

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter shows the overview of the research. It provides background of the research, research problem, research objective, research significance, and definition of key terms.

1.1 Background of the Research

The study of taboo words has become increasingly important in linguistic and sociolinguistic research because these expressions reflect the close relationship between language, culture, and society. Taboo words are not merely prohibited or offensive expressions but also represent linguistic phenomena whose meanings and communicative functions are shaped by social norms, cultural values, and contextual factors (Jay, 1999; Wardaugh, 2006). Consequently, the analysis of taboo language extends beyond identifying inappropriate vocabulary to understanding how speakers employ language to express emotions, negotiate identities, reinforce interpersonal relationships, and communicate particular social meanings. This perspective highlights the importance of taboo language as an integral component of language use in contemporary society.

Furthermore, the widespread use of taboo words across contemporary media indicates that their communicative roles have evolved alongside social and cultural developments. In various forms of public discourse, including music, films, social media, and digital communication, taboo words are intentionally employed to strengthen emotional expression, emphasize rhetorical messages, challenge social norms, and construct individual or group identities (Jay, 1999; Wardaugh, 2006). This development demonstrates that taboo language should be examined not only as a socially restricted form of language but also as a meaningful linguistic resource that reflects the dynamic interaction between language and society. Therefore, investigating taboo words from linguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding their functions in contemporary communication, particularly in hip-hop song lyrics.

Hip-hop music has long been recognized as more than a form of entertainment; it functions as a medium through which artists express personal experiences, negotiate cultural identities, criticize social conditions, and challenge dominant ideologies. One of the most distinctive linguistic characteristics of hip-hop is the extensive use of taboo language. Rather than serving merely as offensive or inappropriate expressions, taboo words are frequently employed to intensify emotional expression, construct authenticity, resist social expectations, and communicate social criticism (Cutler, 2007). According to Jay (1999, p. 2), taboo language consists of words and expressions that are culturally restricted because they are considered offensive, inappropriate, or socially unacceptable. However, the meaning and function of taboo words cannot be separated from their social context, since their interpretation depends on the cultural values and communicative purposes of the speaker. Consequently, taboo language has become an important area of sociolinguistic research because it reflects the relationship between language, culture, identity, and power.

Among contemporary hip-hop artists, Eminem stands out as one of the most influential figures whose artistic identity is closely associated with the strategic use of taboo language. Born in 1972, Eminem has sold more than 277 million records worldwide, making him one of the best-selling rappers in history (Dawkins, 2013). Throughout his career, he has consistently attracted public attention not only because of his exceptional lyrical techniques but also because of his provocative use of explicit language, satire, and controversial social commentary. Unlike many mainstream artists who avoid potentially offensive expressions, Eminem deliberately incorporates taboo words into his lyrics to construct his alter ego, Slim Shady, challenge social norms, express psychological conflict, and criticize various social and political issues. His linguistic style demonstrates that taboo language functions not simply as profanity but as a communicative strategy that strengthens artistic identity and delivers complex messages to audiences.

Beyond its controversial reception, *The Death of Slim Shady (Coup de Grâce)* album represents a significant linguistic phenomenon that deserves systematic academic investigation. Unlike many previous albums that present independent

themes in each song, this album is constructed as a concept album centered on the symbolic death of Slim Shady, Eminem's long-established alter ego. Through this narrative, the album explores conflicts between artistic identity, personal transformation, public expectations, and freedom of expression, creating a coherent discourse in which language functions as the primary medium for conveying these themes. Consequently, the album provides a rich corpus for examining how linguistic choices contribute to meaning construction throughout interconnected song lyrics.

The selection of Eminem as the subject of this study is based not only on his influence as one of the most prominent figures in contemporary hip-hop but also on his distinctive use of language. Throughout his career, Eminem has consistently employed taboo words as deliberate rhetorical and artistic devices rather than merely offensive expressions. His lyrics combine explicit language with storytelling, satire, irony, humor, and social criticism, demonstrating that taboo words can perform multiple communicative functions, including expressing emotions, constructing identity, criticizing social issues, and reinforcing artistic expression. These characteristics distinguish his lyrical style from that of many contemporary artists and make his work particularly appropriate for linguistic and sociolinguistic investigation.

Furthermore, The Death of Slim Shady (*Coup de Grâce*) album was selected because it demonstrates a more systematic and contextually meaningful use of taboo language than many of Eminem's earlier works. Within the album, taboo words are not employed solely to provoke audiences or generate controversy but are integrated into the narrative to develop characterization, intensify emotional expression, strengthen rhetorical impact, and support the album's central themes. This relationship between language, narrative, and artistic expression provides an appropriate context for examining taboo words as meaningful linguistic resources rather than isolated offensive vocabulary. Therefore, this study applies Jay's (1999) classification to identify the types of taboo words found in the lyrics and employs Wardaugh's (2006) sociolinguistic perspective to explain their communicative functions. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study seeks to

demonstrate how taboo language contributes to meaning construction, identity representation, emotional expression, and artistic creativity in The Death of Slim Shady (*Coup de Grâce*) album.

The album also generated widespread public discussion due to its explicit lyrics, provocative themes, and the symbolic portrayal of Slim Shady's death, attracting attention from both music critics and audiences. Beyond its commercial success and controversial reception, The Death of Slim Shady (*Coup de Grâce*) album represents a significant linguistic phenomenon that deserves systematic academic investigation. Unlike Eminem's previous albums, this concept album develops a coherent narrative in which taboo words function not merely as offensive expressions but as rhetorical and artistic devices that construct identity, intensify emotional expression, reinforce satire and social criticism, and support thematic development across interconnected songs. Consequently, the album provides a unique context for examining how taboo language contributes to meaning construction from both linguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives.

To further illustrate the significance of taboo language in the album, this research focuses on seven of the most popular songs based on *Genius* lyric statistics as of July 2024: *Houdini* (6M), *Tobey* (1.2M), *Fuel* (1.2M), *Guilty Conscience 2* (592.8K), *Renaissance* (576K), *Somebody Save Me* (518.3K), and *Evil* (465.8K) (Genius, 2024). These songs were selected not only because of their popularity but also because they provide representative examples of the album's linguistic diversity, containing various types of taboo words used across different communicative contexts. Their lyrical content reflects the album's central themes, including identity, emotional conflict, satire, and social criticism, making them an appropriate corpus for identifying the types of taboo words based on Jay's (1999) taxonomy and examining their communicative functions through Wardaugh's (2006) sociolinguistic perspective.

Furthermore, the symbolic conflict between Eminem and his alter ego, Slim Shady, makes this album particularly suitable for sociolinguistic investigation. The dialogue between these two identities illustrates how language can simultaneously represent personal experience, public identity, and cultural resistance. Taboo words

become linguistic resources through which Eminem negotiates the boundaries between fiction and reality, authenticity and performance, as well as social acceptance and public controversy. This interaction reflects Wardaugh's (2006) view that language is inseparable from social context because speakers continuously adapt linguistic choices to express identity and negotiate relationships within society. Therefore, investigating the taboo words used throughout this album not only identifies categories of offensive language but also explains how these linguistic choices function within Eminem's broader artistic discourse and contemporary hip-hop culture.

First previous studies found in Kadek (2025), this research analyzes the functions of taboo words in Eminem's song "Habits" using Wardaugh (2006) framework. The findings reveal four main functions: attracting attention, expressing contempt, provoking anger, and mocking authority. The most common uses are to draw attention and show contempt, often among close acquaintances or to emphasize emotional states. Eminem employs taboo language such as "dick," "fucking," "shit," and "shitty" to evoke strong reactions, ridicule institutions, or highlight internal conflicts and social critique. These words serve as tools for expressing raw emotion, challenging authority, and critiquing societal norms, especially in informal contexts. While effective in conveying intense feelings and social commentary, frequent use of taboo words can offend audiences. Overall, the research underscores how taboo language functions as a powerful device in music lyrics to evoke emotion, critique social issues, and establish a connection with listeners despite potential controversy.

The second previous study found in Sari (2020) this research examines the use of taboo words in the movie "Parker," employing Battistella (2005) framework to categorize them into three types: obscenity, profanity, and epithet. The qualitative study reveals that obscenity is the most prevalent type, followed by profanity, while epithet appears the least. Through observation methods and pragmatic identity analysis of the movie's script, the research highlights how these taboo words are utilized in informal contexts to convey strong emotions such as anger and disgust. Specific examples from the film, including terms like "hell," "motherfucker," and

“bitch,” are discussed to illustrate their meanings and contexts. The conclusion underscores the importance of taboo language in society and suggests avenues for further research, including exploring different theories and sources like song lyrics and novels. The article references various studies on taboo language and its sociolinguistic implications.

The third previous study found in (Rahayu & Panggabean, 2024) examined the use of taboo words in Eminem’s song lyrics and their relationship to political views. The study employed a descriptive qualitative method and analyzed taboo words found in seven Eminem songs. The data were classified based on Battistella’s theory, resulting in 85 instances of taboo words consisting of four types: epithets, profanity, vulgarity, and obscenity. The findings demonstrated that taboo words were not merely used as offensive expressions but also functioned as linguistic resources for expressing political views, particularly protests against social-status and racial discrimination.

The last previous study found in Febriyanti Umma (2023) the research investigates the use of taboo words in Nicki Minaj's song lyrics from her album “Queen,” employing qualitative descriptive methods. It categorizes these words based on Jay (2009) theory, which identifies seven types, including cursing, obscenity, and vulgar language. The study reveals that taboo language serves multiple functions: it draws attention, expresses contempt, provokes emotions, and mocks authority. For instance, words like “bitch” and “fuck” are analyzed for their impact on listeners and their role in enhancing lyrical attractiveness. The findings suggest that Minaj's strategic use of taboo words not only reflects her unique artistic expression but also fosters a deeper connection with her audience. Overall, the research highlights the significance of taboo language in contemporary music, illustrating how it can convey complex emotions and societal critiques while engaging listeners.

Previous studies have contributed substantially to the understanding of taboo language across different media. Kadek (2025) examined the functions of taboo words in Eminem’s “Habits” using Wardaugh’s (2006) framework, while Sari (2020) investigated taboo words in the film “Parker” through Battistella’s (2005)

classification. Likewise, Febriyanti Umma (2023) analyzed taboo language in Nicki Minaj's *Queen* album using Jay's taxonomy, and (Rahayu & Panggabean, 2024) examined taboo words in Eminem's songs in relation to political views using a descriptive qualitative approach. Although these studies provide valuable insights into the categorization and functions of taboo language, they mainly focus on individual songs, films, or albums released in different cultural and temporal contexts.

However, several limitations remain. First, previous studies generally investigate taboo language either by emphasizing its linguistic categories or its communicative functions, rather than integrating both perspectives into a single comprehensive analysis. Second, most research examines earlier musical works and therefore does not capture the linguistic characteristics of Eminem's most recent artistic phase represented in "The Death of Slim Shady (*Coup de Grâce*)" (2024). As a concept album centered on the symbolic death of Slim Shady, this work presents a unique narrative in which taboo language is employed not merely as offensive vocabulary but as a rhetorical strategy for identity construction, social criticism, satire, and negotiation of cultural values. These contextual dimensions have received limited scholarly attention.

Furthermore, the release of "The Death of Slim Shady (*Coup de Grâce*)" has introduced a new discourse surrounding artistic freedom, censorship, cancel culture, and the changing boundaries of acceptable language in contemporary society. Despite the album's significant cultural impact and commercial success, there is still limited sociolinguistic research examining how taboo words function within this conceptual narrative and how they reflect broader relationships between language, identity, power, and culture.

Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by examining both the types of taboo words based on Jay's (1999) taxonomy and their social functions based on Wardaugh's (2006) framework in seven selected songs from "The Death of Slim Shady (*Coup de Grâce*)". By combining these two analytical perspectives within the context of Eminem's latest concept album, this research provides a more

comprehensive sociolinguistic understanding of taboo language as a strategic communicative resource rather than merely offensive speech.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the background of problem can be formulated into the research question as follow:

1. What types of taboo words are used in Eminem's lyrics from The Death of Slim Shady (*Coup de Grâce*) album?
2. What is the function of taboo words used in the various tracks from The Death of Slim Shady (*Coup de Grâce*) album?

1.3 Research Objective

Related to the research questions above, the following is a research objective are to answer taboo words used in Eminem's lyrics from *The Death of Slim Shady (Coup de Grâce)*:

1. To identify the specific types of taboo words used in the Eminem song lyrics from The Death of Slim Shady (*Coup de Grâce*) album
2. To explores the function of taboo words from the various tracks in The Death of Slim Shady (*Coup de Grâce*) album

1.4 Research Significance

Theoretically, this research significantly enhances our understanding of how taboo language functions within hip-hop music, specifically illustrating Eminem's use of such words to convey complex emotions, challenge societal norms, and reflect personal experiences. It deepens theoretical appreciation for his artistry and highlights the cultural implications of language in music, contributing valuable insights to academic discourse on language and culture, and encouraging critical reflection on the complexities of contemporary communication

Practically, beyond its theoretical contributions, this study sheds light on the practical role of taboo language in shaping identity and community within hip-hop culture. It reveals how artists like Eminem connect with audiences and address

social issues through provocative speech, serving as a practical tool for resistance and self-expression.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

a. Linguistics

Linguistics is the scientific study of human language, encompassing a comprehensive examination of its structure, use, and cognitive underpinnings (Fromkin & Victoria A, 2000, p. 1).

b. Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is fundamentally the study of our everyday lives, focusing on how language functions in casual conversations, the media we consume, and the societal norms, policies, and laws that govern language use (Ronald Wardaugh & Janet M.Fuller, 2015, p. 1).

c. Language and Culture

Language and culture influence each other in important ways. Language carries cultural knowledge, values, and traditions, acting not only as a communication tool but also as a key part of cultural identity (Wardaugh, 2006, p. 221).

d. Taboo language

Taboo language is often considered offensive or inappropriate within specific cultural contexts, emphasizing how language reflects societal norms and values (Fromkin, 2011, p. 472). Also Jay (1999, p. 8) comprehensively categorizes taboo language, including epithets, profanity, towards the sacred), blasphemy, obscenity, vulgarity, insult and slur, and slang. According to Wardaugh (2006, p. 239), taboo words are not merely linguistic transgressions but perform several crucial social functions that profoundly influence communication, social interaction, and the expression of emotions.

e. Songs Lyrics

Song lyrics are a form of written discourse that combines language and music to express ideas, emotions, experiences, and social messages. Although lyrics are

created as part of musical compositions, they also function as linguistic texts because they contain carefully selected words, expressions, and stylistic features that convey meaning. According to Abrams and Harpham (2015), lyrics are poetic expressions through which writers communicate thoughts and feelings in an artistic form.

