



# The Analysis of Swearwords Used in Buleleng

K.Senaputra tanjung, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Singaraja, Indonesia

## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the use of swear words in the Balinese language used by the people in Buleleng Regency, North Bali. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study explores the forms, references, and functions of swear words commonly used in everyday social interactions. According to Anderson & Trudgill (1990), swear words refer to something taboo in certain cultures and are used to express strong emotions or attitudes. Robin (1992) adds that swear words are often used to convey anger or passion. Hughes (1998) classifies swear words based on their types, such as those related to sexuality, filth, and animal names. In Buleleng, words such as *pirata* (ancestor), *naskleng* (male genitalia), *tai* (excrement), *cicing* (dog), and *lengeh* (stupid) are commonly used, even by children, as part of a long-standing cultural heritage. The use of these words is not always negative but can also serve to attract attention, alleviate discomfort, provoke, create interpersonal identity, and function as both integrative and aggressive expressions. These findings suggest that swear words in Buleleng play a significant role in social communication and reflect the dynamics of local culture.

**Keywords:** Balinese language, swear words, Buleleng, linguistic function

**Corresponding:** [senaputra@undiksha.ac.id](mailto:senaputra@undiksha.ac.id)

**APA Citation:** Tanjung, K. S. (2024). The Analysis of Swearwords Used In Buleleng. *Journal of Educational Study*, 4(2), 119-126.

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## 1. Introduction

Language is a reflection of the culture and collective thinking of a society. It not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a means of expressing identity, emotions, social values, and even power hierarchies. One interesting aspect of language that is often overlooked in formal studies is the use of swear words. Although considered taboo, rude, and impolite in many contexts, the existence of swear words in almost all languages shows that they are an inseparable part of human linguistic behavior.

Swear words generally refer to words or phrases used to express anger, frustration, surprise, or other forms of strong emotion. According to Anderson and Trudgill (1990), swear words are a form of linguistic expression that deviates from the norms of politeness and contains strong emotional connotations, often related to things that are culturally considered taboo. Robin (1992) states that swear words are used in intense situations as a means of releasing emotional stress, while Hughes (1998) classifies these words based on taboo objects such as sex, bodily excretions, religion, and animals, which reflect cultural sensitivities in certain societies. In the context of Indonesia, and more specifically North Bali, the use of swear words has a very interesting dynamic. In Buleleng Regency, an area known for its rich culture and diversity of

local languages, swear words are not only used in situations of anger or conflict, but are also present in daily interactions between friends, family, and even in informal communication among the general public. Words such as *naskleng* (male genitals), *pirata* (a rude term for ancestors), *cicing* (dog), and *lenggeh* (stupid) not only have emotional content, but also pragmatic functions, such as strengthening social relationships or creating a humorous effect. This phenomenon shows that the meaning of swear words is very dependent on the social and cultural context in which the word is used. In Buleleng society, the use of swear words can reflect emotional closeness, social hierarchy, and also as a form of resistance to formal norms that are considered too rigid. The use of swear words can be a form of authentic self-expression, although it is often considered to violate politeness in formal language standards. As revealed in a study by Putra et al. (2021), English course students in Buleleng also use swear words in Balinese in informal situations as a way to express their identity and emotions. However, the meaning of swear words is not uniform. In the context of education, religion, and intergenerational communication, the use of these words can trigger controversy and be considered a decline in language morality. Therefore, it is important to view this phenomenon objectively and scientifically, taking into account the cultural background, age of the user, social relations between speakers, and communication situations.

This study aims to explore the forms, meanings, and functions of swear words in the lives of the Buleleng community. Through a qualitative descriptive approach, this study will reveal how swear words are used linguistically and socially by local communities, and how these expressions reflect cultural dynamics and changes in values in contemporary Balinese society. It is hoped that through this study, we can better understand the linguistic functions of swear words and their contribution to cultural diversity and forms of communication in Indonesian society, especially in Buleleng.

## **2. Method**

### **Design**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, which is considered appropriate for exploring linguistic phenomena that are deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts, such as the use of swear words within the Buleleng community. The qualitative method emphasizes the exploration of meaning, intention, and function as understood by the participants themselves, allowing for a rich and in-depth interpretation of language use in its natural setting. The descriptive aspect of the approach aims to provide a systematic, factual, and accurate depiction of how swear words are used in daily communication among members of the Buleleng community. Rather than relying on numerical data, this approach focuses on detailed descriptions, interpretations, and contextual analysis of verbal expressions, considering the background, relationships, and specific situations in which these words are used. The use of this method is based on the understanding that swear words are not merely vulgar or offensive expressions, but rather carry complex social, emotional, and cultural meanings. In many cases, these words function as tools for expressing solidarity, emotional release, humor, social hierarchy, or even resistance. Therefore, a qualitative method is ideal for revealing how these layers of meaning are constructed, negotiated, and understood within the local community. Data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of natural conversations. These techniques enabled the researcher to capture authentic language use in context and to engage with speakers in reflective discussions about their perceptions and intentions when using such language. Participants were selected purposively to ensure a representative range of age groups, genders, occupations, and social backgrounds, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture of swear word usage in Buleleng. Moreover, the researcher acted as a key instrument in this study, immersing

themselves in the field, interacting closely with the participants, and conducting an interpretive analysis of the data. This contextual and interpretive lens is essential in understanding how language reflects and shapes social realities in a specific cultural setting such as Buleleng.

### **Instrument**

In the study entitled "The Analysis of Swear Words in Buleleng", the research instrument was designed to support the descriptive qualitative approach used. In this approach, the main focus is to explore the meaning, function, and social context of the use of swear words in the daily lives of the Buleleng community. Therefore, the instruments used are not only technical, but also consider the social and cultural aspects that underlie the data collected. The main instrument in this study is the researcher himself. In qualitative studies, researchers act as human instruments who are directly involved in the process of collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data. Researchers must be sensitive to the socio-cultural context, have skills in communicating with participants, and be able to reflect on their position and subjectivity so that the research results remain objective and valid. In addition to the researcher as the main instrument, there are also supporting instruments developed to facilitate the data collection process. These instruments consist of observation guidelines, semi-structured interview guidelines, and documentation formats. First, observation guidelines are used to record the use of swear words naturally in various social contexts. Observations were conducted in public places such as traditional markets, coffee shops, youth hangouts, and traditional activities. Aspects observed included the situation of using swear words, social relations between speakers and interlocutors, nonverbal expressions, and reactions from listeners or people around them. Researchers noted whether swear words were used in the context of anger, joking, showing familiarity, or even as a form of satire or social criticism. Second, a semi-structured interview instrument was prepared to dig deeper into participants' understanding of swear words. These interviews were conducted with various community groups, including young people, adults, and local traditional or cultural figures. The questions in the interviews were open-ended, such as: "In what situations do you think swear words are considered normal?" or "Do you think swear words can strengthen social relationships?" Through these interviews, researchers attempted to capture the perceptions, values, and personal experiences of participants that could not be reached through observation alone.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **1. Research Location and Subjects**

The research was conducted in Buleleng Regency, Bali, specifically within both urban and rural communities that exhibit high levels of interpersonal communication. The research subjects consisted of various age groups and social backgrounds, including adolescents, young adults, and older individuals residing in the region. Subjects were selected purposively—namely, individuals who were known or identified as using swear words in daily conversations.

#### **2. Data Collection Techniques**

Data were collected using three primary techniques: Participant Observation: The researcher directly observed verbal interactions in natural settings (e.g., at food stalls, schools, markets, or in household environments) to record the forms and contexts in which swear words were used. In-depth Interviews: Conducted with selected informants to gain further understanding of the meanings, intentions, and perceptions behind their use of swear words. The interviews were semi-structured to maintain flexibility while ensuring focus. Documentation: This included collecting transcripts of conversations, voice recordings (with consent), as well as written or digital content (such as comments on local social media) that contained examples of swear word usage.

### 3. Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The analytical process included the following stages: **Data Reduction:** Filtering data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation to focus only on information relevant to the use of swear words. **Categorization:** Grouping swear words based on their linguistic forms, types (e.g., sexual, animal-related, excretory, etc.), usage context, and social function. **Interpretation:** Interpreting the findings using linguistic and sociolinguistic theories discussed in the literature review.

### 3. Findings

#### Context, Examples, and Illustrations of Swear Word Usage in Buleleng

The use of swear words in the Buleleng community cannot be understood apart from the local social and cultural context. Buleleng, as one of the regencies in North Bali, is known for its people who are direct, expressive, and exhibit an open communication style. In everyday conversations—especially in informal settings such as markets, hangout spots, or family spaces—the use of coarse language is neither unfamiliar nor always considered offensive.

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#### 1. Social and Functional Contexts

Swear words in Buleleng are used for various functions, including:

- **Expression of Intense Emotion:** Used when someone is angry, frustrated, or upset.
- **Building Intimacy:** Among peers or close relatives, swear words can foster a sense of closeness and honesty.
- **Teasing with Humor:** Used as humorous mockery that is not necessarily intended to offend.
- **Signaling Power or Dominance:** In some contexts, swear words are used to assert superiority or emphasize social status.

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#### 2. Common Swear Words in Buleleng

Word	Literal Meaning	General Function	Social Notes
<i>Cicing!</i>	Dog	Expressing anger or mockery	Can be offensive if used outside of close relationships
<i>Naskleng</i>	Male genitalia	Insult or emotional expression	Taboo in formal settings; common among youth
<i>Lengeh</i>	Stupid / Slow	Informal criticism or teasing	Often used jokingly in casual contexts

Word	Literal Meaning	General Function	Social Notes
<i>Pirata</i>	Your ancestor (derogatory)	Highly offensive insult	Generally considered extremely rude
<i>Tai!</i>	Feces	Reaction to disgust or frustration	Common as a spontaneous emotional outburst

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### 3. Real-Life Situations

#### Illustration 1: At a Local Coffee Stall

Two young men are joking around at a coffee stall.

- Youth A: “*Lengeh bener si Made, disuruh beli kopi malah beli teh botol!*”
- Youth B: “*Haha... dasar cicing og! Tapi ya dia lucu gitu, ogah marahinnya.*”

In this context, *lengeh* and *cicing* are not used as serious insults but as expressions of camaraderie between friends. The tone and facial expressions are usually relaxed, often accompanied by laughter.

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#### Illustration 2: In a Conflict

A vendor feels cheated by a customer who ran off with merchandise.

- “*Pirata! Dasar naskleng, ngilang bawa baju dagangan!*”

Here, the words *pirata* and *naskleng* are extremely offensive, used in a context of genuine anger. These words carry strong emotional intensity and express a sense of being wronged.

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#### Illustration 3: At School (Informal)

In a conversation between students:

- Student A: “*Aduh... lupa PR lagi. Tai banget dah nasibku.*”
- Student B: “*Haha, lengeh tenan. Kayak gini terus tiap Senin.*”

Among teenagers, especially students, words like *tai* and *lengeh* are used very flexibly. This shows how swear words have become part of the local slang and youth vernacular.

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### 4. Contextual Differences: Formal vs Informal

It is important to note that although the use of swear words is common in informal settings, the people of Buleleng still uphold norms of politeness in formal situations. The use

of swear words is generally avoided in formal education settings, religious ceremonies, or intergenerational communication (especially toward elders).

#### 4. Discussions

The findings of this study reveal that the use of swear words in Buleleng is a deeply rooted linguistic and sociocultural phenomenon that cannot be simply categorized as negative or inappropriate. Instead, these words play a diverse and functional role in the everyday communication of Buleleng society. The analysis of data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation demonstrates that swear words in the Balinese language are not only emotional expressions but also serve as tools for negotiating social relationships, expressing identity, and reflecting cultural dynamics. One of the most prominent findings is the contextual flexibility of swear words. As illustrated in the data, words such as *cicing*, *naskleng*, *lengh*, *pirata*, and *tai* are used in both serious and humorous situations. The function of these words changes significantly depending on who is speaking, to whom, in what setting, and with what intent. For example, *cicing* may function as a friendly tease among close peers, but in a formal or unfamiliar context, it could be perceived as highly offensive. This reinforces Hughes' (1998) argument that the meaning and acceptability of swear words are socially constructed and context-dependent. In Buleleng, swear words are commonly used in informal interactions, especially among younger generations and within peer groups. This aligns with Putra et al. (2021), who observed similar patterns among English course students in Buleleng. Among youth, swear words often serve to express solidarity, emotional release, and even humor. This reflects a broader linguistic trend where taboo expressions are reappropriated by subcultures or peer groups to create a shared identity and foster closeness. In this regard, the findings also support Jay's (2009) psychological perspective that swearing can serve as a mechanism for stress relief and identity assertion. The multifunctionality of swear words is further evident in their use to express emotional intensity, criticism, authority, or frustration. For instance, during conflict or anger, expressions like *pirata* and *naskleng* carry strong emotional weight and are used to convey deep dissatisfaction or insult. This use aligns with Robin's (1992) idea that swear words act as outlets for emotional outbursts, especially in moments of confrontation or stress. Interestingly, swear words also function as a linguistic tool of humor and affection. In situations involving close friends or relatives, expressions such as *lengh* or *tai* are used jokingly without the intent to offend. The role of intonation, body language, and shared understanding becomes essential in distinguishing between aggression and playfulness. This finding emphasizes that swear words in Buleleng are not merely about their literal meanings but about pragmatic function and interpersonal dynamics. Moreover, the research highlights a clear boundary between formal and informal use. While swear words are prevalent in casual settings, the community generally avoids their use in formal domains such as religious rituals, school classrooms, or when addressing elders. This conscious code-switching indicates that the people of Buleleng are culturally aware of when and where such language is socially acceptable. It supports Andersson and Trudgill's (1990) claim that swearing is governed by implicit social norms and varies across contexts. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, the use of swear words in Buleleng also reflects power dynamics, cultural resistance, and social stratification. In some cases, swear words are used to assert dominance, challenge authority, or resist societal expectations. For instance, the use of *pirata* as a powerful insult challenges traditional respect for ancestors, suggesting a subversive undertone. This aspect connects to the broader function of language as a tool for both maintaining and challenging social order. Importantly, the research also reveals generational

and attitudinal differences. While younger people tend to view swear words as casual or humorous, older generations often consider them impolite or even immoral. This contrast reflects ongoing cultural shifts and the impact of modernization, media influence, and changing norms of expression in Balinese society. As such, the use of swear words in Buleleng provides a lens into larger cultural negotiations between tradition and modernity. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that swear words in Buleleng are not marginal linguistic elements, but integral parts of communication that carry emotional, social, and cultural significance. Their use reflects the speaker's intent, relationship, and cultural context—proving that swearing is not just an act of rudeness, but a complex and meaningful social act. Thus, understanding swear words from a sociolinguistic perspective enables us to appreciate the richness and nuance of language use in real-life social interaction.

## 5. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study reveals that the use of swear words in the Buleleng community is a complex and meaningful linguistic phenomenon. Although generally considered rude or taboo, in certain social contexts—such as among peers, close family members, or during casual conversations—swear words actually function as tools for expressing honesty, intimacy, humor, and intense emotions. Words like *cicing*, *naskleng*, *lengeh*, and *pirata* are not always insulting but can be part of the distinctive, direct, and open communication style of the Buleleng people. Swear words in Buleleng also reflect local cultural values and the dynamics of social relationships. Their meaning is highly contextual—shaped by the relationships between speakers, the communicative situation, and prevailing social norms. However, it is important to note that the use of these words remains unacceptable in formal contexts or intergenerational communication, where politeness norms are more strictly upheld. Thus, the phenomenon of swear words in Buleleng affirms that language is not merely a tool of communication but also a reflection of culture and social identity. Understanding swear words from both scientific and cultural perspectives can enrich our insight into the diversity of language forms and functions in everyday life.

### Suggestion

1. Education on Local Language and Culture  
Teachers, parents, and educators should introduce appropriate language use contexts, including distinguishing between swear words that may appear in casual spaces and those that must be avoided in public or formal settings.
2. Further Studies  
Future research can delve deeper into how swear words evolve within local digital media (such as social media comments), or in song lyrics and traditional performances from Buleleng.
3. Cultural Approach to Language Regulation  
Local governments or traditional institutions should adopt educational rather than repressive approaches in responding to the use of coarse language, taking into account the cultural value and social function of such words.
4. Documentation and Preservation of Oral Language  
Since some swear words reflect unique characteristics of regional languages, it is important to document and study these forms of oral language as part of the cultural heritage of North Bali.

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