CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Language is an effective tool for expressing ideas, emotions, and intentions. Language conveys both personal thoughts and beliefs of the communities that we belong to (Amberg & Vause, 2009). People communicate through language in a variety of ways, ranging from polite greetings to heated arguments. Aside from everyday language, there is a category of words known as swear words, which are used to express strong emotions or attitudes more intensely or directly. As societies evolved, so did language, and swear words followed suit. People frequently use swear words to express their emotions.

A swear word is a term or phrase that the general public finds profane, obscene, vulgar, or otherwise unacceptable (Zelira & Fitrawati, 2022). These words are used when the speakers are angry, happy (Putri Widyanti, 2023), displeased, and surprised (Prihartanti et al., 2012). For the majority of people, swearing has negative connotations and is considered bad language; something ugly, dirty, inappropriate (Setyaningtias et al., 2023), and associated with lower social class and prestige (Ushudur et al., 2023). However, according to Nicolau & Sukamto, (2014), swearing is not always associated with lower socioeconomic status or education level. Cultural

changes, language contact, and historical events all influenced the development of new meanings, connotations, and social significance for swear words over the years.

The use and perception of swear words can vary greatly depending on cultural norms, social context, and personal sensitivities. What is considered a swear word in one culture may not have the same significance or meaning in another. Swear words can include a wide range of references, such as words referring to bodily functions, sexual acts or anatomy, religious figures or concepts, and derogatory terms directed at specific individuals or groups based on race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation (Kristiano & Ardi, 2018).

Although swear words are considered improper and bad, most people however use swear words in specific contexts (Asing et al., 2024). Thus, while swear words may appear to be universal, it is important to realize that their acceptability and impact might differ greatly from country to country. Understanding the use of swear words is particularly important, as it helps to prevent cultural misunderstanding and miscommunication, especially in the field of tourism in Bali, where numerous foreign people visit.

As it is known, countless foreign people with different cultural backgrounds and languages have come to Bali, including Thai tourists. Based on data from Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Bali, in 2023 the total number of Thai tourists that came to Bali was 41,438 people, where Thai tourists are the

fifth highest tourists that visited Bali among ASEAN countries. Since Bali is one of the islands that receives numerous Thai tourists, it is crucial for people who work in the tourism field to know swear words, especially swear words that are used in Thailand in order to avoid misunderstanding and miscommunication. Aligning with that, studying swear words can be helpful for international students in exchange programs in different countries. Hence, studying swear words in different countries especially Thailand is necessary to conduct.

The majority of Thai people speak *Phasa Thai* (ภาษาไทย), which translates to "Thai language" in Thai. Additionally, it is Thailand's official and national language. Language in Thai society reflects cultural norms such as hierarchy and respect, which have an impact on the usage of swear words and other inappropriate language. In Thailand, swear words and offensive language are deeply embedded in social norms and cultural practices, and they play an important role in communication. The use and effect of such language varies greatly depending on context, tone, and the nature of the connection between persons. In casual or private contexts, swear words may be used with varied degrees of humor or passion, indicating familiarity and intimate ties. In contrast, using inappropriate language in official or public settings is often regarded as impolite and insulting, and may result in social punishments. Thus, if swear words are interpreted incorrectly it might lead to major consequences.

Several previous studies have been conducted on swear words, for instance, Tran, (2024) did a comparative study of Vietnamese and English swear words and discovered both English and Vietnamese swear words related to animals, body parts, religion, and physiological functions to communicate anger and insult. However, Vietnamese cursing frequently focuses on family and ancestors, demonstrating respect for familial connections, whereas English swearing places emphasis on personal characteristics and sexual references. Vietnamese swear words are more varied and complex because of their community-based culture, whereas English swear words are simpler and more centered on the individual.

Another study conducted by (Martina & Lubis, 2022) aims to describe the forms of swear words in the Malay language of West Kalimantan. The finding shows that swear words in West Kalimantan's Malay language differ by region, with each location having its own unique style. Common insults such as "*bodo bale*" (extremely dumb) and "*bahlol*" attack intelligence, whereas "*tengal*" (stubborn) and "*bengak*" (ignorant) support stubbornness or a lack of awareness. Animal references like "*bangkai*" (carcass) and "*beruk*" (monkey) are used to mock, and body-part curses like "*kimmak*" (mother's genitals) are extremely insulting. Religious terminology such as "*iblis*" (devil) and "*setan*" (satan) are used to disparage immoral behavior. These swear words range in seriousness, yet they may also be used jokingly among friends.

In line with that, research done by (Setyaningtias et al., 2023) discovered that there are five categories in which young multicultural students use swear words: funny, aggressive, blasphemous, and obscenity. Vulgar phrases pertaining to sexual content, such "teling" (Lampung, which means penis) and "konak" (Papua, which means vagina), are considered obscenity. Insults such as "lugor" (meaning dumb) and "kampang" (meaning son of a bitch) are examples of abusive language directed at other people. Blasphemy is the use of derogatory terms with greater implications, such "antu" (Kalimantan, which means devil) and "sunal" (Kalimantan, which means bitch). Expletives, such as "tundun" (Kalimantan, which means vagina) and "kimbek" (Medan, which means vagina), are used to convey intimate feelings like annoyance. Playful curse words, such "bodat" (Medan, meaning monkey) and "pinahan" (Medan, meaning pig), are frequently used among friends.

Thus, several studies of swear words in different countries and regions have been conducted. However, far too little attention has been given to the swear words used in Thailand. Therefore, this study aims to explore how swear words are used in Thailand, a form of swear words, the function of swear words as well as the reference of the swear words. Understanding how language reflects cultural values is essential for good communication, cross-cultural understanding, and language teaching. Furthermore, the findings could help to a better understanding of language change, evolution, and cross-cultural relationships.

1.2 Problem Identification

While swear words have become common in all languages, their usage, connotations, and social implications differ greatly throughout cultures. This lack of understanding complicates effective communication, especially in multicultural settings. As a result, understanding the use of swear words in Thailand is necessary to fill this knowledge gap and provide insights that may be used in language teaching, cross-cultural communication, and sociolinguistic research.

1.3 Research Question

Following the background previously mentioned, the research question for this study is as listed below:

1. What are the *Phasa Thai* swear words used by Thai people?

2. What forms of *Phasa Thai* swear words are used by Thai people?

3. What are the functions of *Phasa Thai* swear words used by Thai people?

4. What are the *Phasa Thai* swear words references used by Thai people?

1.4 Limitations of the Study

The study of swear words in Thailand has certain drawbacks. First, the findings may just applicable to these specific languages and cultures, rather than everyone. Second, interpreting swear words can be difficult, and some meanings may become lost. Language changes throughout time may not be fully captured. Despite these limits, the study provides vital insights into language and culture, as well as areas where we need to discover more.

1.5 Objective of the Study

Based on the research question, the objective of this study is as listed below:

1) To identify *Phasa Thai* swear words that are used in Thailand.

2) To analyze forms of *Phasa Thai* swear words that are used in Thailand.

3) To identify the function of *Phasa Thai* swear words used in Thailand.

4) To identify the references of *Phasa Thai* swear words used in Thailand.

1.6 Research Significance

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

This study can serve as a reference for future research and give useful insights into the use of swear words in Thailand. The findings could assist researchers and students in comprehending how swear words are used.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

a. For EFL Student

This study can be an additional reference for learning cross-cultural understanding and English for tours and travel. Align with that, this research also helps prospective English teachers enrich their knowledge about sociolinguistics, which will be used in teaching internationally.

b. International Student

This study helps international student build their cultural awareness in which understanding swear words can provide insight into Thai culture and what is inappropriate or acceptable in certain settings. This allows students to blend into society better.

c. For General Society

This research educates society about the richness of linguistic and cultural variety, as well as fostering appreciation for various forms of communication. Finally, this study helps to promote a more connected and inclusive global society by encouraging knowledge and respect for varied cultural traditions.