

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Language is not just a way to communicate, but it is also the foundation for expressing our identity, emotion, and where we are from (Joseph, 2004). Language is a system that is shaped by social interactions. It shows not only how people communicate meaning, but also how groups decide what is okay (not taboo) and what is not (taboo) (Allan & Burridge, 2006). One of the most well-known language features in this case is the use of swear words, which is common in many cultures but is used, accepted, and felt in quite different ways.

Swear words are generally characterized as statements considered unpleasant, prohibited, or insulting, commonly used in casual circumstances to communicate strong emotions such as anger, frustration, pain, surprise, or even laughter. As stated by Stapleton et al. (2022), swear words perform essential communicative tasks and represent deeply rooted social norms. Although prohibited, they still have structure and purpose. In fact, according to Hagen (2013), the way people swear what words they use, when, and how can provide a unique perspective into their society's values, manners, and cultural limits. Swearing behavior is a rich subject of investigation, particularly within sociolinguistics and intercultural communication.

In Balinese society, language use is influenced by a deep cultural focus on respect, politeness, and social hierarchy. Speech acts, including the use of taboo language, are restricted by the traditional norms of *krama* (polite) and *basa alus* (refined) levels. Swear words, when employed, often reflect social frustration or unity within specific peer groups, among others (Harismayanti et al., 2017). These expressions can either strengthen group identity or, on the other hand, can result in offense and social sanction depending on the context and the status of the interlocutors.

In contrast, French society, while still shaped by social norms, generally allows freer and more open use of swear words in both casual and

expressive contexts (Mohr, 2013). French swear words such as *putain* or *merde* are regularly used across socioeconomic classes and age groups to express a range of emotions. As Sajarwa (2021) notes, French swearing behavior is shaped by socio-economic factors and gender, but its usage does not carry the same cultural weight or hierarchical implications as in Balinese society. In French, swearing can be viewed as a sort of catharsis, humor, or even tenderness depending on accent and situation (Vallery, 2024). Comparing swear words between Balinese and French speakers offers valuable insights into the deeper cultural and social norms that shape communication. Such a comparative study becomes especially relevant in today's increasingly globalized context and its connections to other things. As one of the world's most frequently visited tourist destinations, Bali receives millions of international visitors each year, including a growing number of French-speaking tourists and those who have decided to live here. This growing interaction has increased the likelihood of cross-cultural miscommunication, particularly involving emotionally expressive language use such as swearing.

According to existing observations and research by scholars, France remains one of the European countries with the largest number of trips to Bali, as noted by Endi & Prasetyo (2020) and Endi & Prasetyo (2021). *Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Bali* in 2026 reported that 279,117 French tourists travelled to Bali from January to December 2025. Other sources also noted that the French have become among the top 10 visitors to Bali in the past five years, surpassing neighboring countries such as Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, with the third-largest European source market, only behind the UK and Germany (Adams, 2026; Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Bali, 2025). This emerging trend highlights the escalating cultural and social interactions between French tourists and the Balinese people. As an example from Lukitasari et al. (2024), their research conducted in Bongan stated that while these frequent interactions facilitate cross-cultural communication, where the local people gradually integrate more and more English into their interactions with foreigners, it also increases the likelihood of

misunderstandings, particularly concerning the inappropriate use of profanity, which may carry varying meanings and social implications across different cultures.

Despite the frequency of these interactions, misunderstandings around swear-word usage remain common. What a French speaker might see as a harmless emotional expression may be considered deeply disrespectful in Balinese cultural settings. Preliminary observations and the researcher's experiences in several high-density tourist and hospitality areas in Bali (such as Ubud) revealed a critical pragmatic disconnect between French and Balinese locals. The urgency of this research emerges from initial field observations of daily disruptions such as traffic congestion and service delays. On these occasions, French speakers were observed uttering expressive swear words like *'putain'* or *'merde'* as spontaneous cathartic reactions to minor frustrations. While French speakers utilized these expressions for emotional release or catharsis, Balinese service workers and locals who understood the swearing and were accustomed to strict linguistic hierarchies governed by *'krama'* and *'basa alus'* perceived these utterances as aggressive, disrespectful, and socially offensive. Conversely, French tourists sometimes misinterpreted local Balinese expressions used informally among peers because they lacked contextual understanding. These miscommunications can create social friction, disrupt hospitality experiences, and even result in interpersonal conflict. In more severe cases, such misunderstandings may damage Bali's reputation as a culturally respectful and tourist-friendly region.

Furthermore, academic literature has a significant gap in comparing swear-word use between these two cultural-linguistic communities. While individual studies have examined swearing in Balinese (for example, from Harismayanti et al., 2017; Wiyasa et al., 2017) and French contexts (for example, from Sajarwa, 2021; Vallery, 2024; Wahyuni, 2025), few have attempted a direct comparative analysis. A study that investigates the forms (word, phrase, and clause), functions (emotional release, aggression, humor, etc.), and references (religion, sex, excrement, animals, personal background,

etc.) of swear words from both languages could result in valuable insights into sociolinguistic behavior and intercultural pragmatics.

Notably, this study aims to contribute to both theory and practice. It provides useful references for language instructors, translators, tourism professionals, and even authorities in the hospitality and education sectors. For Balinese people working in tourism, understanding how and why French visitors swear can help in interpreting such language without taking unnecessary offense (Stapleton et al., 2022). For French speakers visiting Bali, greater awareness of local cultural taboos can help prevent unwanted disrespect or social blunders. Ultimately, this research aims to promote mutual understanding and respectful communication between two distinct linguistic and cultural groups.

These reasons motivate the researcher to conduct the study. To help minimize misunderstandings, the researcher aims to deliver findings on swear words used in both languages. The researcher's findings, preliminary observations, and data highlight the importance of this research. Understanding these linguistic nuances is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication. The lack of comparative analysis limits current knowledge and underscores the need for further investigation.

In conclusion, comparing swear words between Balinese and French speakers is more than just a language exercise. Instead, it helps people become more aware of, and better at dealing with, people from other cultures. By analyzing the similarities and differences in how swear words form, function, and are referenced across these cultures, this research shows how language deeply reflects and shapes social reality. Such knowledge is crucial not only for academics but also for practitioners in tourism, education, and international relations. This study addresses a scholarly gap and proactively supports more polite global communication.

1.2 Identification of Research Problem

Swear words are a frequent part of human language, yet they can be offensive in some cultures. They occur in almost all languages and cultures,

but the way they are used, what they imply, and how socially acceptable they are can vary greatly from one group to another. In Balinese culture, which is heavily influenced by Hindu religious ideals and social hierarchies, swearing is very controlled. In formal or intergenerational settings, saying things that are rude or unpleasant can have serious social consequences. French culture, on the other hand, allows swearing more often, especially in casual contexts where it can be used to let off steam, make a joke, or stress something.

These cultural differences in swearing behaviors become especially important in intercultural contact, notably in Bali, a major worldwide tourism destination with a growing proportion of French-speaking visitors. Given how many French tourists visit Bali, as per data from Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Bali (2026), the likelihood of misunderstandings and cultural confrontations due to swear word usage also increases. What is deemed harmless or even hilarious in French may be perceived as extremely unpleasant or improper by Balinese speakers, and vice versa. Differences like these can inhibit effective communication, impair interpersonal relationships, and affect professional contexts such as tourism, education, and customer service.

Despite this practical importance, there is a lack of extensive comparative research analyzing how swear words are used, interpreted, and perceived across Balinese and French language communities. Existing research has generally concentrated on curse words within a single culture, without directly comparing the linguistic forms, social functions, and cultural references of swearing across both languages. Without such comparative examination, misunderstandings and misjudgments will certainly continue to arise.

Therefore, the key difficulty noted in this research is the absence of an in-depth comparative analysis of the forms, functions, and references of swear words between Balinese and French speakers, which is necessary for developing intercultural communication and sociolinguistic knowledge.

1.3 Research Limitation

The research focuses on the comparison of swear words between Balinese and French speakers, specifically analyzing the forms, functions, and references of these expressions in their various cultural and linguistic settings. The study does not try to generalize the complete spectrum of swearing behavior in Indonesia or France but rather relies on the viewpoints of local Balinese and French speakers selected as informants.

The research scope is further limited to the spoken language in informal and semi-formal situations, rather than literary or digital forms of swearing. The Balinese data used in this study are based on the Buleleng dialect, which may not fully represent other regional Balinese dialects. The primary data sources (informants) are limited to three per language. Additionally, the French data will mostly reflect the general variety of the language, not its regional variants.

1.4 Statement of Research Problem

Based on the background and identified issues, the main research problems can be formulated as the following questions:

1. What are the similarities and differences in the forms of swear words used by Balinese and French speakers?
2. What are the similarities and differences in the functions of swear words used by Balinese and French speakers?
3. What are the similarities and differences in the references of swear words used by Balinese and French speakers?

1.5 Research Objectives

Based on the stated research problems, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To find out the similarities and differences in the forms of swear words between Balinese and French speakers.
2. To analyze the similarities and differences in the functions of swear words between Balinese and French speakers.

3. To explore the similarities and differences in the references of swear words between Balinese and French speakers.

1.6 Research Significance

As stated in the research objectives above, this research provides two significances and is also expected to provide meaningful and valuable contributions to:

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

This study enriches sociolinguistics and intercultural communication by comparing swear words across two culturally and linguistically distinct communities. As Hagen (2013) and Stapleton et al. (2022) highlights how cultural norms impact the form, function, and interpretation of taboo language, and offers empirical support for understanding how swearing reflects identity, power relations, and solidarity.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

1. For Balinese Speakers

This research helps Balinese speakers, particularly those working in education, hospitality, and tourism, better understand how and why French people use swear words, reducing the risk of misunderstanding or offense.

2. For French Speakers

It helps visitors, foreign residents, or students from France who study Balinese culture to understand language-related taboos. This study will help them understand better and encourage them to communicate more appropriately and respectfully in Bali by better understanding differences in culture and perception.

3. For Tourism Professionals and Educators

The findings can serve as reference material for cultural training programs, language courses, or intercultural communication workshops, especially those focused on

improving service quality and social interaction in a multicultural context.

4. For General Readers and Researchers

The study serves as a valuable resource for readers interested in cross-cultural linguistics, pragmatics, and cultural awareness in language use, especially by addressing the often-overlooked topic of swear word usage.

1.7 Key Terms

1. Swear Words: Statements characterized as unpleasant, prohibited, or insulting, used in casual contexts to convey strong emotions, such as anger, frustration, surprise, or humor, exhibit structural patterns and perform essential communicative tasks within social norms.
2. Balinese Language: A language deeply rooted in cultural respect, politeness, and social hierarchy, in which speech acts and taboo language are strictly regulated by traditional norms such as the *krama* (polite) and *basa alus* (refined) registers.
3. French Language: A language shaped by socioeconomic and gender factors, allowing freer use of swear words in casual contexts as an emotional release, catharsis, or humor, without rigid hierarchical constraints.
4. Forms of Swear Words: The structural and grammatical classifications of taboo utterances, categorized in this study as words (monomorphemic and polymorphemic), phrases (noun, verb, and adjectival), and clauses.
5. Functions of Swear Words: The pragmatic and communicative purposes served by swearing in interaction, identified in this study as expressing emotion, attracting attention, emphasizing, aggression and provocation, social bonding, and humor.
6. References of Swear Words: The semantic topics or taboo thematic sources from which swear words derive their offensive or emotional meaning, including religion, sex and gender, excrement, animals, sexual acts, personal background, and mental illness.

7. Intercultural Communication: The contact and language interaction between individuals from distinct cultural backgrounds, specifically native Balinese speakers and French visitors or residents in Bali, in which differing cultural expectations and discourse patterns influence mutual understanding.

