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**LINGUISTIC INTERPRETATIONS OF TABOO
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE FILM
CHURULI ('CURUḷI')**

Rahul Krishna H S*
Syam S K**

ABSTRACT

Every term in a language is not appropriate for all situations, with some having wrong and negative connotations also due to which people try to avoid to use them sensitive issues. Such terms are known as taboo terms. Words or expressions frequently viewed as inappropriate in specific contexts are considered taboo. The movie 'curuḷi' is a recently released Malayalam movie directed by the most celebrated filmmaker Lijo Jose Pellissery, son of great renowned actor Jose Pellissery, and screenplay by S Hareesh. The plot of this film is rather unusual and unique when contrasted to most other traditional Malayalam films. This paper aims to study the linguistic aspect of the taboos used in the movie Curuḷi. The specific objective of the paper is to analyse the taboo used in the movie based on their structure and semantics.

Keywords: Malayalam Taboo, Taboo Word, Curuḷi, Taboo Structure, Linguistic Study

1. Introduction

Not every term in a language is appropriate for all situations. Some need to be avoided due to the sensitivity involved. Such terms are known as taboo terms. Words or expressions frequently viewed as inappropriate in specific contexts are referred to as taboo language Milner, 2011. However, Margaret Need defined the notion of taboo as a "negative sanction whose infringement results in an automatic penalty without human or superhuman mediation" Need, 1935.

The movie 'curuḷi' is a recently released Malayalam movie directed by the most celebrated filmmaker Lijo Jose Pellissery, son of great renowned actor Jose Pellissery, and screenplay by S Hareesh. The movie was initially premiered at IFFK on February 11 2021, and was later released via Sony Liv, an OTT service, on November 19, 2021. When the film 'curuḷi' was released, the Malayali audience at various phases received it with varying reactions. They split into many

* Department of Linguistics, University of Kerala, Kerala, India

** Department of Linguistics, University of Kerala, Kerala, India

sections to condemn and praise the film's use of profanity. The vocabulary utilised in this film was completely different from that of other Malayalam films. The film's screenplay extensively uses taboo terms uncommon in Malayalam films. This sparked several heated disputes on the news stations. A person filed a petition to have *curuḷi* removed from the OTT platform. As a result, the Kerala High Court asked the police to view the movie *curuḷi* to investigate and submit a report on the language used throughout the film. Linguists, not cops, are the best people to research the language of the film.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The plot revolves around a bunch of people who habitually use taboos in their everyday lives. As a consequence, the plot of this film is rather unusual and unique when contrasted to most other traditional Malayalam films. This video contains several buzzwords with multiple meanings as well as forbidden terms. Furthermore, a movie of this type developed a new fad in society, providing a helpful context for language study. The various taboos used in the movie need to be analysed utilising a linguistic method.

1.1.1 Aims and Objectives

This paper aims to study the taboos used in the movie *Curuḷi* from a linguistic perspective. The specific objective of the paper is to analyse the taboos used in the movie based on its structure and semantics.

1.1.2 Review of the Literature

Social and Linguistic Culture of New Generation Movies (Robert, 2014) showed that several obscene terms are used in Mollywood's new generation movies. The study also defined distinct types of taboos, including lexical and sentence-based taboos, as well as their context and instances. Furthermore, the author says that while these derogatory phrases utilised in movies truly reflect the friendship group, society regards them as unclean and nasty.

teRippadaṅṅal :sa:mska:rika – sa:mu:hika – manahśa :strviśakalanam (Das, 2017) explored the linguistic, sociological, and psychological elements of taboo word development in Malayalam and the cultural relation to gender status for variables such as gender and Sex. According to the study, the meaning of taboo phrases is a function of historical, social, and psychological aspects.

1. Methodology and Data Collection

The study is conducted within a descriptive and analytic framework. The data for the study was gathered after intensive watching of the movie. The collected data for the research was then charted, classified and analysed. The secondary data sources, such as books, library materials, dictionaries and encyclopaedia, and conference papers, were utilised for the research.

2. Data Analysis

The usage of taboo words in the aforementioned movie is pretty much higher than the conventional Malayalam movies. The frequency of the forbidden terms is estimated to be upto 170 times by utilising 70 restricted words during the movie's progression. So, a viewer can expect a taboo word every 41 seconds of the movie. The structural and the semantic aspects of the taboo words of the movie are discussed below.

2.1 Structural Aspects

In this section, the categories of taboo words and use of case markers is provided.

6.1.1 Simple words

Nouns

1. koṅṭam 'scrotum'
2. aṅṭi 'penis'

Adjectives

1. kampi 'sexual desire'
2. ṅa: Ri 'smelly person or dirty'

Adverbs

1. u:mpa:n 'to have oral sex'
2. mo:ṅṭiyiṭṭu 'after drunk'

Verbs

1. mu:ṅci 'licked/fucked up'
2. tu:Ra:n 'to excrete faeces'

3.1.2 Compound words

Noun+Noun

1. balipi:ṭham 'sacrificial pedestal'
2. maittaṅṭikal 'pubic hair'

Noun + Verb

1. erumaykkiṭṭuke:RRiyiṭṭu 'to copulate buffalo'
2. taḷḷaykkuoṅṭa:kka:n 'to fuck mother'

Adjective + Noun

1. ku:tticimakkale 'children of a prostitute'
2. kuṅṅikuṅṅa 'short penis'

3.1.3 Case Markers

The following lines describe the various case forms used in the movie.

The accusative case marks the direct object of the transitive verb. There have been only three prohibited terms observed in the collected data.

1. η i-nRe appanumamma:mayum ku:te
pan η in-e kaśsa:p η uceyyun η u η tu
you-GEN father and grandmother together pig-ACC
slaughtering

Your father and grandmother are slaughtering a pig.

The dative case marks the recipient or beneficiary of an action. There are only five situations where collected terms come with a dative case.

2. a:yiram tantay-kku o η ta:ya
thousand father-DAT born to

Born to thousand fathers.

The genitive case, also known as the possessive case, indicates possession or some close kinship of the noun. This case occurs with seven restricted terms observed in the collected data.

1. ka η uve:Riy-u η e mo:ne
gallowed criminal-GEN son-ACC

Son of gallowed criminal.

The locative case directs the location or position of the noun. The collected data shows that this locative case occurs with only three situations.

1. kuRR-il
vagina-LOC

In vagina

Vocative case marks when a noun addresses a person or animal etc. This case is the most frequently occurring than any other cases in the gathered data.

1. na:y-e:
dog-VOC

dog

1. ku η -e:
penis-VOC

penis

2.2 Semantic Aspects of Taboo

The prohibited terms used in the movie were examined and grouped in this part based on their sense. They are divided into 11 groups based on semantic domains, such as *animal-related*, *sex organ*, *sex*, *food*, *excretion*, *body*, *object*, *quality*, *kinship*, *religious* and *mental ailment or defect*.

Animal-related taboos are made with the names of the animals whose manner is least ferocious and most defamed quality in the animal kingdom.

1. ṅa:ye
dog (male)
2. marapaṭṭi
asian palm civet

In almost all languages, words related to *sex* are still considered taboo. These remarks are forbidden in public but permitted in private conversations if both parties agree.

1. kaḷappu
sexual desire
2. avara:ti
prostitute

Like *sex*, the words related to the *sex organ* are also considered taboo in almost every language. These taboos are made with the names of male and female sex organs.

1. pu: Ru
vagina
2. kuṇṇa
penis

The *food-related* taboos found in the data do not visibly indicate any forbidden item but indirectly point to restricted terms by their usage or structure. In most cases, these jagged towards the name of the sex organ.

1. ku:laccakka
a kind of Jackfruit
2. kumpaḷaṇṇa
pumpkin

In the *body-related* taboos, the names of the different body parts were employed to form taboos. However, these terms refer to or denote useless or worthless things.

1. maire

hair

2. maittaṅṅikal

Pubic hair

In the category of *excretion*, except for tears, all other body excretions are considered taboo in many languages. All words denoting excretion and its accompanying terminology and activities are grouped in this area.

1. tu:Ra:n

To excrete faeces

The terms in the *object* category are typically seen as the names of the weapons or things. However, these categories imply the various sex organs or are related to sex. These instruments may have the appearance or a distinguishing attribute of the sex organ they represent.

1. to:kku

gun (penis)

2. toḷatiriya:ttavane

Do not know to categorise between female sexual organs

In *kinship*, the taboos are employed in these categories to malign the targeted person's family or family members. Relationship or kinship terminology is blended up with disparaging or sex-related ones. This group of taboos is considered to have the most vulgarised words in the whole categorisation. A proverb in English 'A man's home is his castle', indicates that a person's family is more vital to him than any other. As a result, a curse on his or her family or a family member hurts more than any other curse. Such use of taboos jeopardises the honour of his family. In most situations, the targeted individual is males rather than females.

1. ku:tticimakkale

children of a prostitute

1. ta:yo:li

motherfucker

The category of *quality* is concerned with the vilified human characteristics or distinctive qualities.

1. ṅa:Ri

A smelly person or dirty

2. paṅṅa

useless or bad

Mental ailment or defect includes the terms of mental illness and handicap. They are commonly used among adolescents and other age groups to address an individual to assert that this type of handicap or mental disease afflicts him or her.

1. poṭṭan

deaf

Religion and religious practices are associated with the *religious* category. These phrases are forbidden because they are sacred and holy.

1. ṅarakam

hell

2. aḷṭṭa:ra

the altar

Of all the semantic domains listed above, the terms related to sex organs and body have greatest frequency, and the terms related to mental ailment or defect and excretion have less frequency in the movie.

a. Dialectal Variation

This section looks at the dialectal variation of the collected taboo words in the movie *curuḷi*. The *phonological variation* observed in the data is that /i/ changed to /e/ in the example of 'eṭa', which means between, whose actual form is 'iṭa'. It can be seen that /i/ changed to /e/ after the influence of the open vowel /a/ in the succeeding syllable.

In *Case variation*, 'paṅṅiye' is changed to paṅṅine with the addition of accusative case marker -e towards the term paṅṅi, which might have caused the alteration of the link morpheme -y- to -n- in the example. The standardised form uses 'paṅṅiye' with the addition of an accusative case marker. In another example, 'eṭayil' is changed to 'eṭayilu', and the locative case marker '-il' is changed to '-ilu'. Furthermore, in the above two examples, similar occurrences cannot be found anymore, which can be decided that changes might be idiolect variation.

In *Lexical variation*, the term 'amarttumo' changed into 'amakkumo', in which the root form is changed and assimilated to the vowel -u.

In the case of *Semantic variation*, the terms such as 'ṅa:ye' and 'mo:ṅṅiyiṭṭu' are the examples. In various regions of Kerala, the dog's standard name is 'ṅa:ye'. However, in other areas of Kerala, it is used to designate or indicate the masculine gender of a dog. Furthermore, in the northern region of Kerala, the term 'mo:ṅṅiyiṭṭu' means to drink. To the southern parts of Kerala, however, the term carries a pejorative

connotation that suggests the recipient is not a favourable of the speaker.

3. Findings and Conclusion

From the study, it has been found that the usage of taboo is much higher with the movie under discussion than the rest of the conventional movies premiered in the Malayalam Film Industry. The frequency of taboo terms is computed up to 170 times by looking at a sample of 70 terms. A viewer is forced to expect a taboo every 41 seconds of the movie's development. Based on the structure, the terms were mainly divided into simple and compound words in the study. The grammatical cases such as accusative case, genitive case, locative case, dative case, and vocative case are observed in the collected data. The prohibited terms used in the movie were examined and grouped, based on their sense, into 11 groups: *animal-related, sex organ, sex, food, excretion, body, object, quality, kinship, religious and mental ailment or defect*. The study also found a slight dialectal variation in phonological, morphological, lexical and semantic domain levels in the collected data.

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