CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers several key aspects, including the research background, the identification of the problem, the scope and limitation of the study, the formulation of the research questions, the objectives of the study, and the significances of the research.

1.1 Background of the Study

Communication is an important part of human life that cannot be separated from the existence of language. Language, as the main communication system, becomes the tool that individuals use to convey information, express emotions, and build relationships with others (Apriyanto, 2020; Erlita, 2020; Farihan et al., 2024). One significant aspect of language in communication is its role in expressing emotions, both positive such as happiness and love, as well as negative ones such as anger and frustration (Banga & Suri, 2015). While people often use polite or neutral language in everyday interactions, there are moments when they rely on more intense forms of expression to convey strong feelings. In situations involving anger, frustration, or stress, individuals may use emotionally charged words or phrases, commonly referred to as swear words.

Swearing is a form of linguistic expression that provides an outlet for strong emotions, acting as a verbal release of tension or aggression (Montagu, 1967). According to Nurhayati (2007), swear words are words uttered in reaction to something unwanted or surprising. These words are often considered impolite or vulgar because their use goes against the social norms that govern communication

(Vingerhoets et al., 2013). For example, someone might angrily use swear words toward another person who made a mistake, creating tension and breaking the expected social respect in that situation. Swear words, therefore, often serve as tools to insult or hurt others by expressing strong negative feelings.

Swear words are often associated with things that are considered taboo or culturally sensitive, which makes them an interesting topic for research in various disciplines, such as linguistics, sociology, and psychology (Jay, 2009; Rashid, 2022). Hughes (1991) said that swear words reflect complex and often controversial issues, such as religion, sexuality, death, excretion and national identity. However, it is important to distinguish between swear words and taboo words. Taboo words are words that are considered highly offensive or embarrassing, so their use is often avoided in formal social situations. Taboo words involve the violation of deep cultural norms, such as the use of terms that insult a person's ethnicity, sexual orientation, or social status. On the other hand, swear words are more flexible in their use, often not fully considered taboo but still possessing emotional power (Karjalainen, 2002; Richard & Schmidt, 2013). For example, in informal contexts, words like "stupid" or "idiot" can be used to express frustration without violating deeper norms.

Previous studies have shown that swear words vary across cultures in terms of their references and usage. Az'Zahrah et al. (2019) compared the use of swear words in Indonesian and Korean, highlighting similarities in their references, including circumstances, animals, objects, body parts, spirits, activities, professions, food, individuals, and non-referential terms. Zainal (2021) examined the use of swear words among Malaysian students from two faculties: Islamic

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Studies (FPI) and English Language Studies (ELS). FPI students commonly use "damn" in English and *"bongok"* (which means *"dungu"* in Indonesia, this word worse than stupid) in Malay, while ELS students prefer "shit" and often say *"bodoh"* which means "stupid." The study found that students use these swear words to express frustration and anger. Based on these studies, swear words are emotionally charged expressions often used to convey frustration, anger, or surprise, and their usage reflects cultural, social, and linguistic differences, serving both functional and context-specific purposes across languages.

Swearing has evolved over time and is now recognized as an integral part of modern communication (Abu-Rayyash et al., 2023). While traditionally viewed as impolite, recent studies suggest that swear words can serve various functions, including humor, emphasis, and emotional relief (Khusna et al., 2021; Stapleton, 2020). This shift in perception has led researchers to explore swearing within different cultural contexts, including Japan, which presents a unique linguistic landscape.

In the context of Japan, a nation widely recognized for its politeness, harmony, and respect for social decorum, the use of swear words presents an intriguing phenomenon. Japanese communication culture strongly emphasizes avoiding direct confrontation, maintaining group harmony, and using honorific language (*keigo*). This cultural backdrop creates the assumption that swearing would be rare or non-existent in Japanese society. However, this assumption overlooks the existence of vulgar and offensive expressions in Japanese, which are used in specific contexts and carry nuanced social meanings. (Harran, 2011; Shen et al., 2024).

While open, aggressive swearing is relatively uncommon in public settings, subtle and context-dependent forms of verbal aggression do exist. Words like "*shine*" (die) and "*uzai*" (annoying) are examples of expressions that can function as swear words depending on tone, situation, and relationship between speakers. Although swearing is not openly practiced in Japanese culture, Japanese people seem more open to using swear words in online communities especially in anonymous or digital contexts. For example, in manga dialogues and social media, Japanese speakers sometimes do swear to express anger, tease, or insult others in ways that reflect emotional intensity (Fredy et al., 2023; Sari & Haristiani, 2024)

Despite these phenomena, academic studies focusing on swearing in the Japanese language remain limited. Existing research mostly analyzes the occurrence of swear words in online environments or fictional media, such as anime, manga, or social media, without thoroughly investigating the broader sociolinguistic contexts in which they occur. Moreover, studies often generalize swear words without distinguishing their forms, references, and functions.

Given this gap, this study aims to investigate Japanese swear words by identifying their forms, references, and functions. By employing a descriptive qualitative approach, this research seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of swearing as a sociolinguistic phenomenon and offer a deeper exploration of how language reflects cultural attitudes toward verbal aggression and emotional expression.

1.2 Problem Identification

Although there are studies that identify the use of swear words in various languages and cultures, there is still a gap in understanding the use, form,

reference, and function of swear words in Japanese culture. Therefore, more in-depth research is needed to examine the specific forms, references, and functions of Japanese swear words in social and emotional communication. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing how native Japanese speakers use swear words, considering their linguistic characteristics and sociocultural implications.

1.3 Limitation of the Study

The limitation of this study was to investigate and analyzing the context usage of swear words used by Japanese and also focusing on the types of forms, functions, and references of swear words used by Japanese people.

1.4 Statements of the Problem

Based on the explanation of the background of the study above, the writer formulates the research questions below:

1. What swear words are used by Japanese?

2. What are the forms of the swear words used in Japanese?

3. What are the references of the swear words used by Japanese?

4. What are the functions of swear words used by Japanese?

1.5 Objectives of the Study

Based on the research questions above the objective of this study can elaborated as follow:

1. To identify the swear words used in Japanese

2. To describe the forms of the swear words used in Japanese

3. To describe the references of the swear words used by Japanese

4. To describe the functions of the swear words used by Japanese

1.6 Significances of the Study

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

This research contributes to linguistic studies, particularly in understanding the form, reference and function of swear words in Japanese culture. The results can expand the theory of language use as a means of emotional expression influenced by social and cultural norms, and enrich the literature on cultural linguistics and sociolinguistics.

1.6.2 Practical Significances

a) For English Language Department

This study helps improve cross-cultural understanding by comparing swear words in English and other languages, such as Japanese or the students' native language. This understanding is useful for students, especially in student exchange programs, to communicate more effectively and sensitively with other cultures. In addition, this skill prepares them to deal with sensitive language topics in various professional contexts, such as education and translation.

b) For Japanese Language Learners

The results of this study can be used by Japanese language learners to understand the context in which swear words are used, especially in understanding their meaning and emotional impact.

Thus, learners can better understand how to communicate in accordance with Japanese cultural norms.

c) For Language Educators, Translators, and Professionals

This study can serve as a reference for language educators, translators, or professionals working with Japanese to identify and translate swear words appropriately. This understanding will help in accurately conveying the meaning without ignoring the emotional context attached to the rude words in Japanese culture.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

a. Definition of Swear Words

Swear words, also called curse words, bad language, or expletives, are linguistic expressions that are generally considered rude, offensive, or inappropriate in certain situations. Jay (2009) explains that swearing is often used to express strong emotions such as anger, frustration, or surprise, or to provoke a reaction. Andersson and Trudgill (1990) add that swearing is a way to break social norms, insult others, or intensify speech. Therefore, swear words are not limited to individual words, but also include longer expressions with strong emotional and social effects. In this study the swear words studied are swear words in Japanese.

b. Forms of Swear Words

Forms of swear words refer to the grammatical structure in which swearing expressions appear. In this study, they are categorized into three forms: word, phrase, and clause. A word is the smallest unit of language with meaning that can stand alone (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). A phrase is

a group of words functioning as one unit, without a subject and predicate (Delahunty & Garvey, 2010). A clause includes both a subject and a predicate, making it more complex than a phrase (Manan et al., 2019).

c. References of Swear Words

References in swear words refer to the specific topics or themes that swear words are associated with, often drawn from taboo or socially sensitive areas. According to Hughes (2006), swear words commonly reference themes such as sex, excrement, animals, personal background, mental illness, and sexual activities. Similarly, Wardhaugh (2006) highlights references like mother-in-law, animals, sex, death, excretion, bodily functions, and religious matters.

d. Functions of Swear Words

Functions refer to the roles that swear words play in communication. Swearing serves various purposes, such as expressing emotions, emphasizing a point, signaling group identity, and showing aggression. Wang (2013) identifies four main functions: emotion expression, emphasis, group identity, and aggression. Saptomo in Cahyani & Setiawan (2019) adds that swearing also communicates anger, annoyance, disappointment, regret, wonder, insult, and intimacy. Thus, swear words can express emotions, emphasize, establish group identity, or convey aggression and insult.