



(MUDIMA)



Patterns of Verbal Violence in School Environments: An Ethnographic Study of Communication in Annur Junior High School in Tanjung Morawa

Zakaria Siregar^{1*}, Shanna Aulia Windri²

Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara

Corresponding Author: Zakaria Siregar zakaria@fisip.uisu.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Verbal Violence, Communication Ethnography, SPEAKING Model, Bullying, School Communication Patterns

Received : 1 April
Revised : 26 May
Accepted : 26 June

©2026 Sirregar, Windri: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



ABSTRACT

This study is motivated by the prevalence of verbal violence in schools, which has become habitual in students' daily social interactions. survey data indicates that 87.6% of bullying victims identified verbal violence as the most frequent yet least reported form. This study aims to examine how patterns of verbal violence are formed and sustained at Annur Junior High School Tanjung Morawa using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model. A qualitative method with a communication ethnography approach was employed, collecting data through observation, in-depth interviews with five informants (three students and two teachers), and documentation. Findings reveal that verbal violence most commonly occurs in classrooms, the canteen, schoolyard, and hallways, particularly during recess. Perpetrators and victims typically belong to the same peer group, blurring the boundary between joking and verbal violence. Dominant forms include profanity, physical mockery, sarcasm, and family-targeted insults, occurring both face-to-face and through digital media. This study concludes that verbal violence at Annur Junior High School is not merely individual behavior but has developed into a systemic social communication pattern shaped by peer culture, family background, and social media exposure

INTRODUCTION

Verbal violence in schools remains a serious problem in Indonesia. Data survey showed that approximately 72.8% of respondents had experienced bullying in various forms, and of these, 87.6% reported that verbal abuse was the most common form. Furthermore, reports from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology and the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) revealed that cases of bullying in schools continue to increase, with verbal bullying being a frequent but rarely reported form (Hidayat et al., 2023; Hinduja & Patchin, 2018).

This fact indicates that verbal violence has become a widespread social phenomenon and requires greater attention, particularly in educational settings (Wirmando et al., 2021).

Within Annur Junior High School in Tanjung Morawa, unhealthy forms of communication between students were also found. Based on data obtained by researchers in the pre-study, they found that verbal violence involved the use of harsh language, such as teasing, demeaning names, or harsh language. This use of language demonstrates a pattern of verbal violence in the school environment that is repeated and has become a part of daily interactions between students. This phenomenon is very interesting for researchers to study because it shows the existence of a unique communication pattern in the Annur Tanjung Morawa Middle School environment.

METHODS

This research employed a qualitative method with a communication ethnography approach. This method was chosen because it is appropriate for uncovering communication patterns occurring in the school environment, particularly related to verbal violence practices (Arikunto, 2010).

Through communication ethnography, researchers can understand how verbal violence is formed, occurs, and is maintained within the context of student communication culture at Annur Junior High School, Tanjung Morawa. The analysis was conducted using Dell Hymes' speaking model as a framework.

The research subjects were specifically second-grade junior high school students. Due to the limited number of informants, this study used total sampling. The number of research subjects was determined

based on the principle of data saturation, which means the data obtained is considered representative of the phenomenon being studied. The informants required for this study are:

- Primary informant: 1 class representative teacher
- Key informants: 3 students
- Additional informants: 1 guidance counselor

The data collection techniques in this study were conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data analysis techniques used in this study were three components: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Moleong, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of research conducted at Annur Junior High School, Tanjung Morawa, through in-depth interviews with five informants: three students and two teachers, it was found that verbal violence is a fairly frequent phenomenon in the school environment and has become part of students' daily communication patterns. Verbal violence manifests not only in the form of direct insults, but also in the form of physical taunts, teasing, insults to social status, and insults targeting the victim's family.

This phenomenon demonstrates that verbal violence is not merely an individual communication behavior but has formed a social habit influenced by the students' social culture at school. From the perspective of Dell Hymes's ethnography of communication, a communication event can be understood as a social activity shaped by the situation, the communicators, the goals, and the prevailing cultural norms within a community. Therefore, the verbal violence that occurred at Annur Junior High School, Tanjung Morawa, can be understood as a communication event that has a specific pattern and structure, and occurs within a social context that supports its sustainability.

1. Setting and Scene (S)

In terms of Setting and Scene, interview results indicate that verbal abuse most frequently occurs in specific locations within the school environment, such as classrooms, the cafeteria, the school field, the hallways, and around the restrooms. These spaces are frequently used by students to gather and interact, especially during breaks, after-school hours, and

during sports activities. These settings provide students with a more open communication environment because teacher supervision is less stringent.

Student informants reported that verbal abuse most often occurs when the school atmosphere is lively and relaxed, and not during teaching and learning activities. For example, when the teacher leaves the classroom, when students gather in the cafeteria, or when playing on the field. In these situations, students tend to use offensive language more freely because they feel they are in an informal social space.

This suggests that verbal abuse tends to emerge in informal communication contexts, where formal school norms are not always fully enforced (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2014). In these situations, jokes between peers often escalate into excessive teasing. This situation further demonstrates that verbal abuse often develops from ordinary interactions that are initially perceived as minor, but then have the potential to escalate into conflict.

2. Participants (P)

Regarding participants, the study found that perpetrators and victims of verbal abuse generally come from peer groups, particularly classmates and the same friendship group. Student informants reported that verbal abuse often occurs between close friends who feel they already have a close relationship. Because of this closeness, perpetrators feel free to tease or use harsh words without considering the impact on the victim.

Homeroom teachers and guidance counselors also confirmed that verbal abuse often occurs in close social relationships. This closeness actually exacerbates the situation because perpetrators perceive such actions as normal and harmless.

However, victims do not always share this perception. In some cases, victims feel offended, depressed, and even embarrassed because the teasing is done in front of other friends (Younan, 2019).

In addition to perpetrators and victims, the study also found that other parties, namely friends, act as witnesses. Most witnesses simply watch, laugh, or even support the perpetrators by adding insult to injury. This attitude creates a situation where verbal abuse is seen as group entertainment. As a result, perpetrators feel social support and become more emboldened to repeat the behavior.

In the context of communication ethnography, this shows that verbal violence does not only involve two people (the perpetrator and the victim), but involves a wider communication community, namely the student friendship group that helps shape and maintain this behavior.

3. Ends (E)

In the Ends aspect, it was found that students' intentions for verbal abuse were mostly perceived as joking, a form of entertainment, or an attempt to gain attention. Student informants stated that teasing was often done to appear funny or to demonstrate dominance within a group. This illustrates that verbal abuse is used as a communication tool to establish social standing, particularly to gain recognition from peers.

However, guidance counselors and homeroom teachers explained that verbal abuse also often arises as a form of emotional reaction. When students feel offended, angry, or have personal conflicts, harsh words become a spontaneous outlet. In other cases, verbal abuse is perpetrated due to rivalry, jealousy, or long-standing conflicts.

Although the perpetrator's initial intention is often perceived as merely joking, the impact on the victim is quite serious. Victims can feel embarrassed, feel inferior, lose self-confidence, and even choose to withdraw from social circles. These impacts also impact learning activities, as victims become less focused and uncomfortable in the school environment. This demonstrates that verbal abuse has negative effects that are not only social but also psychological.

In this case, the Ends element demonstrates an imbalance between the perpetrator's goals and the victim's outcomes. The perpetrator may have considered it a joke, but the victim may have felt profound emotional distress.

4. Act Sequence (A)

In the Act Sequence aspect, research found that verbal abuse typically occurs through a gradual sequence of communication actions. Verbal abuse often begins with light teasing or joking, then progresses to more violent insults. If the victim responds negatively, such as anger or retaliation, the conflict escalates into an open fight.

This sequence indicates that verbal abuse does not always manifest as direct aggression from the outset, but rather develops slowly due to a lack of

social control from the surrounding environment. Student informants also stated that when the teasing reaches a physical or family context, the initially relaxed atmosphere can become serious, even leading to arguments and potential fights.

The guidance counselor also stated that certain students frequently repeat this behavior, allowing verbal abuse to occur repeatedly and become a persistent communication pattern. This indicates that verbal abuse is not a one-time event, but rather a repetitive pattern that forms negative communication habits at school.

5. Key (K)

In the Key aspect, it was found that verbal abuse is often delivered in a joking, laughing, or non-serious tone. This demonstrates that verbal abuse is often disguised as humor, allowing the perpetrator to feel that their actions are not wrong.

However, in some cases, verbal abuse is delivered in a high-pitched tone and with strong emotions, particularly when the conflict escalates or when the victim displays a disapproving reaction (Wiyani, 2012).

Student informants stated that the atmosphere usually changes when the victim begins to feel offended, cry, or become angry. At that point, the tone of communication shifts from joking to serious and tense. This demonstrates that tone and communication style are important factors in distinguishing between casual joking and verbal abuse.

Thus, the Key component indicates that verbal abuse at Annur Middle School does not always manifest as overtly aggressive communication, but is often disguised as humor that masks its negative impact.

6. Instrumentalities (I)

In the Instrumentalities aspect, it was found that verbal violence is generally perpetrated through direct verbal communication, such as when students interact in class, the cafeteria, or on the field. However, in some cases, verbal violence can also occur through digital media, such as group chats or social media. This indicates that advances in communication technology have expanded the scope for verbal violence.

Verbal violence through digital media tends to be more difficult to control because it can occur at any time and is not always visible to teachers. Furthermore, digital verbal violence can spread more

widely and leave a trail that can socially shame victims. This situation exacerbates the impact of verbal violence because victims face pressure not only in the school environment but also in digital communication spaces.

7. Norms (N)

In the Norms aspect, the study found that student communication norms at Annur Middle School tend to view abusive language as normal. Student informants stated that they are so accustomed to hearing insults and taunts almost every day that they no longer perceive it as a form of bullying. These unwritten norms create a communication culture that allows verbal violence to flourish without any awareness that such behavior is wrong.

Furthermore, peers who laugh or join in the teasing reinforce the norm that verbal abuse is commonplace. The infrequent reprimands or reports of incidents by students further reinforce the perception of verbal abuse as a normal part of school life.

The guidance counselor stated that these norms of abusive communication are influenced by the students' family backgrounds. Many students face family issues such as lack of parental attention, separation, or a lack of communication etiquette education at home. This causes students to carry their communication patterns from home into school. If schools do not consistently provide guidance, these negative communication norms will continue to develop and become part of the school culture.

8. Genre (G)

In terms of genre, the verbal violence at Annur Middle School was dominated by insults, physical taunts, teasing, insults about social status, and insults targeting the victim's family. This form of communication frequently occurs in students' daily interactions, both directly and indirectly.

The guidance counselor emphasized that repeated verbal violence can create a culture of abusive communication, where students become accustomed to considering insults as part of social interaction. This indicates that the genre of verbal violence in schools is no longer simply spontaneous but has become a recurring and recognized form of communication within the student community.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research and discussion on Patterns of Verbal Violence in the School Environment: An Ethnographic Study of Communication at Annur Junior High School, Tanjung Morawa, it can be concluded that verbal violence is a fairly frequent communication phenomenon and has become part of students' social interactions within the school environment. This verbal violence manifests itself in the form of insults, physical teasing, sarcasm, insults about social status, and even insults targeting the victim's family. This phenomenon demonstrates that verbal violence is not only an individual act but has formed a recurring social communication pattern within the student community.

Using an ethnographic communication approach using the Dell Hymes Speaking model, this study found that verbal violence occurs in various communication contexts influenced by the situation, social relationships, communication goals, and cultural norms of student communication within the school environment.

In terms of Setting and Scene, verbal violence most frequently occurs in specific locations such as the classroom, cafeteria, school field, school hallways, and around restrooms. Verbal violence often occurs in informal situations such as recess, after-school hours, and sports activities, especially when students gather without direct teacher supervision. The communication atmosphere is often initially perceived as joking, but can escalate into serious conflict when one party feels offended.

In the Participants aspect, perpetrators and victims of verbal abuse are generally peers with close social relationships, such as classmates or a group of friends. This closeness allows perpetrators to feel free to tease and use harsh words, as it is considered normal. Furthermore, the presence of other students as witnesses who often laugh at or support the taunts further reinforces the occurrence of verbal abuse in the school environment.

In the Ends aspect, the purpose of verbal abuse, according to students, is mostly to joke, seek attention, and demonstrate dominance within the group.

However, based on the views of homeroom teachers and guidance counselors, verbal abuse also occurs as an emotional reaction to minor conflicts, competition, or personal issues. The impact is quite

serious, as victims can experience shame, low self-esteem, loss of self-confidence, social withdrawal, and even decreased motivation to learn.

In the Act Sequence aspect, verbal abuse typically occurs gradually, starting with light teasing, then progressing to more violent insults or insults. If the victim retaliates, the conflict can escalate into an argument and even potentially physical violence. This demonstrates that verbal abuse is an evolving communication process, not simply a spontaneous event.

In the Key aspect, verbal abuse is often delivered jokingly and with laughter, but can become serious and emotional when the victim is offended or insulted. This change in tone indicates that the joke has turned into hurtful verbal abuse.

In the Instrumentalities aspect, verbal abuse occurs not only directly through verbal communication but also through digital media such as WhatsApp or social media. The use of digital media makes verbal abuse more easily spread, more difficult to control, and can have a greater impact because messages can be read repeatedly and shared with many people.

In the Norms aspect, it was found that verbal abuse has become commonplace among most students. These permissive communication norms have led students to no longer perceive harsh words as a form of bullying. These habits are reinforced by the social environment and family factors, such as a lack of communication ethics education at home.

In terms of genre, the dominant forms of verbal violence include swearing, physical teasing, teasing, insults, and humiliating the victim in front of peers. Repeated verbal violence can create a negative communication culture that is considered normal in students' social lives.

Therefore, this study concludes that verbal violence at Annur Junior High School, Tanjung Morawa, is a communication pattern influenced by students' social culture, group norms, family environment, and the development of digital communication. Therefore, verbal violence cannot be viewed as merely an individual problem, but rather as a social phenomenon that requires comprehensive intervention.

REFERENCES

- Arikunto, S. (2010). *Prosedur Penelitian Suatu Pendekatan Praktik*. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta.
- Hidayat, F. P., Hardiyanto, S., Lubis, F. H., & Adhani, A. (2023). Kemampuan Literasi Media Sebagai Upaya Mengantisipasi Cybercrime Pada Remaja Di Kota Medan. *Jurnal Interaksi: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 7(1), 13–25. <https://doi.org/10.30596/ji.v7i1.12904>
- Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. (2018). Cyberbullying : Identification, Prevention, & Response. *Research Center, October*, 1–9.
- Moleong, L. J. (2014). *Metodologi Penelitian Kuantitatif*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Wirmando, Anita Fransiska, Hurat, V. S., & Korompis, V. V. N. (2021). Dampak Penggunaan Media Sosial Terhadap Perilaku Bullying Pada Remaja. *Nursing Care and Health Technology Journal*, 1(3), 118–121. <http://ojs.nchat.id/index.php/nchat/article/view/19>
- Wiyani, N. A. (2012). *Save Our Children From School Bullying*. AR-RUZZ MEDIA.
- Younan, B. (2019). A systematic review of bullying definitions: how definition and format affect study outcome. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*, 11(2), 109–115. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JACPR-02-2018-0347>
- Zalaquett, C. P., & Chatters, S. J. (2014). Cyberbullying in College. *SAGE Open*, 4(1), 215824401452672. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014526721>