

Bangkan Malayan Swearing Words

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Abstract

Swearing words are commonly perceived as taboo, impolite, and socially inappropriate expressions. However, their persistence in everyday communication across languages and cultures indicates their deep-rooted function in human interaction. This study aims to explore the origin and function of swearing words in Bangkan Malayan, a regional dialect spoken on Bangka Island by a multicultural society. This research was conducted qualitatively through observation and semi-structured interviews with native speakers. The investigation revealed that swearing expressions in the dialect originate from five distinct sources: mental attributes, animal references, religious beliefs, part of body, and symbolic elements related to impurity. These origins are strongly influenced by the cultural and religious context of the community, particularly Islamic values. Functionally, the swearing words serve not only to insult but also to express strong emotions, generate humor, establish solidarity, and affirm social or individual identity. Interestingly, some expressions have undergone semantic shifts, allowing for humorous or non-hostile use depending on the context. The findings highlight that swearing in Bangkan Malayan is not merely an act of verbal aggression, but a complex socio-linguistic phenomenon deeply embedded in local norms, emotions, and interpersonal dynamics. Therefore, it reflects a structured communicative strategy with both expressive and social functions. This study contributes to the broader understanding of linguistic taboos and swearing in minority languages, and encourages further exploration in under-researched regional varieties.

Keywords: *Swearing Words, Bangka Island, Bangkan-Malayan*

Introduction

Expressing swearing words, as a dynamic linguistic phenomenon, reflects the complexity of human communication, serving a wide range of functions that go beyond mere vulgarity (Reranta, 2023; Reranta et al., 2024). While often regarded as socially inappropriate or impolite, swearing plays a critical role in expressing intense emotions, reinforcing group identity, establishing social boundaries, and asserting power dynamics. Scholars have argued that swearing is not simply a linguistic anomaly, but rather a psychologically and socially embedded tool used to navigate emotionally charged or socially sensitive situations. At its core, swearing involves the use of taboo or forbidden language that tends to provoke immediate emotional and physiological responses in both the speaker and the listener (Ljung, 2011; Reranta, 2023; Reranta et al., 2024).

The classification of swearing as taboo reflects long-standing societal and cultural norms that associate such language with moral and behavioral deviance. As Adam (2016) explains, these prohibitions are deeply rooted in collective values, where the use of offensive language is seen as a threat to social harmony and cultural propriety. Consequently, swearing often carries negative implications, especially when used in formal or sensitive contexts. Its association with rudeness, aggression, and disrespect can lead to social tension or misunderstanding. Jay and Janschewitz (2021) highlight that swearing in conversation, particularly when not contextually appropriate, frequently results in interpersonal conflict and

strained communication. Therefore, despite its expressive potential, the use of swearing in public or professional discourse is generally discouraged, as it risks violating social norms and disrupting relational dynamics. Understanding the dual nature of swearing—as both a powerful expressive resource and a socially risky act—offers deeper insight into how language functions not only as a means of conveying meaning but also as a reflection of cultural boundaries and emotional regulation.

Although swearing is frequently regarded as impolite, offensive, or socially inappropriate, it remains a persistent and multifaceted feature of human language, deeply rooted in emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of communication. Hughes (1991) emphasizes that societies have never been able to fully eliminate swearing from everyday discourse, as such expressions are intrinsically tied to how individuals react to emotionally charged or unexpected situations—where the intensity of emotion often triggers spontaneous verbal responses. This suggests that swearing is not merely an act of vulgarity but a natural linguistic mechanism for coping with sudden emotional arousal. Building upon this idea, Reranta et al. (2023) argue that the prevalence of swearing in spoken interactions is not only due to its association with strong emotions such as anger or frustration, but also because it performs various pragmatic and social functions. Swearing often transcends its literal meaning, serving instead as a communicative tool for emotional regulation, stress relief, interpersonal bonding, and even humor. Bergen (2020), Jay and Janschewitz (2021), and Reranta et al. (2023), support this broader interpretation by suggesting that swearing can convey a range of sentiments—including surprise, amusement, or solidarity—depending on the social context and the relationship between speakers. Thus, rather than being dismissed as merely disruptive or vulgar, swearing should be understood as a linguistically and psychologically significant phenomenon that reflects the expressive richness of language and its ability to navigate the complexities of human interaction.

The multifaceted functions of swearing words, as outlined in the previous discussion, are further explored within a contemporary sociolinguistic context in the research conducted by Reranta (2023), which focuses on the use of swear words among Lampungese speakers. In this study, Reranta identifies and categorizes three principal communicative functions of swearing that reflect both linguistic creativity and social dynamics. Firstly, swearing words are employed as instruments of insult or verbal aggression, typically aimed at demeaning or belittling others, often in moments of interpersonal conflict or emotional disappointment. This usage aligns with the traditional view of swearing as inherently offensive or derogatory. Secondly, swear words also function in a humorous or jocular manner, where their usage is not intended to cause harm but instead to provoke laughter, establish solidarity, or reduce social tension through playful banter. This pragmatic shift in intent illustrates how context and speaker relationships shape the perceived severity of swearing. Thirdly, swear words are used as spontaneous expressions of strong emotions such as anger, frustration, irritation, or even surprise. In these instances, swearing serves as an emotional outlet or coping mechanism, allowing speakers to release tension or highlight the intensity of their feelings. Collectively, these three functions underscore the nuanced and context-dependent nature of swearing in Lampungese communication, demonstrating that such linguistic expressions are not merely vulgar or impolite, but rather embedded in complex socio-cultural and emotional frameworks.

Beers Fägersten (2017) asserts that swearing words have a negative meaning and come from certain origins. Moreover, Wibowo (2020) categorized profanity according to its origin. The following table, which has been modified to broaden the context, has the classifications as below:

Table 1. Origin of Swearing Words (Adapted from Wibowo, 2020)

No.	Source	Example of Swearing Words
1	Part of body	Penis, Vagina, and Head
2	Personality	Stingy
3	Mental	Crazy
4	Activity	Fuck
5	Animal	Monkey
6	Occupation	Criminal
7	Figure/Person	<i>Bolot</i> , an Indonesian actor who always acts as a deaf
8	Food	Egg Crust
9	Ghost	Zombie
10	Family Relation	Mother
11	Ethnicity	Negroid
12	Origin	Asia

The data presented above illustrates that swear words may originate from various lexical sources, with their offensive nature largely determined by negative associations. As Reranta (2024) explains, such associations are socially constructed and context-dependent; therefore, a term considered profane in one cultural or linguistic setting may not carry the same connotation in another.

The notion is further supported by Allan and Burridge (2006), who highlight the example of the word *bloody* in British and American English. In British English, *bloody* has historically functioned as a mild expletive or intensifier—commonly used in expressions like *bloody hell* or *bloody idiot*. While once deemed highly inappropriate in formal settings, it has since become relatively mild and widely accepted in colloquial usage. Conversely, in American English, *bloody* is not typically perceived as a swear word. Instead, it is often interpreted as humorous, quaint, or simply characteristic of British vernacular. Its lack of perceived offensiveness in the U.S. context stems from the absence of the cultural and emotional weight it holds in the UK. These findings underscore the idea that swearing is a rich linguistic phenomenon shaped by cultural norms and communicative intent.

However, the analyses of swearing word currently are still limited; not all language has been studied to discover their swearing words. Whereas, the typical word plays vital role in communication (Ljung, 2011; Reranta, 2023). Therefore, the typical analysis should be conducted more, especially to a lingua franca which is spoken by multicultural society. One of qualified language is Bangkan Malayan. Bangkan Malayan, a dialect shaped by historical contact between Malay, Chinese, and other linguistic influences. The dialect of Malayan is majorly spoken in Bangka Island by some ethnicities; Malayan, Chinese, and other ethnicities which are considered minor (Badan Pusat Statistika, 2024). Unfortunately, the analysis of swearing word there has not been done yet.

This paper was intended to fulfil the space of research. The intention of conducting research on linguistic swearing words of Bangkan Malayan is to explore the origin and function of swearing words in the regional variety. By investigating both structure and function of swearing expressions within the community, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how language reflects and shapes social behavior in a localized cultural setting, while also enriching the broader field of swearing word studies in minority or regional languages.

Theory and Method

This study adopts a qualitative research approach. As Leavy (2014) explains, qualitative research—particularly within the fields of social and behavioral inquiry—is intended to examine, interpret, and clarify phenomena; to reveal the meanings individuals assign to actions, events, and artifacts; and to deepen the understanding of social reality. In a similar vein, Zaluchu (2020) emphasizes that qualitative research is grounded in a phenomenological perspective, which underpins its methodological orientation. Consistent with this view, Silverman (2021) notes that qualitative research is employed to formulate theses based on lived experiences and contextual understanding. Accordingly, this study aims to explore the phenomenon of swearing in Bangkan Malayan, focusing on its origins and functions. In line with the theoretical perspectives outlined above, a qualitative approach was applied to conduct the analysis and generate the research findings.

In the data collection phase, the researcher employed an observational method using two primary techniques: unobtrusive listening and non-participant observation. These approaches allowed for the gathering of authentic primary data from naturally occurring conversations among Bangkan Malayan speakers, with minimal interference from the researcher. To enrich the observational findings, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with 20 native speakers, selected through random sampling based on two credibility criteria: (1) self-identifying Bangkan Malayan as their mother tongue and (2) having used the dialect consistently in daily conversation for more than 20 years. These interviews aimed to elicit deeper insights into the meanings, usage, and social functions of swearing expressions within the Bangkan Malayan speech community.

During the analysis phase, all oral data were transcribed verbatim to preserve linguistic accuracy. The transcriptions were analyzed using two complementary linguistic approaches: the distributional method, which examined the internal structure of the swearing terms, and the contextual identity method, which explored their meanings, origins, and sociocultural functions. The latter enabled interpretation of each expression in relation to emotional states, interpersonal dynamics, and social norms. The results will be presented in the following chapter as a thematic essay discussing each datum in terms of meaning, etymology, and function. Each swearing term will be transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) 2022 scheme and accompanied by an English translation, including grammatical glosses for phrasal forms.

Findings and Discussion

This paper presents some insights into the origin and function of swearing words in Bangkan Malayan. The investigation revealed five origins of swearing words in Bangkan Malayan. The first one is mentality. Concerning the first form, there are two data discovered. Both will be explored below:

*/gile buda?/
crazy kid
'Crazy kid'*

*/budu baga?/
Stupid extreme
'Extremely Stupid'*

The data presented above clearly illustrate the significant role of mentality in shaping the origin of swearing expressions in Bangkan Malayan. Specifically, the terms 'stupid' and 'crazy', which generally carry negative connotations in many languages across the world, also possess similar derogatory implications within the Bangkan Malayan linguistic context.

However, what distinguishes these terms in Bangkan Malayan is the fact that they are not typically employed in single words as swearing words. Instead, they require the presence of a collocating lexical item to form a fixed expression or idiomatic insult, as displayed in the data. These composite forms are considered frozen expressions, meaning they are culturally and linguistically entrenched and not subject to structural variation. For instance, the phrase */gile buda?/* is a commonly used expression that carries a strong pejorative tone, and it can be directed toward individuals regardless of their social status or age, including adults who are no longer considered children. Interestingly, the informants involved in the study reported that the swearing words could be used reciprocally between children and their parents, which defies conventional expectations regarding respect and politeness in familial relationships. Nevertheless, the informants were unable to provide a clear sociolinguistic or cultural rationale behind the acceptability of such usage of kid status. This observation suggests the need for further ethnolinguistic investigation to uncover the underlying sociocultural norms that permit such language practices in Bangkan Malayan discourse. Related to both swearing, they are applicable for any functions, such as to insult, express anger, generate humour, show social solidarity and individual identity.

The second discovered origin of swearing words in Bangkan Malayan is derived from references to animals, a phenomenon that aligns with patterns observed in various other regional languages across Indonesia. In the case of Bangkan Malayan, four animals have been identified as sources of swearing vocabulary, with particular emphasis on the terms associated with 'dog' and 'pig'. This is consistent with linguistic findings by Triadi (2017), Mahayana (2022), and Reranta (2023), who observed that animal-based profanity, particularly involving dogs and pigs, is widespread in many Indonesian local languages. In the Bangkan Malayan dialect, these animals are linguistically represented through the terms */ase?/* or */asu?/* for 'dog' and */babi?/* for 'pig'. These lexical choices are not arbitrary but deeply rooted in cultural and religious beliefs. As discussed by Subroto (2011), the use of such terms as swearing word is closely related to the Islamic worldview that predominates in Bangkan society. Within Islamic teachings, both dogs and pigs are considered impure animals, often associated with filth and moral degradation. Therefore, their symbolic use as insults reflects an intentional projection of negative social judgment, intended to offend or degrade the target. The semantic shift from literal animal reference to derogatory human insult illustrates how cultural values and religious ideologies shape the evolution of swearing practices within the Bangkan Malayan linguistic community.

Another category of swearing words in Bangkan Malayan originates from animal references, specifically the terms */kəra?/* 'ape' and */buroŋ kuək/* 'owl'. These animals are employed as swearing words due to their strong negative connotations within the cultural framework of the Bangkan community. The term */kəra?/* is associated with an ape, which is culturally perceived as both physically unattractive and behaviorally undesirable, particularly for its greediness and erratic actions. Consequently, calling someone an 'ape' in this context serves to insult their appearance and moral character, reinforcing the derogatory function of the swearing word. Similarly, the phrase */buroŋ kuək/* refers to an owl, which is considered one of the most offensive animal-based swearing words in Bangkan Malayan. The owl is regarded as a frightening and ominous creature due to its nocturnal habits and its association with the supernatural or mystical realms. For the Bangkan people, the owl's physical traits—such as its piercing eyes and silent flight—are perceived as eerie and unsettling. Its nocturnality symbolically links it to the 'night world', a concept often associated with misfortune, secrecy, and even malevolent spiritual forces. Therefore, using 'owl' as a swearing word goes beyond mere insult. This demonstrates how deeply embedded cultural beliefs and symbolic associations shape the use and interpretation of swearing words in a local linguistic context.

In relation to animal-based swearing expressions in Bangkan Malayan, the terms /*ase?*/ and /*babi?*/ are more functionally versatile than the other animal-related terms. Based on the findings, these two expressions are not only used to insult or express anger but also to generate humor, show social solidarity, and affirm personal or group identity. In contrast, the terms /*kəra?*/ and /*buɾoŋ kuək*/ are more narrowly used, mainly to insult or express anger. These words are typically directed at individuals who are viewed as public enemies or who engage in socially condemned behavior, such as acts of abuse or sexual violence. Among them, /*buɾoŋ kuək*/ tends to carry stronger negative associations and is more closely linked to severely inappropriate conduct.

Next origin of swearing words in Bangkan Malayan is animal faces. From the effort of collecting data, there are two typical origins has been found. They are as below:

/taI ase? bəgere?/
Waste dog dry up by times
'Dried dog feces'

/taI ase? aŋos/
Waste dog burnt
'Burnt dog feces'

Both phrases discussed above refer to the same object—dog feces—but are distinguished by different semantic modifiers that intensify their offensive meaning within the Bangkan Malayan cultural context. As a form of profanity, these expressions derive their strength from deeply rooted cultural associations with impurity and misfortune. Dog feces are considered inherently disgusting due to their nature as waste and the fact that they come from a dog, an animal viewed by Bangkans as unclean. The phrase */taI ase? bəgere?/* or 'dried dog feces' metaphorically extends this disgust by referring to the deceptive appearance of the dried waste, which often blends in with soil or rocks, leading people to step on it accidentally—an act symbolizing unexpected misfortune. The second modifier, *aŋos* ('burnt'), adds an even stronger negative connotation. In Bangkan belief, dog waste that has been burned is seen as the worst possible substance, symbolizing intensified impurity and bad luck. Thus, both phrases function as powerful swearing expressions not only because of their literal meanings but also due to the cultural and symbolic weight they carry, linking physical revulsion with social misfortune.

Both swearing expressions, */taI ase? bəgere?/* 'dried dog feces' and */taI ase? aŋos/* 'burnt dog feces', are used in Bangkan Malayan for several different purposes. First, they are commonly used to express strong emotions like anger or frustration, allowing speakers to release tension in a powerful way. Second, these phrases can also be used to create humor. When said among close friends, the shocking or absurd nature of the words can be funny and entertaining. Third, they can show closeness and group identity. Among people who share the same background or social group, using such phrases can build a sense of belonging and familiarity. Lastly, and most often, these expressions are used to insult someone with unpleasant or disgusting behavior. By comparing a person to something considered extremely filthy and unlucky, the speaker strongly criticizes the person's character. In short, these swearing words serve emotional, social, humorous, and insulting functions in Bangkan Malayan communication.

The fourth discovery of swearing words in Bangkan Malayan is rooted in religious belief. Within this category, the research yielded a single term: /*kaper*/. Etymologically derived from the Arabic word *kafir*, meaning 'infidel' or 'non-believer', the term in the Bangkan Malayan context specifically refers to a 'non-Muslim'. However, its usage reveals a unique sociolinguistic nuance. The data show that the term is exclusively employed within Muslim communities and, rather paradoxically, is often directed at fellow Muslims rather than actual

non-believers. This indicates a shift in meaning and function from its original religious connotation to a more socially constructed usage. In practice, the term /kaper/ functions primarily as a humorous expression among speakers, although it can also carry insulting undertones depending on the context of the utterance. This finding highlights the complex interplay between belief, identity, and pragmatic intent in the use of swearing words.

In line with many cross-linguistic findings on the origin of swearing expressions, the Bangkan Malayan language also incorporates references to human anatomy, particularly intimate body parts, as a source of profanity. This category includes four prominent examples: /luloŋ/, referring to the buttocks; /pəle?/, denoting the penis; /ate?/, meaning vagina; and /pukima?/, which specifically refers to the mother's vagina. These anatomical terms function as swearing words primarily due to their strong cultural taboo and their associations with indecency and moral boundaries. The linguistic use of such terms reflects a broader sociolinguistic phenomenon, where bodily references—especially those tied to sexuality and reproduction—are leveraged for their emotive and transgressive power. Within the Bangkan Malayan context, these expressions are often employed to express contempt, insult, or emotional intensity, serving both as markers of verbal aggression and as tools of social regulation. Besides, those all can be used to insult, express anger, generate humour and show social solidarity and individual identity

Conclusion

The linguistic study of swearing words in the Bangkan Malayan dialect reveals a complex system that transcends mere vulgarity, highlighting their deep entrenchment in cultural, social, and emotional contexts. The research identifies five primary origins of these expressions: mental states, such as 'crazy' and 'stupid', animal references (including 'dog', 'pig', 'ape', and 'owl'), animal feces, such as 'dried dog feces' and 'burnt dog faces', religious beliefs, notably the term *kaper*, and parts of the human body, such as the buttocks, penis, and vagina. Each source reflects particular social perceptions and taboos, with mental and animal-related terms often symbolizing irrationality or undesirable traits, while religious and anatomical references carry heavier socio-religious and moral implications. Functionally, these swearing words serve multiple communicative purposes: expressing intense emotions such as anger and frustration, generating humour, asserting identity, reinforcing group solidarity, and most frequently, insulting or demeaning others. Their usage demonstrates that Bangkan Malayan swearing is not random or purely swearing, but rather a structured form of expression that reflects the community's norms, values, and interpersonal dynamics.

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