove its factuality, part of the Arabic

prayer Al Fatihah⁵ – ***La ilaha illallah*** ‘*There is no God but Allah*’- is uttered to seal the finality of the truth of the sworn oath. Sample sentence (6) depicts a denial of an action, and to prove the veracity, the Arabic word ***malaikat*** ‘*angel*’ is evoked.

These Arabic terms and expressions are commonly used among the Tausug informants to highlight the truth of the matter and to persuade the other interactants to the side of the speaker. To swear as an oath among Muslims has both benefactive and malefactive effects “in this world and the hereafter”.

Cursing in Bahasa Sug

Cursing in Bahasa Sug involved expressions of sickness, destruction, and death and often invoked to curse someone because of unpaid debts, saving the face, and spreading lies.

The following samples of cursing (7) – (10) are commonly used among the Tausug, and evoke death to the cursed person.

7. *Mang man kaw matay. ‘May you die.’*

8. *Matay kaw. ‘May you die.’*

9. *Mabugtang kaw. ‘May you die.’*

10. *Malaglag kaw. ‘May you die.’*

The preceding samples of curses are also appended to utterances when someone collects payment of debt, and the debtor is known for habitual non-payment or late payment of loans. Consider the sample statement below.

11. *Kuhnu kaw magbayad sin utang mo? Malaglag kaw. ‘When will you pay your debt? May you die.’*

In Tausug society, having debts is normal but if it will not be paid, altercation ensues more often than not. With the element of irascibility, the Tausug speaker uttered this line out of anger and disappointment. He cursed the delinquent debtor by saying, “*Matay kaw*”, to call the attention of the debtor to pay with the sense of necessity and urgency. One does not wish to die early so the speaker is expecting that the debtor to pay as soon as possible.

Other instances of cursing in Tausug have something to do with telling lies, spreading slander, and committing impropriety. To these statements, curses shown in (7) – (10) are also appended as shown in samples (12), (13), (14), and (15) as follows.

12. *Putingan in babuy ini. Syaitan tuud. Matay kaw. ‘This pig is a liar. Truly, the devil. May you die.’*

13. *Ayaw nakaw pamuting! Nalka in kadtuan mu tuwan. Malaglag kaw. ‘Don’t lie. You’ll go to hell boy. May you die.’*

14. *Mayta mu siya siyum? Tunang sayan sin taymanghud mu. Mabugtang kaw. ‘Why did you kiss her? She is the fiancée of your brother. May you die.’*

15. *Ig na kaw ha bay. Baisan kaw. Masalak kaw. ‘Get out from our house. You are a slut. May you die.’*

In sample (2), the Tausug speaker uttered this curse to the lying person who is then compared to a ***babuy*** ‘*pig*’. Pig, labeled ***haram*** in Islamic jurisprudence, is the lowest form of animal considered by Muslim Tausugs. The liar is then called ***Syaitan***, Arabic for devil, because of his act. The speaker here was usually confrontational and angry in uttering these lines. Sample (13) has the Arabic loanword ***nalka*** ‘*hell*’ which denotes the ultimate punishment for the lying person, a sharp disciplinary reprimand. Sample (14) states of a situation where the curse is uttered to the supposed offender accused of impropriety known in Islam as ***khalwat***, an Arabic word which signifies forbidden close proximity between unrelated members of opposite sex. As such, this act brings disgrace and causes shame to the family. Such gravity of offence to religion and culture⁸ demands a severe punishment, hence, the equally forceful curse ***Mabugtang kaw!*** ‘*May you die.*’ Sample (15) has the same value as that of sample (14) wherein an offending daughter accused of impropriety and prostitution is driven out of the house. Prostitution is immoral in Islam and is categorized as ***haram***. The samples (14) and (15) signify the strong following of the Tausugs of the ***adat***, ‘*customary laws*’ and the ***agama*** ‘*religion*’.

Other profanities in Bahasa Sug

Sex, animal references, and weather elements also formed part of profanities in Bahasa Sug. Consider the succeeding examples (16) – (21) as follows:

16. *Jiyubul kaw!* 'You are sodomized.'

17. *Nag-iyut kay apu niya!* 'She had sex with her grandfather.'

18. *Nagkangug kaw!* 'You are fucking.'

19. *Naglalasi na isab in bata-bata ini. Lisuan tuud!* 'This boy is masturbating. You are indeed lazy.'

20. *Nagdawgdug, nagkilat, nagkussu sin mata bilat!* 'There is thunder, there is lightning, she poked her vagina.'

21. *Nagdawgdug, nagluti, nagkussu sin mata buli!* 'There is thunder, there is lightning, she poked her anus.'

The preceding samples of profanities have the element of sex.

Sample (16) is an ejaculatory expression of profanity uttered when someone is angry or shocked like a startle response. The word *jiyubul* 'sodomized'; is verb derived from the noun *jubul* 'anus'. Sample (17) makes use of the verb *nag-iyut* 'had sex' to denote the incestuous action done by the girl and her grandfather, which is also considered *haram*. This profanity is often mentioned for example when a Tausug does not win in the lottery. Having sex with a grandparent is considered a jinx, and such act is also punishable as well as the participation in the games of luck. Sample (18) has the verb *nagkangug* 'fucking', and sample (19) has the verb *naglalasi* 'masturbating'.

Both are denoting sexual activities uttered in profanity. Informants were ardent in saying that such acts were not literally performed for it means that the person spoken to, such as the young child, is lazy and not doing anything, and therefore nothing prurient. Being habitually lazy may incur the label *babuy* 'pig', hated animal for being haram and characterized similarly for the habitual eating and sleeping of the pig.

Samples (20) and (21) are gathered from children playing who love to sing these lines when there is thunder and lightning. These particular samples are rhymes used in play among kids without any consciousness of impropriety, to the horror of the listening adults. In (20), the word *bilat* signifies the female genitalia being poked supposedly by the child herself when it is *nagkilat* 'lightning'. Similarly, sample (21) has the word *buli* 'anus' which also supposedly poked by the child when lightning strikes as depicted by the word *nagluti* 'lightning'. The listening adult usually sanctions the little ones by telling them that the lightning and thunder will not stop if they will not also stop playing and singing the profane rhyme. The fierce lightning and thunder may become more forceful and destructive due to the utterance of *haram* rhyme. To this end, the adult says the stern warning as seen below in (22):

22. *Mga bata, mangi maglaka-laka. Kugdanan kamu sin kilat.* 'Children, don't say those words. Lightning will strike you.'

This stern warning is often followed by the admonition of reciting Quran verses and prayers to stop the fearsome lightning and thunder. More often than not, this strict warning makes the playing kids stop, but not without the restrained playful giggling and chuckling.

Profanity in Kagan

In Islam, there are two verses in the English translation of the Quran by Abdullah Yusuf Ali that mention profanity directly, namely, Al Araf Chapter 7:180 and Al Hajj Chapter 22:25, and requital and grievous penalty await those who commit profanity. Profanity manifested in the form of cursing, swearing, and blasphemy is also a sin in Islam (Muhammad Bin Uthman Adh-Sgagabu, 1993). Following are samples of profanity in Kagan who are believers of Islam.

Swearing in Kagan

The Kagans incorporate the direct mention of Allah due to its high level of sanctity in swearing to prove the truth of utterances.

1. **Wallahi!** *Yatay da yang parente ko.*
“I swear to Allah. My relative just passed away.”
2. **Wallahi!** *Yamatay yang ama ko.*
“I swear to Allah! My father passed away.”
3. **Ya Allah! Astaghfirullah. Wallahi** *virgin pa ko.*
“Oh my god! I seek Allah’s forgiveness. I promise to God I’m still virgin.”

In entries (1) – (3), the sentential forms use the Arabic terms **Wallahi** ‘I swear to Allah’, **Ya Allah** ‘Oh God’, **Astagfirullah** ‘I seek Allah’s forgiveness’ to prove the truth or to intensify the stated facts. These Arabic terms along with their conceptual structures were incorporated into the language of the Kagan thereby affecting and expanding their worldview.

Samples (1) and (2) talk about the death of a father or a relative. To prove its factuality, the Arabic expression **Wallahi** ‘I swear to Allah’ is expressed to seal the veracity of the sworn oath. Sample sentence (3) speaks about virginity. Single ladies must stay virgin, for if not, they are considered as haram. In this instance, the informant uttered the Arabic expressions **Ya Allah** ‘Oh God’ and **Astagfirullah** ‘I seek Allah’s forgiveness’ to highlight the veracity of the matter and to persuade the other interactants that she is still virgin. The Kagan speaker borrowed the English term ‘virgin’ in this instance.

Cursing in Kagan

Just like the Tausugs, cursing in Kagan involves the expressions of destruction, death and animal references. The following samples of cursing in sentential forms (4) – (7) are commonly used among the Kagans in Davao Province.

4. *Yaputok pang dila mo ah! Ka munafiq mo!*
“I hope your tongue gets cut off! You liar!”
5. *Astagfirullah! Kayot mo! Karippa sawman sang gawbok mo ky lumon.*
“Astagfirullah! Slut! Your job is so dirty!”
6. *Kasingit mong baboy kaw.*
“You’re a greedy pig!”

In sample (4), the Kagan speaker utters this curse to the lying person who is then called **munafiq** ‘liar’. **Munafiq** is an Arabic term. Out of anger and disappointment, the Kagan speaker wishes that the tongue of the lying person gets cut off. One does not wish this so the speaker is expecting that the lying person will tell the truth.

Sample (5) talks about prostitution, which is immoral in Islam, and is categorized as haram. The Kagan speaker utters **Astagfirullah** ‘Forgive me God’ to express that prostitution is haram and the religion and culture demand severe punishment. Because of anger, the speaker utters the taboo expression **Kayot mo!** ‘slut’ which is a direct assault to a person’s face.

Sample (6) deals with a greedy person, who is then compared to a babuy ‘pig’. Just like the Tausugs, the Kagans considered pig as the lowest form of animal. This expression is a direct assault to the well-being of the person concerned.

Other profanities in Kagan

Other forms of indigenous Kagan profanities are categorized under sex and assault to the face like in the expressions in sentential forms below.

8. *Attiya mo! Yassapu kaw!* “You dirty shit! Fuck you !”
9. *Karippa mo!* “You filthy creature!”
10. *Kabaga ng parangay mo!* “ You got thick face!”

Entries (8) – (9) deal with expressions on sex. Samples (8) – (9) are uttered by the Kagan speaker when someone backstabs him or her. Out of anger, the Kagan speaker utters *Attiya mo! Yassapu kaw!* “ You dirty shit! Fuck you !” and *Karippa mo!* “You filthy creature!”. But the Kagan elders would

remind the young ones by saying, *Ayaw da paglambita idtu na mga pyaglawngan. Haram.* ‘Refrain from uttering those lines. Haram.’

Sample (10) is expressed by the Kagan speaker when someone accuses him that he or she is not a good Kagan or Muslim. To attack the dignity of the other interactant, the Kagan speaker utters *Kabaga ng parangay mo!* “ You got thick face!”. For the Kagan speaker, no one has the right to judge him or her if he or she is a good Muslim or not as what the Kagan informant shared during the focus group discussion, *Ayaw aku paghusgay. Yang Allah gaid yang awn katungud para maghusga anak.* “Do not judge me. Only Allah has the right to judge me.”

CONCLUSION

Islam plays an immense role of the lexicalization of some profanities in the languages of Bahasa Sug and Kagan, respectively. Such influence of lexicalized profanity is reflected in the incorporation of loanwords and religious terms coming from Arabic language. Religion plays a major role in the culture of the Tausug and Kagan societies. In fact, it functions as an identity marker of the Tausug and Kagan.

The Tausugs and Kagan although separated by language are all the same Filipino Austronesians and Muslims. Both societies also consider that profanity is bad which gives emphasis to the similarity of accepted moral concepts of the two groups. Moreover, profanity does not include only sex and religion as many studies have found. Hence, profanity can be in the form of assault to the “face”, a very important psychosocial concept in the Tausug and Kagan communities.

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