

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research Background

Bali and Singapore share close cultural and economic ties, particularly through tourism. Singapore is one of the largest contributors of international tourists to Bali (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Bali, 2024). Moreover, the movement of people between the two regions is on the rise, with a significant number of Balinese working or studying in Singapore. Within this setting of heightened cross-cultural exchanges, language serves as an important component in facilitating communication and fostering mutual understanding. Nevertheless, variations in language use, particularly concerning swear words, can cause misunderstanding, social friction, and even conflicts, especially in professional environments. This occurs because swear words often carry distinct cultural connotations, causing their meanings to shift depending on the community context in which they are used.

Beyond serving merely as a tool for communication, language also embodies social and cultural identities that mirror the values held by a society (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). Swear words represent a linguistic phenomenon that transcends cultural boundaries, exhibiting diverse functions and meanings depending on the social and cultural contexts of different communities (Dewaele, 2016; Ljung, 2011). Although often regarded as taboo, these words are woven into everyday speech and function to express emotions such as frustration, affirm personal feelings, or even strengthen interpersonal social bonds (Jay, 2009).

This study forms part of a broader collaborative research project that explores the comparison of swear words between Bali and several other countries, including Australia, South Korea, China, Singapore, and France. The umbrella project involves six researchers working collectively, with each focusing on one specific country as a point of comparison with Bali. Within this framework, the current research centers on the contrast between Bali and Singapore. Such a shared design offers a comprehensive view of how swear words operate across various languages and cultures while allowing each sub-study to shed light on distinctive sociolinguistic aspects within its focus area.

The selection of Singapore and Bali as the objects of this study is based on their sociolinguistic diversity and cultural connection. Singapore exemplifies a multilingual nation-state in which English, Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil coexist and interact to shape a complex linguistic landscape. The influence of different ethnic communities, particularly the Chinese population, contributes to the use of Hokkien-based swear words in everyday speech (Yun, 2012). In contrast, Bali stands as a local ethnolinguistic community in Indonesia, where the Balinese language symbolizes cultural identity and reflects social structures. Swear words in Balinese, which are often derived from native expressions, tend to be used in informal settings as a way to express emotions and reinforce social closeness (Wisudayanti, 2020). The linguistic diversity of Singapore and the traditional nature of Balinese communication create a meaningful basis for comparing the forms, functions, and references of swear words in both societies.

This study specifically focuses on Hokkien-derived Singaporean swear words and Balinese swear words documented in previous studies and related sources. The focus on Hokkien swear words is intended to represent a distinctive category of swear words that has frequently appeared in studies of Singaporean linguistic practices. Likewise, the focus on Balinese swear words allows the study to examine swear-word expressions that are culturally embedded within the Balinese language. Limiting the scope of the data in this way helps maintain consistency in the comparison and enables a more focused analysis of the forms, functions, and references of swear words across the two linguistic and cultural contexts. Furthermore, the use of documented secondary data ensures that the comparison is grounded in existing linguistic evidence and previous scholarly findings.

Swear words function beyond their literal meaning and are employed to express feelings of anger, frustration, surprise, or even friendship (Dewaele, 2016). Swear words are often classified based on their references, such as religious, sexual, excretory, mental illness-related expressions, and animal-related words (Yani et al., 2017). Swear words in Balinese culture are usually used in informal conversation and are more friendly teasing than insulting (Wisudayanti, 2020). In Singapore, swear words, particularly those derived from Hokkien and English words, have diversified to keep pace with changing cultural and linguistic realities (Yun, 2012). The diverse usage and constantly fluctuating meaning of swear words highlight the relationship between society and language.

Swearing has social effects that can be positive or negative. According to Jay (2009), Swearing can lead to group solidarity or cause conflict. Using swear

words can also reinforce some stereotypes. Frequent users of swear words tend to be more extroverted but are sometimes perceived as aggressive or impolite, depending on the context (Dewaele, 2016). One culture may perceive a word as offensive, whereas other communities may consider swear words not offensive.

There have been some studies of Balinese and Singaporean swear words. Yani et al. (2017) examined Balinese swear words and categorized them into word, phrase, and clause forms, with findings of references to religion, sex, and body functions. Wisudayanti (2020) examined students' use of swear words in Buleleng, revealing that swearing is prevalent across all age groups. In Singapore, the decline of Hokkien swear words among younger generations was reported by Yun (2012), who tends to favor English-derived swear words. Sugiantari et al. (2025) conduct research on common swear words employed by Singaporean tourists and their linguistic patterns. Mahayoni et al. (2025) and Wahyuni et al. (2025) show that swear words in different cultures vary in their forms, functions, and references. Despite these studies, a gap remains in research that directly compares swear words in Bali and Singapore using the same analytical framework.

Swear words are deeply rooted in the cultural identity of every locality, and the use of swear words shows similarities and differences in linguistic expression. Despite apparent differences in swearing between Bali and Singapore, previous studies have not directly compared their forms, functions, or references. However, such a comparative study is crucial, particularly for individuals engaged in intercultural communication. For instance, tourism workers in Bali who frequently interact with Singaporean visitors may benefit from understanding the nuances of Singaporean swear words to avoid miscommunication. Likewise, Balinese who are

studying or working in Singapore could gain insight into the difference between those swear words. Additionally, Singaporeans are highly interested in Balinese culture, as evidenced by statistical data on international tourist arrivals to Bali. In 2024, Singaporean tourists accounted for approximately 20% of total ASEAN visitors (713,315), indicating that Singapore is one of the primary sources of tourists to Bali (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Bali, 2024). This substantial share suggests that Singaporean tourists maintain an interest in visiting Bali, particularly in enjoying the cultural, social, and tourism attractions. This study is considered important, particularly in light of Bali's tourism industry and the increasing intercultural interactions between these two countries. Through systematic documentation and analysis of the similarities and differences in swear words used in Bali and Singapore, the study contributes to the novelty of swear words studies and enhances cross-cultural understanding.

This study aims to analyze and compare Balinese and Hokkien-derived Singaporean swear words in terms of similarities and differences of forms, functions, and references. The findings will contribute to the fields of sociolinguistics and cross-cultural communication by providing insights into how swear words function within different cultural contexts. Additionally, this study will be beneficial for language learners, educators, and professionals in tourism and cross-cultural communication.

## **1.2 Identification of Research Problem**

Singapore is one of the largest sources of foreign visitors to Bali (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Bali, 2024). Many Balinese people choose to work or study in Singapore, resulting in frequent cross-cultural interactions. However, differences

in the usage and perception of swear words in these two cultures may lead to misunderstandings, social tension, and conflicts, particularly in tourism and professional environments. Previous studies have examined Balinese and Singaporean swear words separately. There is a limited study that explicitly compares their similarities and differences in forms, references, and functions. As a result of the close socio-economic relations between Bali and Singapore, it is necessary to understand these linguistic differences in order to promote intercultural communication and minimize potential conflicts.

### **1.3 Research Limitation**

This study focuses on the comparison between Balinese and Hokkien-derived Singaporean swear words in terms of their similarities and differences in forms, functions, and references. This study relies on secondary data derived from previous studies, which were collected from journal articles and theses. No interviews, surveys, or other primary data collection methods were used. However, many of the referenced studies were based on primary field data, such as conversation excerpts and naturally occurring examples. Thus, while this research does not produce new empirical data, it relies on previously documented real-world instances and focuses on synthesizing and interpreting how Balinese and Hokkien-derived Singaporean swear terms have been described and analyzed in the existing literature. This approach enables a comparative examination while acknowledging that it may not capture every nuance of spontaneous, in-situ language use.

### **1.4 Statement of Research Problems**

Based on the problem described above, the research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What are the similarities and differences between the forms of Hokkien-derived Singaporean and Balinese swear words?
2. What are the similarities and differences between the functions of Hokkien-derived Singaporean and Balinese swear words?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the references of Hokkien-derived Singaporean and Balinese swear words?

### **1.5 Research Objectives**

Based on the research questions above, the objectives of this study could be obtained as follows:

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1. To identify the similarities and differences in the forms of swear words in Hokkien-derived Singaporean and Balinese.
  2. To analyze the similarities and differences in the functions of swear words in Hokkien-derived Singaporean and Balinese.
  3. To investigate the similarities and differences in the references of swear words in Hokkien-derived Singaporean and Balinese.

### **1.6 Research Significances**

This study provides two significances: theoretical significance and practical significance.

#### **1.6.1 Theoretical Significance**

The results of this study contribute to the understanding of the functioning of swear words in multilingual and multicultural settings. By comparing Balinese and Singaporean swear words based on forms, functions, and references, this study

draws upon available sociolinguistic theories of swear words and their functioning in communication.

## **1.6.2 Practical Significance**

### **1.6.2.1 For Balinese**

The results of this study are intended for Balinese people, particularly tourism workers who frequently interact with Singaporean visitors, as well as Balinese people studying and working in Singapore. Rather than encouraging the use or learning of swear words, this research highlights the importance of understanding their cultural meanings and social implications. Such awareness can help prevent miscommunication, promote intercultural sensitivity, and support more respectful communication in cross-cultural encounters.

### **1.6.2.2 For Singaporean**

The result of this study is for Singaporean people, particularly those who visit Bali and who are interested to learn Balinese culture, the study provides insights into the cultural values and communication norms associated with language use, including taboo and emotional expressions. Recognizing these cultural nuances can help visitors avoid unintended offenses and foster mutual respect and understanding during intercultural interactions.

### **1.6.2.3 For Readers**

For readers and scholars interested in sociolinguistics and cross-cultural communication, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how swear

words function as a reflection of cultural norms, emotional expression, and social relations, thereby enhancing awareness of linguistic diversity across communities.

