

Patterns of Swear Words in Denpasar: Anthropological Linguistic Study

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Abstract. The study of swear words has emerged as a compelling topic due to their intrinsic connection to language, society, and culture. Denpasar possesses certain banned swear words that vary based on the circumstances, including the location, timing, rationale, speaker, and recipient of the utterance. Moreover, the majority of expletives in this city diverge somewhat from the overall Balinese taboo lexicon. This study examined the patterns of swear words utilized by the youth in Denpasar. The data were gathered by structured interview methodologies augmented by the elicitation approach. The findings indicate that the utilization of profanity by adolescents or youthful groups manifests in specific circumstances, including environment, participants, and purposes. Furthermore, from the standpoint of the three primary focal points in anthropological linguistics, it was discovered that, within Balinese culture, particularly among the younger generation in Denpasar, the phenomenon of profanity arises not solely from the employment of lexicon with taboo connotations, but also due to the emotive value inherent in the expression and the utilization of specific variations by and for particular participants.

Keywords: swear words, concepts, teenagers, Denpasar

1 Introduction

Generally, certain subjects are considered taboo, including sexuality and anatomical regions, among others. In both the United States and other European nations, there exist specific statements pertaining to race and religion that are considered to be taboo subjects. (I. M. Mahayana et al., 2022). For example: “Oh My God”, “Jesus Christ”, “Holy shit” are some expressions related to religion that should not be used carelessly. However, in Indonesia, especially Bali, words such as “*Ya Allah, Mimih Dewa Ratu*,” are not taboo. Sociocultural factors such as gender and cultural norms affect whether the expression is the taboo or not (I. M. A. Mahayana et al., 2022; Schippers, 2013; Wardaugh, 2006).

Denpasar’s popularity as a migration center for people from over Indonesia has rapidly diversified the city into a melting place of diverse cultures, languages, and ethnicities. Recently, the number of people migrating to Denpasar has increased dramatically. According to official statistics, the push and pull factors are the two main causes of migration (full factors) (Anom Kumbara & Kartika Dewi, 2018). Denpasar – the capital city of Bali – as one of the tourism destinations, has the potential for development resources, and providing large employment opportunities is estimated to be the main attraction of migration. Now, Denpasar is the center of government, trade center, education center, tourism center, and industrial center, absolutely inviting people from other cities to seek a job and settle down. These migrants come from

outside the city of Denpasar, Bali, and abroad. With the phenomenon of the arrival of migrants who have diverse backgrounds, the intensity of multi-languages, and the increasingly rapid advancement of technology, the shifts and dynamics of changes in the Balinese language are changing slowly.

Speakers and languages are inherently linked to societal activities, so positioning language as not solely an individualistic phenomenon, but also a social one. Language and its speakers are influenced not only by linguistic elements but also by non-linguistic ones, including social influences. Various social factors can influence language usage, including social status, educational attainment, age, economic status, gender, and other relevant variables. The utilisation of language is influenced by situational conditions, encompassing factors like as the identity of the speaker, the language employed, the intended recipient, the timing and location of the communication, as well as the specific topics being discussed (Kurniawati, 2019).

According to Ullmann (1977), the occurrence of swear words can be attributed to three distinct factors: the presence of anything that evokes dread (referred to as fear taboo), the presence of something that lacks emotional connotations (known as delicacy taboo), and the presence of something that is considered impolite or inappropriate (referred to as property taboo). Expressions are commonly regarded as swearing when they are employed with the intention of inflicting harm and humiliation upon another individual. In the context of Denpasar, the term swearing or cursing can be employed to denote the level of intimacy or familiarity exhibited between individuals engaged in a conversation. Swear words are words that are considered offensive language that are unacceptable and used by speakers in certain contexts. They implement it in ways inconsistent with society's social, cultural, and religious norms. Swearing terms in written or spoken discourse are usually governed by various social, cultural, religious, and psychological characteristics. Many researchers have examined taboos or profanity in previous studies. These researchers usually exclusively look at types and functions in films or novels. In addition, earlier studies have only focused on words/phrases classified as taboo without elaborating more on how these expressions can be classified as taboo and how they are classified as not taboo and vice versa. Thus, this research aims at investigating the patterns of swear words used by teenagers in Denpasar.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Swear Words

Swearing refers to a category of linguistic expressions that are widely regarded as taboo and unacceptable across several languages. Despite this social consensus, a significant number of individuals continue to include profanity in their everyday speech for the purpose of interpersonal communication. According to Ljung (2011), it was stated that:

”swearing is one of the many devices that languages offer speakers as a way to give additional emphasis to their speech and often combined with other emphasizing techniques such as stress, intonation, tone of voice and also gestures and facial expression”

The use of swearing is associated with individuals' intense emotional states. According to Byrne (2017), swearing is a lexical unit employed by individuals in a state of heightened emotional arousal, as well as linguistic expressions that pertain to subjects considered socially

or culturally inappropriate. Nevertheless, a significant portion of individuals opt to abstain from employing profanity in their verbal communication or everyday discourse due to their perception of swear words as taboo expressions that are unsuitable for use in formal contexts. It is widely recognized that swear words are commonly employed as an informal means of engaging in conversations within one's daily life. According to Ljung (2011: 161), swearing can be characterized as an expressive language that incorporates prohibited terms. Its primary purpose is to convey or appear to convey the speaker's emotions and views. While there are individuals who view swear words as vulgar, impolite, and indicative of anger, others employ them not only to convey emotions such as anger but also to express happiness, shock, frustration or to emphasise their statements.

The majority of individuals may hold the belief that the use of swearing represents a standard employment of language; nonetheless, it is important to note that not all offensive terms may be classified as swear words. According to Karjalainen (2002), the utilization of forbidden language or phrases that pertain to taboo subjects is considered as swearing by individuals who lack specialized knowledge in the field. However, it is important to note that while all swear words are classified as taboo, not all words that are considered taboo fall under the category of swear terms. It is crucial to bear in mind that the classification of a word as taboo is contingent upon the context, and swear words are words that include taboo. However, the use of swear words does not invariably constitute an act of swearing.

2.2 Contexts

According to Surana (2017), speech events encompass verbal interactions that encompass various elements beyond language itself. These elements include the speaker, the interlocutor, the subject matter being discussed, and the temporal context in which the speech occurs. Thus, these factors can be summarized as "who speaks, what language, to whom, when, and what end." Moreover, Hymes (as cited in Junaidi & Wardani, 2019) presents a conceptual framework for understanding the factors that influence speech events within similar contextual settings using the acronym SPEAKING. Each phoneme serves as a representation of the intended distinguishing element.

(S) Setting and scene encompass the background and context. The setting encompasses the physical aspects, encompassing both the location and temporal context of the speech. The scene is characterized as a psychological setting, which pertains to the psychological context that underlies the discourse.

(P) Participants refer to individuals who are actively engaged in a conversation, either through direct involvement or indirect contribution. Factors pertaining to participants, including age, educational attainment, social background, and other relevant characteristics.

(E) (E) Ends refer to the consequences or reactions anticipated by the speaker in a conversation (ends as outcomes), as well as the overarching objective of the discourse (ends in view aims).

(A) Act sequence, message or order, which includes the message form and the message text

(K) Key, encompasses the manner, tone, attitude, or context of the dialogue. The context of conversation can vary, encompassing tones such as serious, relaxed, friendly, among others.

(I) Instrumentalities, specifically the methods of communication. It refers to the medium through which the conversation is conveyed. For instance: through verbal communication, written forms, letters, radio, and similar mediums.

(N) Norms, denotes the standards or regulations that constrain dialogue. For instance, the permissible topics and those that remain unaddressed, as well as the manner of discourse: smooth, rough, open, etc.

(G) Genres or types, specifically types or forms of discourse. This specifically pertains to the nature of the discourse presented. Examples include telephone, newspaper, poetry, and lecture (Junaidi & Wardani, 2019)

2.3 Anthropological Linguistic

Foley (1997) proposed this term a branch of linguistics which is concerned with the position of language in a broader social and cultural context and the role of language in integrating and supporting cultural practices and social structures. This concept views language in relation to socio-cultural contexts and language as a process of cultural practice and social structure. Foley explains that this science views language through the prism of the core anthropological concept, namely culture. In this way, this science tries to find the meaning behind the use, misuse and non-use of language and its different forms, registers and styles. For him, anthropological linguistics is an interpretive scientific discipline that examines language in depth to find cultural understanding, search for the meaning of language and also as a method for understanding culture in detail.

The framework used as a reference for this research is the anthropological linguistic framework popularized by Duranti (1997). Duranti explained in detail the things that were the central attention in this study. He further divided the focus of study or the main concern of anthropological linguistic in studying language, culture, and other aspects of human life into three important aspects, namely (i) performance, (ii) indexicality, and (iii) participation. Therefore, this research is focused on finding and analyzing swear words in these three aspects.

3 Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative methodology, incorporating both field studies and literature reviews. Descriptive qualitative research allows researchers to thoroughly articulate the variables under investigation. Qualitative research emphasizes the formulation of the problem rather than the research objectives or hypotheses. This study seeks to gather insights regarding individuals' opinions, responses, or perceptions, necessitating a qualitative approach or the use of descriptive language in the discussion (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the researchers served as data collectors. Following data collection, the researchers analyze the data and draw conclusions.

This study employs an ethnographic approach. Duranti (1997) asserts that a specific set of techniques is essential for the analysis of linguistic and cultural practices. The ethnographic method is deemed adequate for examining the principles and norms surrounding taboos or abuse, as it encompasses not only the semantics of words or phrases but also the dynamics of the communication process, including the participants involved, the context, and the circumstances under which communication takes place.

This study analyzes the usage of swear words among the younger generation in Denpasar. This study examines the expression of taboo language, specifically swear words, in Balinese.

The participants consisted of the indigenous population of Denpasar City, particularly the youth, along with comments from the @infodenpasar Instagram account.

Methods are defined as processes or procedures employed to address a problem. Qualitative research prioritizes data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation. This research employs a non-participant observation strategy. This strategy does not require researchers to participate directly in data collection.

Following the observation phase, the researchers performed interviews. An open interview is the type employed. This study employed the interview method as outlined by Spradley(1979) for the selection of informants. Several criteria are established for selecting informants: 1) a strong understanding of Balinese language and culture; 2) residence in the Denpasar area, which is central to Balinese cultural development; 3) availability of sufficient time; and 4) a non-analytical approach (providing information in its original form). Individuals of productive age were chosen as informants within the age range of 15 to 39 years. In 2021, the productive age population constituted 40% of the total demographic(Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Denpasar, 2022).

In this research, the informants interviewed were 20 people aged 15 to 30. This interview focused on exploring in-depth the informants' understanding of culture, swear words in the form of words, phrases, and expressions in certain contexts. After the interview, then the data transcription process uses a laptop device. Then, the documents used as data sources are manuscripts, books, social media, and journals. In this case, related to Balinese swear words. Then, the data were analyzed in the following stages: selecting data to select truly valid data, describing swear words that were truly valid, classifying the data based on its category, and conducting data analysis to conclude. In conducting data analysis, this study adopted two ethnographic stages initiated by Spradley (1979), namely domain analysis and taxonomic analysis. It is used to classify predefined categories and determine how these expressions become taboo/non-taboo. After that, the research results are presented formally in the form of tables and charts, as well as informally; the results are described in sentences so that they are easier to understand.

4 Result and Discussion

Swear words have diverse contextual uses. In general, the pattern of swear words is related to what words are used, how they are expressed, what the context of the speech is, and who is involved in the communication process. These elements support each other, and each element contributes to and influences the occurrence of violations of existing boundaries so that the expression in question is considered taboo in society's view. It is related to what was mentioned at the beginning, that an expression is considered taboo if communication activities violate the boundaries outlined by the ancestors. These violations can result in "loss of face" or cause danger to the speaker, interlocutor or listener. However, each tribe has its pattern of expression in the process of the emergence of language taboos. In connection with this matter, the following explains the taboo pattern in Denpasar, which includes performance, indexicality, and participation.

The performance encompasses the physical aspects, encompassing both the location and temporal context of the speech. Language acquisition is comprehended through performance in various activities, acts, and communication performances, necessitating the utilisation of creative abilities. Language, being a linguistic component that encompasses cultural knowledge,

cannot be comprehended in isolation from language practises or communicative acts (speaking). In general, the performance of swear words is when the speaker speaks to hurt the other person's feelings, speaks in a way that provokes danger, speaks using a harsh voice, a sharp gaze, or gestures that corner the other person. All of these performance elements are well understood by society that verbal and nonverbal attitudes show a form of dislike and can cause problems or conflicts. These verbal expressions can be avoided so that they do not violate language rules, namely by using subtle forms or euphemisms for each existing word. Likewise, the nonverbal expressions used can be avoided by speaking with normal intonation and tone, looking appropriately, or not using gestures that make other people feel offended, for example:

A. Data I

Eh, nas kleng ibe!

(You dickhead!)

The data above were taken from a conversation by two teenagers in a coffee shop. The word *nas keleng* can be considered as vulgarity. *Nas* comes from the word *tendas* 'head', and *keleng* comes from the word *kelet* 'penis/male genitals' (I. M. A. Mahayana et al., 2020). In this case *nas keleng* is classified as exocentric compound noun referred to "a despicable person". This swear word is taboo or cannot be used carelessly in certain places, because it can cause discomfort to those who hear this utterance.

B. Data II

A: *Klee nok, gagah kali ci!*

(Damn, it's so awesome)

B: *Ahh, biasa aja*

(It's not much)

Participants refer to individuals who are actively engaged in a conversation, either through direct involvement or indirect contribution. Factors pertaining to participants, including age, educational attainment, social background, and other relevant characteristics.

Klee is one the variations of word *keleng* (data I). This utterance is common to be found in Denpasar. This swear word can be used to express certain emotions, such as shocked, anger, dissatisfaction, and happiness. The swear word *klee nok* in data II above is used to express admiration. The conversation above is about a teenager (A) who was amazed of the new motorcycle that belongs to B. The utterance *klee nok* in this case is used to praise other in the conversation. Looking at what happened in the conversation, the participant B does not show his comfort after A uttered the word *klee*. He responded it casually instead. It reflects that swear words used by teenagers in Denpasar can be uttered in certain place and participant involved in the conversation. Let's take a look at the other data.

C. Data III

A: *Klee nok, kalah gen terus!*

(Dammit. I never win!)

B: *Kla kle kla kle*

(Watch your words please)

A: *Ck!*

The next conversation above is about a teenager who happened to play a game (A) and his mother (B) who happened to wait for their order in the coffee shop. In this conversation, B does not look comfortable with her son utterance. It shows that the word *klee nok* cannot be uttered

carelessly, because it can bother the other participants who happen to hear it. Therefore, participant aspect plays an important role in the use of swear word performance.

Indexicality is related to language signs. In this case, the language signs used indicate something related to them, referring to references that have been understood collectively by the community. Therefore, in daily communication, we must also avoid using language signs that are considered to violate the rules. Indexicality in kinship relationship taboos are all language signs (other than strategies permitted in a particular relationship) that refer to impoliteness, refer to attitudes of cultural violation, and show disrespect. Likewise, in other relationships, expressions are considered taboo if the words, phrases, clitics or sayings used refer to things that are not good in society's collective memory or position the interlocutor as an inferior entity. It can be briefly explained by the information below, which shows that it is improper to speak to someone directly in a single word with a slightly sharp voice and tone.

D. Data IV

A: *Cicing ci!*
(You scum!)

B: *Ci bangsat!*
(Fuck you!)

Generally, the word *cicing* refers to the name of a four-legged animal, which, according to certain religious beliefs, is an abhorred animal. It is considered taboo because the speaker and the interlocutor both already have this understanding in their memory. The speaker equates the person he is addressing with the animal, and it causes disharmony in society.

5 Conclusion

Topics related to swear words can be analyzed using various scientific concepts. However, some of them only discuss the meaning of the concept of taboo from the point of view of its lexical meaning, and this clearly needs to provide a complete understanding of the existing rules for swear words because these rules are cultural products and norms. The anthropological linguistic concept investigates swear words not only from the meaning of individual words but also from the deepest part of the rule. This concept is able to look at patterns of swear words in depth through the existing concepts of performance, indexicality and participation. From the perspective of the three things that are the main focus in anthropological linguistic, the meaning of taboo can be expressed better because, as explained, in Balinese culture, especially the younger generation in Denpasar, the phenomenon of swear words can occur not only because of the use of words that have taboo meaning, but because the way of expressing it contains emotive value, and because it uses certain variations by and for certain participants.

Swear words in Denpasar have several meanings and functions, all of which lead to nobility values, which are used as a means to restrain people's communication so that harmony and good relations are maintained well. However, due to the impact of increasingly higher levels of public education, rapid heterogeneity of society in the environment, globalization and other cultures, as well as the influence of inter-ethnic marriages, the people have begun to leave this culture gradually. Hence, the shift in the meaning of swear words is inevitable.

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