



# The Analysis of Taboo Language as a Form of Racial Discrimination on Blackkklansman Film by Spike Lee

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## Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis dan makna bahasa tabu yang dianggap sebagai diskriminasi rasial pada film yang berjudul *BlackKkKlansman*. Penelitian ini menggunakan analisis tekstual untuk menganalisis subjek sebagai sebuah teks sehingga dapat dipahami dan didapatkan maknanya. Sumber data dari penelitian ini adalah film yang berjudul *BlackKkKlansman*. Batistella menyatakan bahwa terdapat empat jenis bahasa tabu yaitu; julukan, kata-kata kotor, vulgar dan kecabulan. Untuk mendapatkan makna dari bahasa tabu tersebut, data dianalisis dengan menggunakan denotasi dan konotasi dari Barthes. Denotasi digunakan untuk mendapatkan makna harfiah dan konotasi untuk makna sekunder. Penelitian ini menemukan 4 jenis bahasa tabu dengan total 52 data. Data tersebut terdiri dari 20 data julukan, 11 data kata-kata kotor, 10 data vulgar, dan 11 data kecabulan. Kesimpulannya, makna dari bahasa tabu tersebut adalah bentuk diskriminasi rasial terhadap kelompok ras tertentu.

**Kata Kunci:** Bahasa Tabu, Diskriminasi Rasial, Denotasi dan Konotasi, Film

## Abstract

This study aimed at identifying the types and meaning of taboo languages which were considered as racial discrimination on the film entitled *BlackKkKlansman*. This study used textual analysis to analyze the subject as a text where it could be understood and got the meaning. The source of data of this study was film entitled *BlackKkKlansman*. Batistella stated that there were four types of taboo language namely; epithet, profanity, vulgarity and obscenity. To get the meaning the taboo language the data was analyzed using denotation and connotation by Barthes. Denotation used to get the literal meaning and connotation for secondary meaning. This study found 4 types of the taboo language with 52 total data. The data were consisted of 20 epithet data, 11 profanity data, 10 vulgarity data and 11 obscenity data. In conclusion, the meaning of the taboo language was a form of racial discrimination towards certain group of race.

**Keywords:** Taboo Language, Racial Discrimination, Denotation And Connotation, Film

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The function of language is to communicate human's intention, feeling, telling information, and giving opinion. Unfortunately in certain context language was not like what it should be. In this case the language could be the weapon in order to harm others. The offensive, swear, intimidating words and also hate speech commonly used to harm the victim. Hate speech is done towards the victim based on their sexual orientation, gender, religion, disability, ethnicity, and also race (Jay, 2009). It is phenomenon of linguistics which is contributes to the infringement of particular culture and social norms (Pluszczyk, 2015). This phenomenon was related with the issues of human's language behavior called as taboo language.

Literally the word taboo was the prohibition to touch and speak about something with context sacred things. The avoidance or can be said as prohibition for the society behavior because it could harm them or other (Gao, 2013). It does not mean the taboo language cannot be delivered but the matters is human do not talk about it (Wardaugh, 2006) Furthermore, the taboo language is only able to deliver in some certain object or in the particular context with

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certain group of people (Gao, 2013). Taboo language comes from one's problem where it causes harm, injury, and discomfort (Allan & Burrige, 2006). The phenomenon of using language in order to discriminate certain race refers to the racial discrimination.

Racial discrimination closely related with deeds which was committed by the superior group towards inferior group. The superior groups were commonly not doing anything good instead they committed to harm the inferior group by doing some negative action. Furthermore there are four types of racial discrimination; isolated racial discrimination, small-group racial discrimination, institutional direct racial discrimination, institutional indirect racial discrimination (Liliweri, 2005).

There are high numbers racial and ethnic groups in the United States such as Blacks, Asians, Hispanics, American Indians, and others, have historically faced severe discrimination pervasive and open denial of civilization, social, political, educational, and economic opportunities (Blank, Rebecca M, Dabady Marilyn, and Citro, 2004). According to Widjaja, (2016) racial discrimination is started from the colonialism of black race people in terms of slavery. The black race people are treated unwell and it is resulting to the casualties. Related to this issue in 2001, has been held a "World Conference Against Racism" in Durban, South Africa from 31<sup>st</sup> of August to 7<sup>th</sup> of September, 2001. The Conference concerns on several aspects such as (1) reviewing progress made in the fight against racism, intolerance, xenophobia; (2) increasing the level of awareness about racism; and (3) recommending ways to increase U.N. Effectiveness through programs that combat racism and related intolerance (Blanchfield, 2008). After the conference was being held the power of racism in America was not over yet and still happening.

Although the positive effect of self-regulated learning, the teaching model is also important in the development of students speaking performance. With the development of technology, flipped learning is one of the English teaching reforms which is a technology teaching method that changes the role of the class and home instruction (Bergman & Sams, 2012). In the conventional method, students receive the material in class and practice exercise at home, but in flipped learning, those acts are flipped. Amiryousefi, (2019) states that, through flipped learning, the students receive the knowledge anywhere they want by watching the video, slides prepared, and the other material provided by the teacher. It enables the students to learn the concept of the material before the class activity. It also allows class activity more productive where the students have more time to practice inside the class, ask more questions, and engage more deeply with content.

The messages of society regarding to the issues of racial discrimination not only could be conveyed through mainstream or mass media such as newspaper, television, radio, and social media. It is also can be conveyed through film. Film becomes a medium comes from phenomena which happen in the society it is also the creator of mass culture (McQuail, 1987). Film was not merely about a motion picture or medium of entertainment for the community, but often films also became our means to learn and understand the things that have happened many years ago which was raised through film media such as history and biography. The occurrence of reality develops in the society will always recorded by film. This study used a film which was published on 2018 entitled "BlacKkKlansman".

BlacKkKlansman was a comedy-crime theme movie. Based on the certain scenes in this movie there are various overview of how African-American faces racist people especially white extremist Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Related on the pre-research data on this film there were some taboo languages that considered as taboo language for example coons, nigga/niggers, toad, and monkey. Thus, this film was suitable to be learnt because it was containing taboo language where this study was concerned on the same topic. This film was representing the issues of racial discrimination in the United States especially in the Colorado Springs, Colorado through BlaKkKlansman film.

## 2. METHOD

Qualitative study was used in this study. This study was commonly related to reality or it can be said as a phenomenon in the society. It was the social constructivist in which emphasized the nature of reality. The focus of this study approach was associated with analyzing and recording which was used in order to reveal or seeking the deeper meaning and significances of human behavior and experience. Furthermore, it was also related to the emotion of people in the society, beliefs, and behaviors. In descriptive qualitative study was focused on this study. This study was aimed to reveal the types and meaning of taboo languages which were considered as racial discrimination on *BlacKkKlansman* film. Since this study used descriptive qualitative study, all the data were being analyzed and mostly described in form of language description rather than numeric data.

The film entitled *BlacKkKlansman* was the primary data that was used in this study. This film is directed by Spike Lee an American director which had been working as director since 1983. *BlacKkKlansman* is produced by Legendary Entertainment in 2018. Overall this movie was telling the situation of African-American who faced racial discrimination in Colorado by the white supremacist KKK (Ku Klux Klan). Since this study was trying to analyze taboo language as the form of racial discrimination which was portrayed in the movie, *BlacKkKlansman* was chosen as primary data of this study.

The instrument of data collection of this study were divided into several parts namely researcher, table, filed notes and also software application GOM player. In term of data collection the researcher had important part. It was because along of the processes in collecting the data it was made and thought by the researcher. In other name the researcher was the main instrument of this study. Beside those parts of instruments this study also used table in order to help in classifying the data to form of sequence of the movie.

The method of data analysis in this study was textual analysis. According to Mckee (2003) textual analysis is a way for the researcher to be able to make sense of the world in order to gather information or in the other name is data-gathering process, furthermore it is used to understand the culture of subculture. Textual analysis is about an interpretation in which made of text (Mckee, 2003). The textual analysis is one of the method analysis which focuses in examining whether the meaning of the text or the content and also the discourse or structure. Due to this study which concerns on taboo language use of racial discrimination in *BlacKkKlansman* film.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

The data that were found and discussed on this sub chapter were from the classification of taboo language by Batistella into 4 types namely epithet, profanity, vulgarity and obscenity. Furthermore, the meaning of the taboo language was discussed using denotation and connotation concept of mythology by Barthes. Moreover, this section showed the data that found and it followed by the discussion directly.

**Table 1.** The Taboo Language of Epithet Type Occurred on *BlacKkKlansman* Film

No.	Epithet	Duration	Sequence	Description
1	Inferior race	00:02:26-00:02:27	2b	A White old man was looking to the clip video of girls went to school.
2	Martin Luther Coons	00:02:50-00:02:52	2b	A slide picture of

No.	Epithet	Duration	Sequence	Description
3	Negroes	00:03:04-00:03:05	2b	Martin Luther King. A slide picture of written language.
4	Lying, dirty monkeys	00:03:07-00:03:08	2b	A slide picture of black men gathering.
5	Toad	00:07:35-00:07:43	7b	An old police officer asked for a record.
6	Black radical	00:12:07-00:12:09	12b	A police officer gave briefing information.
7	Panther nigger	00:23:39-00:23:42	12j	A police officer was arresting some black people.
8	Niggers selling soap, Niggers selling toothpaste, Niggers selling automobiles	00:40:07-00:40:10	17a	Walter Breachway was talking with Flip.
9	A black lawn jockey	00:54:16-00:54:18	20c	Connie was yelling while looking outside the window.
10	Backwards race of chimpanzees	01:21:30-01:21:33	36a	Felix was talking with Connie before getting sleep.



Figure 1. Taboo Language of Epithet Type in Sequence 2b

### ***Inferior Race***

According to the movie at the second sequence there was an old man talking in front of the clip video. The clip video was about some black girls got out from a car and went to school. The old man was talking about that situation in the video where the superior race was share the same school with the inferior race. The statement of the old man in the video was “compelling the white children to go to school with inferior race”. Literally inferior race refers to people that have a lower power in the society than the dominant race.

Inferior race was connected with people whose power in the society was lower than the superior group of race. The situation in the film at the sequence 2 where an old man was standing and looking at a clip video giving statement “compelling white children to go to school with an inferior race”. From this statement there was another meaning behind it. The

meaning was the old man was mad that the white children should share the same school with inferior race. The inferior race refers to the Afro-American people. From the Jim Crow era there was a segregation of colored people or Afro-American to go to school with white people. Even though the era of Jim Crow was ended the white people still refused to go to school with inferior race or they still share the same school but avoid them in the society because the superior group thought that their group was not appropriate to socially connected with inferior race.



**Figure 2.** Taboo Language of Epithet Type in Sequence 2b

### ***Martin Luther Coons***

Based on the sequence of the film it was depicting the picture of Martin Luther King sat on first row with his alleys. The picture portrayed that He was attending a meeting. Moreover, while the picture has been shown an old man in the film conveyed that the situation in the United State of America was great until the “Martin Luther Coon” with his commies started a civil right assault. The result of this statement could be understood that the word “coon” referred to Marin Luther King’s name which parodically changed. In its origin the word coon identified originally as stereotype of lazy, slovenly, the one who singing and dancing. This term was used in order to stereotyping black person.

The word “coon” on Martin Luther Coon which said by an old man in the film brought hidden meaning. It represents the prejudice of black people that their characteristics were very lazy, slovenly, and they were who would like to dance and singing. This characteristics was considered bad by some of white racist people, they did not like to see black people with that kind of characteristics the white racist people felt disgusted. The word coons used by white racist people became the imagery to represent the black people by just using a single word. In the other hand, the word coon derived from the Caucasian. In the era of Jim Crow the white people will dressed to resemble the black people. So, the white people will colored their skin in order to make them look like black people. This kind of act also called as the practice “Black Face”. The practice black face had been done in film production in Jim Crow era. The most famous “Coon” in American film production played by Steppin Fetchit. In the film the character of black people were brought inside the characterization of coon which played by white person, they will raised the character of black people that stereotypically as lazy, stupid, disgusted, brutal, and the other negativity of black people.

**Table 2.** The Taboo Language of Profanity Type Occurred on BlacKkKlansman Film

No.	Profanity	Duration	Sequence	Description
1	Jewish controlled puppet	00:02:17-00:02:19	2b	A white old man was talking in front of a clip video.
2	Holy white protestant	00:02:57-00:03:00	2b	A white old man

No.	Profanity values	Duration	Sequence	Description
				was talking in front of a clip video.
3	Blood-sucking Jews	00:03:32-00:03:34	2b	A white old man was talking in front of a clip video.
4	God, watch this! God!	00:03:41-00:03:42	2b	A white old man was talking in front of a clip video.
5	Jewish conspiracy	00:03:56-00:03:58	2b	A white old man was talking in front of a clip video.
6	May God bless us all	00:03:59-00:04:01	2b	A white old man was talking in front of a clip video.
7	Jew killed Christ	00:42:42-00:42:44	17b	Felix tried to offend Flip
8	I hear you Jews do something funny with your dicks. Some weird Jew shit.	00:53:37-00:53:41	20b	Felix was oppressing Flip.
9	Thank God almighty	01:21:43-01:21:45	36a	Felix was talking with Connie before getting sleep.
10	Jesus.H.Christ	01:47:15-01:47:17	43g	David Duke was surprised because of Ron Stallworth



Figure 3. Taboo Language of Profanity Type in Sequence 2b

### ***Jewish Controlled Puppet***

A white old man was standing in front of the clip video and stated that brown decision in supreme U.S court was forced upon them by Jewish controlled puppet. Brown decision was a landmark decision, in which the racial segregation in the public school was unconstitutional. After that, the white old man mentioned Jewish controlled puppet. Jewish was related or associated to Jews or Judaism. Moreover, Jew was associated to religion or ethnic group which originated from Israelites. After that, puppet was an object that resembled human, animal or mythical thing that was controlled, played or animated by human which known as puppeteer. Thus, the white old man referred to the Jewish who played a puppet in the U.S Supreme Court.

The meaning of Jewish controlled puppet was considered taboo because it was contained by race term. The white old man was referred that the U.S Supreme Court was

controlled by Jewish. It could be understood by the word puppet. Puppet was an object commonly resembled human, animal or mythical things in which controlled or animated by puppeteer. The puppeteer that the white man in the *BlacKkKlansman* film referred was Jewish. The white old man was blaming the Brown Decision because the laws stated that the racial segregation in the public school was unconstitutional and it made them (white people) shared the same school with inferior race or the other race besides white and they believed that the Brown Decision of U.S Supreme Court was controlled by Jewish. The white racist people such as the white old man in the *Blackkkklansman* film was showed their political ideology of anti-Semitism.



**Figure 4.** Taboo Language of Profanity Type in Sequence 2b

### ***Holy White Protestant Values***

The white old man was standing in front of a clip video while stating Martin Luther “Coon” was started a civil right assault against the holy white protestant values. The clip video showed the picture of Martin Luther King sat in front row within the other of his commies. Holy was associated to the goodness and righteous. White was a color pigmentation which has the relation with holy, goodness and also righteous. The white old man also mentioned protestant values in the *Blackkkklansman* film which related to the religion of Christian Protestant.

The definition of holy was related and associated to the deed of righteous. Next, white was associated to the color pigmentation which can be understood as goodness, holy, and also righteous. White also denoted a certain race which had a white skin. Protestant values referred to the belief of Christian Protestant religion. The holy white protestant values can be understood as a belief where the protestant values were holy and could not be sued or opposed. The white old man in *BlacKkKlansman* film was mad because Martin Luther King started his civil right assault against the segregation and racial issues in America. He believed that Martin Luther King was a threat within the white Protestant people.

**Table 3.** The Taboo Language of Vulgarity Type Occurred on *BlacKkKlansman* Film

No.	Vulgarity	Duration	Sequence	Description
1	Virgin pure flesh of white women.	00:03:23-00:03:24	2b	A slide picture of movie when a girl was fallen off from hill.
2	I heard you think you're hot shit but you ain't nothing but a cold fart.	00:09:47-00:09:52	9a	A police officer asked for a record.
3	Black asses and black elbows	00:23:35-00:23:37	12j	A police officer was arresting some black people.

No.	Vulgarity	Duration	Sequence	Description
4	I don't give two shit what your nigger name is!	00:23:48-00:23:50	12j	A police officer was arresting some black people.
5	Fucking jig	00:38:37-00:38:38	16b	Felix was driving a car.
6	I hear you Jews do something funny with your dicks. Some weird Jew shit.	00:53:37-00:53:41	20b	Felix was oppressing Flip.
7	Loudmouth Black Student Union bitch	01:06:22-01:06:29	26a	Felix was giving information to Flip, Ivanhoe and Walter.
8	Eat a white dick	01:28:13-01:28:15	40a	A police officer was provoking Ron Stallworth
9	Living shit	01:32:18-01:32:18	43b	Ivanhoe was talking to Felix.
10	Black ass	01:57:38- 01:01:57:40	48a	A police was talking recklessly.



Figure 5. Taboo Language of Vulgarity Type in Sequence 2b

### ***Virgin Pure Flesh of White Women***

An old white man was standing in front of clip video of a girl fell off from a hill. The white man looked at the camera and said “Virgin pure flesh of white women”. Virgin was a term commonly used for women or female however man could be owned this term. Virgin defined as a condition of human where they never had or inexperienced sexual intercourse. Furthermore, pure flesh was related to the part of human body. It could be defined as soft tissue of a body, especially muscle and fat. Flesh also understood as the soft substance which consisted of fat and muscle discovered between bones and skin of a human and animal. White women connected with certain race of people where they had white color pigmentation of their skin.

The sequence 2b has shown that old white man exclaimed “Virgin pure flash of white women”. Virgin defined as a condition of human or animal that they were never had sexual intercourse. However, it also could be understood that virgin was a condition of human or animal that not yet touched or being exploited. This point of view gave another meaning of virgin that it was belief as holy condition, not yet touched, and innocent. Furthermore, pure flesh was associated with virgin and with the addition with white women the context of the



statement was clear. The old white man defined the white women as a holy person, someone that should be protected. They did not want that the white women were being sexually harmed by the black or African-American men. Thus, this showed the hatred of the old white man toward African-American with the prejudice that they craved white women.



**Figure 6.** Taboo Language of Vulgarity Type in Sequence 9a

### ***I Heard You Think You're Hot Shit but You Ain't Nothing but a Cold Fart***

Ron Stallworth was assigned on file record room and he was involved in argumentation with an officer who asked a file of prisoner. In the end of the argumentation the officer said “I heard you think you’re hot shit but you ain’t nothing but a cold fart” with mocking tone. The word hot referred to something high degree or high temperature while shit defined as a waste product of the digestive tract of human or animal released through the anus or cloaca. Based on the definition, hot shit defined as high temperature waste product of human or animal which was released through the anus. Furthermore “cold fart” exclaimed by the officer to Ron Stallworth. Cold was the opposite of hot it defined as low temperature while fart defined as an emission of gas from anus.

The officer exclaimed “I heard you think you’re hot shit but you ain’t nothing but a cold fart” in the end of argumentation with Ron Stallworth and immediately left the file record room. Hot shit was a phrase that defined as someone or something that was very good, it could be defined also as someone who thought they were the best. Furthermore, cold fart denoted a meaning of a boring or a contemptible person. Thus, “I heard you think you’re hot shit but you ain’t nothing but a cold fart” statement that uttered by the officer was used as a pejorative sentence. The police officer consciously intended to demean Ron Stallworth because he was black. Ron Stallworth thought that he was cool however the officer thought he was a useless and boring person and a waste of time to talk with.

**Table 4.** The Taboo Language of Obscenity Type Occurred on BlacKkKlansman Film

No.	Obscenity	Duration	Sequence	Description
1	Rapists	00:03:13-00:03:14	2b	A slide picture of a movie.
2	Virgin pure flesh of white women	00:03:23-00:03:24	2b	A slide picture of movie when a girl was fallen off from hill.
3	Black asses and black elbows	00:23:35-00:23:37	12j	A police officer was arresting some black people.
4	I don't give two shit what your nigger name is!	00:23:48-00:23:50	12j	A police officer was arresting some black people.
5	Black bitch	00:23:53-00:23:55	12j	A police officer was

No.	Obscenity	Duration	Sequence	Description
6	Fucking jig	00:38:37-00:38:38	16b	arresting some black people. Felix was driving a car
7	Kill that son of a bitch	00:54:28-00:54:30	20d	The organization member was yelling while Ron Stallworth drove his car away.
8	Eat white dick	01:28:13-01:28:15	40a	A police officer was provoking Ron Stallworth
9	Living shit	01:32:18-01:32:18	43b	Ivanhoe was talking to Felix.
10	Black ass	01:57:38-01:01:57:40	48a	A police was talking recklessly.

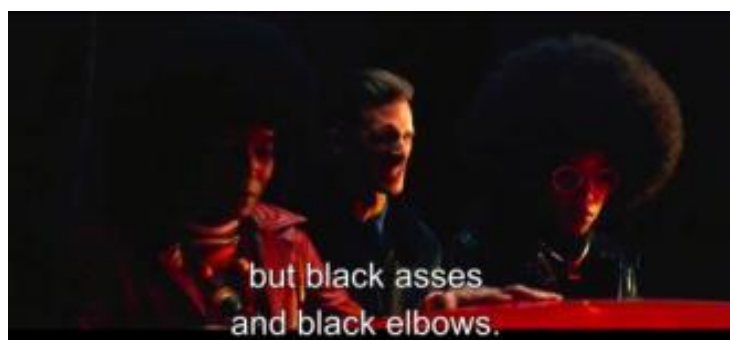


Figure 7. Taboo Language of Obscenity Type in Sequence 2b

### **Rapists**

Rapist was a word that stated by white old man in the BlackKkKlansman film. He was stood up in front of a one of the scenes in the film. The film depicted a woman who being chased by black guy. At the same time with the scene on the film the white old man stated a word “rapist”. Rapist referred to person who consciously committed to force someone in order to have sexual intercourse with them. It was related to the word rape which defined as violated legal regulation of sexual intercourse done by person or group of people, with or without force sexual penetration of vagina, anus or mouth of another person without the consent of the victim.

The white old man in the BlackKkKlansman film was clearly referred the word “rapist” to the black people. He was framing the character of black people especially African-American which supported by some piece of scenes in the film. The character that emphasized by the white old man was African-American as a group of people whose cruel characteristics. The cruelty of African-American conceived through word rapist. Based on the definition of rapist, it could be defined as a person or group of people who committed to have sexual intercourse without any consent of the victim. From this view, the white old man was became the representative of the white racist people who prejudiced even labeled African-American as rapists with the reason that they were craving the white women.



**Figure 8.** Taboo Language of Obscenity Type in Sequence 12j

### ***Black Asses and Black Elbows***

Two girls from Black Student Union Organization students were arrested by police officer. A police officer exclaimed “I don’t wanna see nothing but black asses and black elbows spread them!” A dark color of pigmentation, there were no absorption of light and it was the opposite of white was known as black. Elbow was known as one among parts of human body it was between forearm and upper arm while asses considered as below-belt part of human body, another part of human body same as bottom. It also defined as someone buttocks or anus.

“I don’t wanna see nothing but black asses and black elbows spread them!” was stated by the police officer while they were arresting two girls of students from Black Students Union Organization. This statement could be considered as racial discrimination because when it was happened one of the police officer shouted “black elbows” and “black asses”. From the definition the word “black” related to the color pigmentation, dark color and the opposite of white, in addition it also represented certain group people or race. The people that considered black were African and also Australian especially Aboriginal ancestry. Thus, black elbows and black asses were widely understood to the term that referred to African-American people. The police officer was underestimate also demeaned the African-American race by saying that statement.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

This study conducted to identify the types of taboo languages which were considered as racial discrimination and to identify the meaning of the taboo language that considered as racial discrimination through denotation and connotation as mythology concept of semiology by Roland Barthes. There were four types of taboo languages. The first was epithet, the second was profanity, the third was vulgarity, and the last one was obscenity. Based on the study the total data of taboo languages that had been gathered were 52 data. Epithet consisted of 20 data, after that profanity consisted of 11 data, furthermore vulgarity consisted of 10 data, and the last type which was obscenity consisted of 11 data. From the 52 data of taboo language which came from 20 taboo language of epithet, 11 taboo language of profanity, 10 taboo language of vulgarity and 11 taboo language of obscenity had been analyzed through denotation and connotation. The meanings of each taboo language based on its types were varied according to the taboo language itself. In the denotation it discovered the data that related to the taboo language while in the connotation, the meaning of taboo languages data were representing the taboo language that considered as racial discrimination.

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