

# Language and Morality: A Case Study on Vulgar Contents in Song Lyrics Prohibited by KPID West Java

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**Abstract.** The article reveals how language maintains moral values. It specifically discusses the prohibition of several English songs by the Indonesian Regional Broadcasting Commission West Java Chapter (KPID JABAR) due to their vulgar contents. The discussion covers the disposition of language and morality, which were viewed from the perspective of morality. The article aims to (1) reveal various vulgar contents conveyed explicitly and implicitly in a number of English songs which were prohibited by KPID JABAR (2) discuss the relationship between vulgarism and language morality in the context of Indonesian culture, as an attempt to provide an explanation on why KPID JABAR prohibited those songs at the particular broadcasting hours. It deployed a Descriptive Qualitative method, as the study highlighted the language phenomenon in society. The data consisted of all lingual forms of those English songs, including vocabularies, phrases, clauses, sentences, and discourses that contained vulgarism. Meanwhile, the data source included 17 English songs banned by KPID JABAR. It combined listening, transcription, and reading as the series of data collection technique. The data analysis featured a Content Analysis, in which the researchers stood as the key instruments, as they are native speakers of Indonesian Language and fully understand the norms of Indonesian cultural morality. The findings essentially proved the existence of vulgar contents promoted by those songs, either explicitly or implicitly. It implied that KPID JABAR's policy to prohibit those songs had reflected a standard measure of the Indonesian morality that should uphold the politeness principles in conveying ideas through language.

**Keywords:** *language, morality, obscene vocabulary, song lyric, Indonesian Regional Broadcasting Commission West Java Chapter (KPID JABAR)*

## INTRODUCTION

Language and morality feature a firm relation within social communication, as language will directly affect

moral behavior and consideration. The difference in Linguistics feature also triggers the difference in cross-cultural morality [1]. Language itself strongly relates to its speakers' communal culture.

Meanwhile, culture represents social behavior and appears as a collective convention. The convention eventually reflects morality based on the speakers' cultural values. Some previous research also examined the relationship between language and morality through several points of view [2]–[6].

The current article highlights the language phenomenon that relates to the discussion of morality. It focuses on the English Language dissemination in Indonesia through songs as part of the artistic works. The problem potentially appears since those songs contain vulgarism. Through the phenomenon, the authors believe that there is a relationship between language and morality as the principle reason that makes KPID JABAR decide to limit the broadcasting hours for those songs.

There were 17 English songs seemed containing vulgar and obscene expressions despite their aesthetic audio features. Due to the issue, KPID JABAR urged the broadcasting agencies, including radios and television channels in West Java to limit the broadcasting of those songs, as their contents violated the Article 20 of Indonesian Broadcasting Commission Regulation No. 02/P/KPI/03/2012 on the Standard of Broadcasting Programs (SPS).

Some previous studies showed how music could mentally affect its listeners. It was revealed that prosocial songs (relatively neutral) could improve prosocial accessibility, grow interpersonal empathy, and educate people to be caring and helpful [7]. Music can also affect human consciousness and environments [8], due to its image that involves different association networks. The creative process of music composition will even lead to various perceptions among listeners [9] — for instance, specific song lyrics impact on students during treadmill activity. The ANOVA test revealed that lyrical songs offered a significant impact on the students, while the instrumental songs did not. The lyrical features of the songs could reduce the burden of activities and emotionally manipulate the duration become shorter. The

song lyrics also significantly affected the improvement of athletes' psychological state and physical performance [10]. Obviously, music affects human's behavior, as it delivers a strong impulse to the brain, emotion, and spiritual aspect [11]. Music has been considered as an effective instrument for mass communication, while lyrics as the feature of the songs play a dominant role in conveying the core message. Ransom explored the relation between lyrics and positive psychology and found out that mind relief could be improved by listening to positive song lyrics. The study discovered a significant relationship between song lyrics and positive psychology [12].

The previous findings eventually lead to a notion that there is also a significant relationship between vulgar English song lyrics and Indonesian morality. The most dominant reason mainly relies on the psychological and behavioral impacts of those songs. Indonesia adheres polite cultural norms and tends to use indirect expressions within the communication process. There are various strategies of implicit language expressions in conveying the speakers' ideas. As

Indonesians generally prioritize the language politeness principles, the use of vulgarism is considered violating their moral and cultural values. The article attempts to reveal various vulgar contents in English songs prohibited by KPID JABAR and describes the forms of vulgarism that opposes Indonesian morality.

#### METHOD

The article used a descriptive qualitative method to examine the concrete social language phenomenon. The data included all lingual forms such as vocabularies, phrases, clauses, sentences, and discourse that promoted vulgarism through the English songs. Meanwhile, the data source consisted of 17 English songs prohibited by KPID JABAR. The songs were as follow.

| NO. | SONG TITLE                      | SINGER                          |
|-----|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1.  | <i>Dusk Till Dawn</i>           | Zayn Malik                      |
| 2.  | <i>Sangria Wine</i>             | Camila Cabello feat. Pharrell W |
| 3.  | <i>Mr. Brightside</i>           | The Killers                     |
| 4.  | <i>Let Me</i>                   | Zayn Malik                      |
| 5.  | <i>Love Me Harder</i>           | Ariana Grande                   |
| 6.  | <i>Plot Twist</i>               | Marc E. Bassy                   |
| 7.  | <i>Shape of You</i>             | Ed Sheeran                      |
| 8.  | <i>Overdose</i>                 | Chris Brown feat. Agnez Mo      |
| 9.  | <i>Makes Me Wonder</i>          | Maroon 5                        |
| 10. | <i>That's What I Like</i>       | Bruno Mars                      |
| 11. | <i>Fuck it I Don't Want You</i> | Eamon                           |
| 12. | <i>Back</i>                     | Camila Cabello feat. Machine    |
| 13. | <i>Bad Things</i>               | Bruno Mars                      |
| 14. | <i>Versace On The Floor</i>     | \$\$rising                      |
| 15. | <i>Midsummer Madness</i>        | DJ Khaled ft. Rihanna           |
| 16. | <i>Wild Thoughts</i>            | Yellow Claw                     |
| 17. | <i>Till It Hurts</i>            | Rita Ora                        |
|     | <i>Your Song</i>                |                                 |

The intensity of vulgarism was categorized based on its partial and total dominance in the appearance of the respective lingual unit. The findings confirmed that the songs commonly did not show complete vulgarism from the beginning to the end. The forms of vulgarism were considered based on the lingual units as a referential

vulgarism, including words (roots, affixed words, and compound words), phrases, clauses, and sentences. The data classification deployed taxonomy as an attempt to reduce the primary data based on their natural categories by organizing the knowledge into different and logical categories. Through the taxonomy, the data were reduced based on the songs' lingual units [19]. However, it ignored the complete data display due to the probability of pragmatic content interpretation. The data were displayed in a descriptive qualitative format through narration.

The data collection technique involved a series of activities, including listening, transcription, and reading. It featured a Content Analysis to objectively explore the lingual forms of the vulgar contents promoted by those songs and subjectively interpret the meaning. The subjective analysis included meaning inference and interpretation. The researchers served the key instruments of analysis, as they are Indonesian native speakers that totally understand Indonesian language and cultural morality. In this case, the researchers played a dominant role in the cultural interpretation to refuse the contents of the songs due to the morality factors.

The content analysis included the data categorization based on the lingual units (words, phrases, clauses, and sentence structures) as well as coding based on the level of vulgarism (explicitly and implicitly).

#### RESULT

Vulgarism is a common linguistic expression that represents a number of linguistic functions [13]. It is generally understood as dirty words, swearing swears, or a curse. However, those expressions also function to reach different purposes due to their interpersonal feature flexibility based on the context (Andersson and Trudgill in [13]). Several studies examined the pragmatic functions related to the notion. Pinker (2007) classified the use of swearing into five categories: ride (offending or psychologically disturbing), catharsis (responding sickness), dysphemistic (proposing negative sentimental), empathy (attracting attention), and idiomatic (marking informality with no specific purpose) [13]. Overall, the functions and effects of vulgarism will depend on the context, social factors (interpersonal relationships and background), and comprehension.

The findings revealed the existing vulgarism of those song lyrics at various levels. Most of the song lyrics were obscene and violating Indonesian standard norms. Specifically, the data characteristics of those song lyrics consisted of three levels of vulgarism, including (1) dominantly vulgar, (2) partially vulgar, and (3) covertly vulgar. There were 12 songs with a dominant vulgarism, four songs with a partial vulgarism, and two songs with covert vulgarism.

Meanwhile, the vulgar contents of the songs prohibited by KPID JABAR were categorized based on the lingual units, including words (roots, affixed words,

and compound words), phrases, clauses, and sentences. The independent units were rarely found due to the tendency of clauses and sentences. The vulgarism forms commonly refer to the human body related to sexual activities, including *ass, lips, body, sleep, kiss, breath, make love, dirty dancing, fuck, nails scratching, and hips*.

With regards to the findings, the context excluded the data in the forms of words, as the vulgarism was mostly found in clauses, sentences, and verses. The following data were quoted from those songs that indicate sexual activities: 1) *Let's make love tonight* (Zayn Malik – Dusk till Dawn); 2) *Make it up, fall in love* (Zayn Malik – Dusk till Dawn); 3) *'Cause I wanna touch you baby, I wanna feel you, too* (Zayn Malik – Dusk till Dawn); 4) *Go, give love to your body. It's only you that can stop it* (Zayn Malik – Dusk till Dawn); 5) *Move it, I move it* (Camila Cabello ft. Pharrell W – Sangria Wine); 6) *Move my body like it is a pipe* (Camila Cabello ft. Pharrell W – Sangria Wine); 7) *It started out with a kiss* (The Killers – Mr. Brightside); 8) *He takes off her dress now* (The Killers – Mr. Brightside); 9) *Sweet baby, our sex has meaning our sex has meaning* (Zayn Malik – Let Me); 10) *More than just one night together exclusively* (Zayn Malik – Let Me), and 11) *Dirty dancing on top of the table* (Zayn Malik – Let Me).

The above samples represent most of the song lyrics. Meanwhile, the description of explicit and implicit sexual activities commonly appeared in the forms of synonymous lingual forms. The following data represent the explicit vulgarism: 1) *Let's make love, tonight* (Zayn Malik – Dusk till Dawn); 2) *It started out with a kiss* (Zayn Malik – Dusk till Dawn); 3) *He takes off her dress now* (The Killers – Mr. Brightside), and 4) *Sweet baby, our sex has meaning* (Zayn Malik – Let Me).

In contrast, the following data indicate the existing implicit vulgarism: 1) *Make it up, fall in love* (Zayn Malik – Dusk till Dawn); 2) *'Cause I wanna touch you baby, I wanna feel you, too* (Zayn Malik – Dusk till Dawn); 3) *Go, give love to your body It's only you that can stop it* (Zayn Malik – Dusk till Dawn); 4) *Move it, I move it* (Camila Cabello ft. Pharrell W – Sangria Wine); 5) *Move my body like it is a pipe* (Camila Cabello ft. Pharrell W – Sangria Wine); 6) *More than just one night together exclusively* (Zayn Malik – Let Me), and 7) *Dirty dancing on top of the table* (Zayn Malik – Let Me).

The following sample represents a full-verse vulgarism found in *Bad Things* song carried out by Camila Cabello and Machine:

....  
*And we're both wild  
And the night's young  
And you're my drug  
Breathe you in 'til my face numb  
Drop it down to that bass drum*

*Nails scratchin' my back tatt  
Eyes closed while you scream out  
And you keep me in with those hips  
While my teeth sink in those lips  
While your body's giving me life*

*And you suffocate in my kiss*

....

The full version of the song briefly contains vulgarism that violates Article 10 of Broadcasting Law on the Standard of Broadcasting Programs. Verse 1 of the law prohibits the broadcasting programs containing songs and/or clip videos with sexual contents, obscenity, and/or promotion of sexual activities. Meanwhile, verse 2 prohibits the musical broadcasting programs that promote women as the sexual object through the scenes and/or lyrics. In fact, most of the English songs persuade intercourse or free sex.

The current study of language morality highlights the relationship between language and mindset. Edward Sapir and Benjamin Worf through their *Linguistics Relativity Hypothesis* believed that language affected human thinking pattern depending on the use of the language features for communication. Sapir and Worf stated that two different languages could not be considered having similar social reality. The impact of language on the thinking pattern could happen through habituation and language formal aspects, including grammar and lexicons [14]. Based on the ideas, the researchers supported KPID JABAR's decision in limiting the broadcasting hours of those English songs due to their vulgarism that violates Indonesian standard norms.

#### CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, those 17 English songs proved to contain vulgarism, causing the improper context for the broadcast in Indonesia despite its easy-listening musical features. The vulgar contents even briefly appear in most of the song verses and directly breach Indonesian politeness norms due to its explicit and implicit messages that violate Indonesian Broadcasting law. In this context, KPID JABAR functions as the main controlling agency in responding the phenomenon of vulgar language, as an attempt to comply with toward the Broadcasting Law and save the youth from negative cultural exposure such as free sex promotion. The social media existence that dominantly affects the development of the broadcasting sector should be continuously monitored by KPI to filter the negative contents that will potentially violate the Broadcasting Law.

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