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Negative associations in address terms: Integrating the Living Qur'an into linguistic culture in the digital era

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Abstract

Language reflects a society's culture, including the way people address one another. However, many forms of address contain negative associations, rooted in stereotypes, social bias, and cultural heritage. This study aims to explore how Living Qur'an—as a concept of interpreting and practicing the Qur'an in daily life—can be integrated into language culture to reduce negative associations in forms of address, particularly in the digital era. Using a qualitative approach, the research analyzes various nicknames with negative connotations and proposes strategies for incorporating Qur'anic values to foster more constructive communication. The findings reveal that digitalization and communication technologies play significant roles in shaping and disseminating language patterns, both positively and negatively. Leveraging technology grounded in Qur'anic values—such as through social media education, Islamic language applications, and awareness campaigns—can be an effective strategy to eliminate harmful language practices. Integrating Qur'anic values into the digital ecosystem is essential for cultivating healthier communication norms.

Keywords: Negative associations; *Living Qur'an*; linguistic culture; address terms; digital era

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as both a bridge and a battlefield of meaning in the midst of the complexities of human interaction. A single word can function as a compliment but also as a wound. This study arises from a deep curiosity toward a unique phenomenon in linguistic culture—namely, the use of animal names as forms of address. The research aims to explore the negative associations embedded in such expressions within Indonesian cultural contexts. The authors intend to examine how these animal-based nicknames are used, the impacts they have on individuals, and why such negative connotations persist so strongly.

In the contemporary digital era, language and culture are undergoing significant transformation. Globalization and the rise of digital technologies have altered how people communicate and interact, including in religious practices. The *Qur'an*, as the sacred scripture of Islam, maintains a central role in the lives of Muslims and should ideally influence ethical and respectful communication.

In social life, linguistic choices and cultural norms significantly affect interpersonal relationships. However, in certain contexts, language is used—intentionally or otherwise—as a tool of social degradation. The phenomenon of verbal bullying through animal-based nicknames is increasingly prevalent, particularly in educational and public settings, with potential for severe psychological impacts on victims (Rahmawati & Sudirman, 2021).

This issue is not limited to children or adolescents. Verbal bullying also occurs within professional environments. For example, a parent's emotional response to name-calling during a basketball game illustrates how language can provoke serious social tension. In medical education settings, the persistence of verbal abuse involving animal labels reflects an entrenched institutional culture (Nugroho & Rachmawati, 2022). These incidents show that bullying transcends age and social status and is embedded in broader societal communication patterns.

The case of Dea Lestari, who experienced sustained bullying for five years—being referred to with derogatory animal terms—and later rose to become a school principal, illustrates the long-term psychological effects of verbal abuse. Despite this, her success story demonstrates the power of resilience, social support, and education to overcome trauma. It also serves as an inspirational model for other victims of verbal bullying and highlights the need for institutional efforts to prevent and respond to such cases.

These cases underscore the critical importance of linguistic awareness in daily communication. Seemingly trivial animal-based nicknames can have profound psychological consequences. Therefore, ethical language use must be taught from an early age as a foundational element of character education (Hasanah, 2018).

The concept of *Living Qur'an*—understood as the internalization and application of *Qur'anic* values in everyday life—offers a framework for addressing this linguistic issue. Yet, its integration into digital-era language culture is not without challenges. One such challenge is the emergence of "negative associations": harmful or counterproductive relationships between *Qur'anic* principles and everyday language practices, especially on digital platforms. These include hate speech, verbal aggression, and misinformation—all of which contradict *Qur'anic* ethics (Hamka, 1982).

An examination of negative associations in animal-based address terms such as *anjing* (dog) and *babi* (pig) reveals their frequent use as demeaning or insulting language. Several dimensions of this problem include:

1. **Negative connotations:** Words such as *anjing*, *babi*, *tikus* (rat), and *monyet* (monkey), though zoologically neutral, often function as insults, conveying hatred, disappointment, or hostility. Even when used jokingly, such terms contribute to psychological distress for recipients (Utami, 2022).
2. **Verbal violence:** These forms of address constitute verbal violence when used to humiliate or curse others, and are frequently experienced by victims in both public and private settings.
3. **Bullying and ridicule:** Animal-based nicknames are often tools of bullying and name-calling, especially when associated with physical characteristics. This includes *body shaming*, such as using the term *babi* for overweight individuals or *cacing* (worm) for those who are thin (Putri & Akbar, 2023).

4. **Cultural and religious sensitivity:** In various Islamic communities—such as among the Sundanese—certain animals like dogs and pigs are considered *najis* (ritually impure). Using such terms as insults carries severe cultural and emotional weight (Hidayatullah, 2020).
5. **Semantic shifts:** In some informal communities, such terms may have shifted meaning to express familiarity. However, not all individuals accept this reinterpretation, and such use remains potentially offensive.
6. **Personal discomfort:** Individuals may feel dehumanized or disrespected by being addressed with animal labels, which may be perceived as impolite or humiliating depending on the context.
7. **Contextual interpretation:** Even neutral animal names can become offensive depending on tone, audience, and situational use.

These findings indicate that animal-based address terms, while common in informal communication, are deeply embedded with sociocultural meaning and psychological impact. Understanding the broader context—historical, cultural, and religious—is vital in interpreting and responding to these linguistic phenomena. The *Qur'an* itself prohibits verbal abuse and name-calling, as articulated in *Surah al-Hujurāt* [49:11], and encourages believers to speak kindly in *Surah al-Isrā'* [17:53].

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The findings of this study indicate that the use of animal names as forms of address frequently carries negative associations that can psychologically harm individuals and shape an unhealthy communication culture. In Islam, the use of respectful language and the avoidance of insults are clearly mandated in the *Qur'an*.

Negative Connotations in Animal-Based Nicknames

Language reflects the culture and social values within a society. The use of animal names in everyday conversation often holds derogatory connotations and functions as a form of verbal abuse. In many cultural contexts, the word *anjing* (dog) is not only a literal reference to an animal but also expresses anger or contempt. Likewise, the term *babi* (pig)—an animal regarded as *najis* in Islamic teachings—when used as an insult, has a deeper psychological impact on Muslim individuals. These stigmatized labels are often reinforced by media and social trends, which shape public perception of such words (Suryadi, 2019).

The normalization of these expressions in communication encourages a more aggressive language culture, diminishing the quality of healthy interpersonal relationships. Such verbal patterns may also lead to social discrimination against individuals frequently targeted by animal-based insults. Over time, this can result in the internalization of verbal abuse and a permissive environment for hate speech. As Rahmawati and Sudirman (2021) emphasize, greater linguistic awareness is essential to minimize the use of negatively charged words and improve the quality of everyday interaction.

Verbal Abuse and Social Consequences

Verbal violence represents a form of aggression that significantly affects a person's psychological well-being. One prevalent manifestation is the use of animal-based nicknames intended to humiliate. Studies show that verbal abuse can cause

victims to experience reduced self-confidence, anxiety, and prolonged social stress—especially among children and adolescents who are still developing emotionally and psychologically (Rahmawati & Sudirman, 2021).

In educational settings, such language practices often trigger bullying behaviors, creating an unwelcoming learning environment that hinders students' social development. The continuous exposure to verbal insults may lead individuals to internalize these negative labels, increasing the risk of mental health disorders such as depression and social withdrawal. As Nugroho and Rachmawati (2022) explain, educational institutions, families, and media play critical roles in intervening and educating the public to foster more positive communication norms.

Bullying and Name-Calling in the Digital Era

The digital age has fundamentally altered communication patterns, enabling users to speak anonymously on social media and other platforms. This anonymity often leads individuals to express themselves more freely, including using harsh or offensive language. The use of animal names for derogatory purposes—such as *babi* to insult body size or *cacing* (worm) to belittle physical weakness—is widespread in online interactions. Such insults can rapidly go viral, contributing to a toxic digital environment dominated by hate speech and *cyberbullying* (Putri & Akbar, 2023).

These practices have serious consequences for victims' mental health. Research shows that frequent targets of online verbal abuse are more likely to suffer from high levels of anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem. According to Nugroho and Rachmawati (2022), *name-calling* online not only damages individual well-being but also contributes to a wider culture of hostility on digital platforms. Increasing digital literacy and promoting ethical language use in online spaces is essential for fostering more respectful communication.

Religious and Cultural Perspectives

In some religious and cultural contexts, certain animal terms carry heightened sensitivities. For example, in Islamic teachings, pigs are considered *najis* (impure), and using the term *babi* to insult someone is viewed as particularly offensive. Similarly, in predominantly Muslim Sundanese communities, dogs are seen as unclean animals. Therefore, calling someone *anjing* may result in severe social and emotional consequences (Hidayatullah, 2020).

This underscores the importance of cultural and religious sensitivity in language use. Misinterpretations or misuse of terms can trigger broader social conflict, especially in the fast-paced digital age where information spreads rapidly and often without filters. Zulfikar and Anwar (2020) argue that ethical communication rooted in Islamic teachings plays a crucial role in maintaining social harmony.

Semantic Shift and Social Context

Language is a dynamic system that continuously evolves in meaning. Terms that were once considered harsh or vulgar may, in some communities, become informal expressions of camaraderie. For example, in certain youth groups, *anjing* is sometimes used to express surprise or closeness. However, such semantic shifts are not universally accepted. Many people still perceive these terms as offensive, especially when used outside the originating context (Putri & Akbar, 2023).

This inconsistency underscores the need for caution in language use. Not everyone interprets evolving expressions in the same way, and what is acceptable in one group may be deeply insulting in another. Promoting language awareness and emotional intelligence is key to reducing misunderstandings and avoiding unnecessary conflict in communication.

Qur'anic Perspective on Verbal Ethics

The *Qur'an* strongly emphasizes the importance of ethical communication. In *Surah al-Hujurāt* (49:11), Allah forbids believers from mocking or insulting one another, stating:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخِرُ قَوْمٌ مِّنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَى أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِّنْ نِسَاءٍ عَسَى أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُنَّ وَلَا تُلْمِرُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَتَبَرُّوا بِالْأَنْقَابِ بِسْ إِلَّا مَنْ لَمْ يَتَبَّعْ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

"Yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū, lā yaskhar qawmūn min qawmīn 'asā an yakūnū khayran minhum... walā tanābazū bil-alqāb."

(O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them... and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames...)

According to Hamka's *Tafsir al-Azhar* (1982), this verse teaches that verbal insults degrade human dignity and corrode social harmony. Islam urges its followers to speak respectfully and to avoid language that wounds or humiliates others.

Furthermore, in *Surah al-Isrā'* (17:53), it is commanded:

وَقُلْ لِعَبَادِي يَقُولُوا الَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ ۝ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَانَ لِلنِّسَانِ عَدُوًّا مُّبِينًا

"Wa qul li 'ibādī yaqūlū allatī hiya ahsan..."

(And tell My servants to say that which is best. Indeed, Satan induces [discord] among them...)

Hamka interprets this verse as a reminder that Satan incites division through offensive speech. Therefore, soft and wise communication is not only a social virtue but also a spiritual necessity.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the use of animal-based nicknames within linguistic culture often conveys negative associations that can significantly impact the psychological well-being and social life of individuals. In the digital era, the prevalence of hate speech and *name-calling* has increased, creating an urgent need for strategies to address this phenomenon. The integration of the *Living Qur'an* concept into linguistic practices offers a viable solution for cultivating a more ethical and positive communication culture.

The *Living Qur'an* encourages Muslims to implement *Qur'anic* values in everyday communication, emphasizing respect, compassion, and constructive language. This is firmly supported by *Qur'anic* guidance. For instance, in *Surah al-Hujurāt* (49:11), Allah SWT commands believers:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخِرُ قَوْمٌ مِّنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَى أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ...

"Yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū, lā yaskhar qawmūn min qawmīn 'asā an yakūnū khayran minhum..."

(*O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them...*)
(QS. al-Ḥujurāt: 11)

This verse underscores the prohibition of mockery and offensive nicknames, advocating instead for mutual respect and social harmony. As Hamka (1982) elaborates in *Tafsir al-Azhar*, such verbal misconduct violates the sanctity of human dignity and undermines social cohesion.

Further reinforcement comes from *Surah al-Isrā'* (17:53), where Allah commands:

وَقُلْ لِّبَادِي يَقُولُوا الَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ...

Wa qul li 'ibādī yaqūlū allatī hiya ahsan...

(*And tell My servants to say that which is best...*)

According to Hamka, this verse teaches that Satan sows discord through harsh and divisive speech, and thus, believers must choose words that foster peace and understanding.

Based on the analysis, several strategic measures can be implemented to encourage ethical language use in society:

1. **Islamic-based educational programs:** These can nurture linguistic awareness and communication ethics from an early age, particularly through curriculum development and character education in schools (Hasanah, 2018).
2. **Digital awareness campaigns:** Social media can be leveraged to promote respectful language norms and counteract online verbal violence through engaging and informative content (Sari & Prasetyo, 2021).
3. **Islamic language applications:** These can offer daily reminders and Qur'anic reflections related to speech, encouraging users to adopt more mindful communication habits (Fauzan et al., 2023).
4. **Community-based language awareness programs:** Through seminars, workshops, and participatory forums, communities can be mobilized to set shared norms for positive language use (Rahmat & Widodo, 2022).
5. **Promotion of alternative expressions:** Encouraging the use of respectful and affectionate terms instead of demeaning nicknames can shift public discourse toward more constructive communication (Zulfikar & Anwar, 2020).

Through these integrated approaches, grounded in both religious values and sociocultural awareness, it is possible to build a communication culture that is more respectful, inclusive, and aligned with *Qur'anic* principles. Future research is recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in various sociocultural settings and to explore their long-term impact on community resilience and interpersonal harmony.

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