

SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTRASTIVE STUDY IN THE EXPRESSION OF SWEAR WORDS BETWEEN ETHNIC INDONESIANS AND ETHNIC ARABS BASED ON SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract: This study aims to contrastively examine the use of swear words in social interaction between Indonesian and Arab ethnicities based on sociolinguistic analysis. Swear words are part of everyday communication that can serve as emotional expressions, humour, solidarity, or even insults, depending on the social and cultural context in which they are used. This study reveals how cultural values, social norms, and linguistic factors influence the use and acceptance of swear words in both ethnic groups. This study uses a sociolinguistic approach to understand the social factors that influence swearing, contrastive analysis to compare the structure and meaning of swear words in Indonesian and Arabic, and ethnography of communication to examine the situation of using swear words in daily life. Data was collected through text analysis from websites, books and social media. The results show that there are differences in the patterns of swear word usage between the two ethnicities. In Arabic culture, swear words are mostly related to family honour, social status, and religion, so their use is more limited and can trigger serious conflicts. Meanwhile, in Indonesian culture, swear words have a wider variety and can function as expressions of anger, jokes, or even forms of familiarity, depending on the social relationship between the speaker and the listener. Moreover, the intensity and social acceptability of swearing varies by region and age group. This research provides new insights into how language as a reflection of culture can influence the way individuals express emotions and interact in society. The findings also have implications for the study of cross-cultural communication, language learning, as well as an understanding of the social and psychological impact of swear word use in everyday interactions.

Keywords: *Sociolinguistics, Contrastive Analysis, Swear Words, Communication Ethnography, Indonesian Culture, Arabic Culture*

INTRODUCTION

Language is a communication tool that not only serves to convey information but also reflects the social identity, cultural values, and norms of a society (Mailani & Okarisma, 2022). In addition, language is one of the tools of interaction from one individual to another (Swarniti, 2020). One form of language communication that is interesting to study is swear words, which are often used in social interactions with various functions, ranging from expressions

of anger, humour, to solidarity between group members. In the communication process, every human conveys information in the form of ideas, feelings or emotions directly. And one form of emotion that exists in communication is swear words. Cursing provides a space for a person to release emotions and tension (Harun, Junaidi, Fajrina, 2019).

There are three conditions in an expression that can be called a curse, namely, the expression must be taboo which is not

usually spoken under normal circumstances. Secondly, the expression cannot be interpreted literally, then the expression must show strong emotions from the speaker. Cursing also aims to mock and insult others using harsh words (Fathurrohim & Nugraha, 2024). Cursing expressions generally occur when there is a misunderstanding or conflict between individuals and groups. Under these conditions, feelings of anger, rage, pain, or other negative emotions arise. To express these feelings, a person accuses him or her by uttering words of abuse. The use of swear words is something that cannot be avoided, even though many people tend to avoid these words (Faizi & Rizal, 2024).

Cursing is also inseparable from socio-cultural conditions. The use of swear words is considered as a way to show courage and assertiveness in dealing with situations (Junaidi & Wardani, 2024). In some communities, swearing is not always considered a negative and offensive form of communication. On the contrary, in certain contexts and communities, swearing can be a part of oral culture that strengthens social identity, shows emotional closeness, or even serves as a form of familiarity (Basuki & Hartati, 2017). Apart from that, the meaning of these curses is sometimes returned to a person's intention in saying those words (J. However, the meaning and acceptance of swear words vary greatly across cultures, depending on the social norms, beliefs, and value systems of the community.

The use of swear words often triggers conflicts and disputes, both between individuals and groups. This generally happens because the aggrieved party has a low tolerance level for harsh words. They consider that the use of such language shows a lack of ethics and respect. In Indonesian society, especially in the regions, disputes over the use of swear words are still common. This is due to the strong values of politeness, ethics and language in the local culture (Handayani & Sakinah, 2024). Most regional communities in Indonesia still believe that swear words contain expressions that are rude, insulting, or

inappropriate. Their use can offend others, cause discomfort, and even trigger conflict, as they touch on sensitive aspects and differences in cultural values.

In linguistic studies, the study of language use in everyday life in society is known as sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that discusses language in relation to social and cultural aspects, as well as how language plays a role in the communication process (Faizi, A. F., Rizal & Dzarna, 2024). swearing has become an interesting study because it is not only related to language structure, but also to sociocultural aspects. For example, Indonesians and Arabs have different language and cultural characteristics in expressing curses. In Indonesia, swear words can be found in a variety of contexts, including in daily life, popular culture, and social media. Indonesian curses are often flexible, in that their use can have both negative and humorous connotations, depending on the situation and the relationship between the speaker and the listener.

In contrast, in Arabic culture, the use of swearing is more restricted by very strong religious and social norms. In Arab society, swear words are not only seen as emotional expressions, but also have significant social consequences. This is due to the cultural values that place family honour, self-respect as highly valued aspects. Therefore, the use of swear words that offend these things can be considered as a severe insult that has the potential to cause serious conflict, and in some cases can even lead to legal action or divisions in social relations. In addition, as Arab societies have a strong attachment to the teachings of Islam, the use of abusive words is often considered incompatible with the values taught in the religion.

Along with the development of globalisation and digitalisation, intercultural interactions are increasing, whether through migration, social media, or other cultural exchanges. Cultural differences in how to say greetings, for example, Indonesians say by raising their right hand. Whereas Arabs are very used to saying greetings either with the

right hand or the left hand (Handayani & Sakinah, 2024). Saying greetings by raising the left hand certainly makes its own misunderstanding. Therefore, a deeper understanding of how people from different cultures use and interpret curses is important to prevent misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication and understand how language reflects the social and cultural dynamics of a society.

Based on what has been stated above, this study aims to conduct a contrastive study of the use, function, and meaning of swear words in Indonesian and Arabic cultures based on a sociolinguistic approach. This study also wants to reveal how social factors, culture, and prevailing norms influence the patterns of swear word usage in the two ethnic groups. By analysing these aspects, this study is expected to contribute to the study of linguistics, cross-cultural communication, and language learning.

This research will provide a deeper understanding of how language reflects the social and cultural values of a society, as well as how swear words can function as complex communication tools in social interaction. In addition, the results of this study can also be a reference material in language learning and cross-cultural communication, especially in understanding the differences in linguistic norms between Indonesian and Arabic society.

METHOD

This study aims to analyse the use of swear words in Indonesian and Arabic from the perspective of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and ethnography of communication. Therefore, the method used in this study refers to a qualitative-descriptive with contrastive analysis. (Paul Markham, 1983) stated that contrastive analysis is the study of two or more languages regarding the differences or similarities between the two languages, both linguistically and in general. This research also takes into account how social factors, cultural norms, and communication context affect the use and perception of swearing in two different language communities. The object of this research is curse words

sourced from, books, journals and Arabic website (arabic-for-nerds ,sciencedirect, languagetrainers).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sociolinguistics has an important role in examining the relationship between language and the social factors that influence it, including the use of cursing. Language not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a reflection of the social structure and cultural values of a society (Trihandayani & Mifthulkahirah, 2022). In this context, this study focuses on how social factors such as social status, age, gender, and interpersonal relationships shape the patterns of cursing in two different cultures, namely Indonesian and Arabic.

The use of swear words in Indonesia is more flexible and contextualised. Cursing is not always negative, but can be part of the social dynamics in informal interactions, especially among peers. In certain situations, such as joking, building intimacy, or venting emotions, swearing is considered normal and can strengthen group solidarity (Khusnul, 2023). However, the use of swearing is still considered inappropriate when used in formal situations, to elders, or in environments that uphold communication ethics.

In contrast, in the Arab cultural context, the use of swearing is much more limited and strictly regulated by religious norms, honour values, and strong social structures. Harsh words that touch on aspects of family, social status or religion are not only considered disrespectful, but can also trigger serious conflict. This is due to the strong value system that upholds personal and collective dignity, so the use of language that is perceived as demeaning to one's honour is highly sensitive and can elicit strong social reactions.

Thus, this study reinforces the view put forward (Holmes, 2013) that language variation, including swearing, is strongly influenced by social factors such as power hierarchy, cultural norms, as well as the context of communication. Cursing is not merely a form of linguistic expression, but a reflection of the social values that live in

society. Therefore, understanding cursing from a sociolinguistic perspective opens up a wider space to see how language shapes and is shaped by the surrounding social reality.

Social Life of Ethnic Arabs and Indonesians

The social life of an ethnic group reflects its culture, values and norms. Arab and Indonesian ethnicities have differences in social structure, cultural values, and patterns of social interaction influenced by religious factors, history, and customs. The patrilineal marriage system regulates the community of Arab descent women are required to marry men of Arab descent as well. However, men of Arab descent may marry women of non Arab descent (Mafazah & Wahyuningtyas, 2020). Marriage with people of Arab descent only in the case of marriages also of Arab ethnicity has the aim of maintaining the clan or family that one has (Shelvira, 2019).

In Arab societies, social life tends to be patriarchal, where men have authority in the family and society. Family structures are strong, with clear roles for the father as head of the family and the mother managing the household (Handoyo & Khalda, 2020). Kinship relations are very important, and often the economic life and social decisions of the family are determined jointly by the members of the extended family. Arabs tend to be direct and blunt in their communication. This reflects their culture which values candour and courage in speech. In everyday interactions, their tone may sound louder than that of Indonesians, but this does not mean they are angry or disrespectful, but rather part of their way of communicating. However, this openness is also limited by Islamic norms of modesty. For example, interactions between men and women are strictly regulated, where . Women in Saudi Arabia attend women-only schools, have banks, shopping centres that are differentiated from men. Women have limitations for free interaction compared to men (Sa'diah & Halimatus, 2022).

Indonesian society has a more diverse social structure, depending on its cultural

background and region. Most societies still maintain close family values, but in some communities, such as in Java, there is a looser egalitarian system in the division of roles between men and women. Meanwhile, in some other areas, such as Minangkabau, a matrilineal system applies, where the lineage is drawn from the mother's side. Indonesians prioritise politeness and harmony in communication. Many Indonesians use more subtle, indirect and conflict-avoiding language in their speech. In Javanese culture, for example, there is the term *tepa selira*, which means understanding the other person's feelings before speaking.

In Arab culture, brotherhood and solidarity between fellow Muslims is very strong (Suhara & Adi, 2016). For example, when they meet, they often greet each other with greetings and show expressions of warmth, such as hugging or kissing cheeks between men. Women in Arab culture are generally more limited in interacting with the opposite sex, especially in public spaces. In Indonesia, social norms are more diverse depending on the region. In Javanese culture, politeness is highly upheld, where people often speak in low tones and honour their elders with the use of subtle language, such as in manners. Meanwhile, in regions such as Batak or Bugis, people are more expressive in their communication, similar to Arabic culture.

In addition, Arabs are known for their culture of mutual cooperation (*ta'awun*), where they help each other in various aspects of life. Major festivals such as Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha are celebrated with great fanfare, and sacrificial meat is distributed to the wider community as a form of social solidarity. As for traditions in Indonesia, *gotong royong* is also an important part of social life. People often work together in events such as community service, *kenduri*, and other traditional celebrations. The family tradition is still strong, where children often live with their parents until they get married, unlike the Arab community who tend to be more independent after adulthood.

Ethnic views of Arabs and Indonesians in their respective cultures

Each ethnicity has its own distinctive cultural understandings and values, which shape their mindset, social norms and the way they interact in their daily lives. Arabs and Indonesians share many similarities in cultural aspects, mainly due to the strong influence of Islam in both. However, there are also fundamental differences in terms of social structure, customs, and the way they express these cultural values in their daily lives.

Arabs place a high value on tribal loyalty or solidarity (*asabiyyah*). This concept dates back to pre-Islamic times and continues to persist in their social life. Loyalty to one's tribe and extended family is still the main value that determines one's social relationships, marriage and even career. This loyalty is also seen in the economic system, where many businesses in the Arab world are family-run, and trust in the business world is mostly given to fellow tribe members or close family.

Table 1. Comparison of Arab and Indonesian Cultural Values

Aspects	Arab Ethnicity	Indonesian Ethnicity
Social Structure	Patriarchal	More flexible, depending on ethnicity and region
Value of Collectivism	Loyalty to tribe and extended family	Mutual cooperation deliberation as core values
Expression	Open, direct, and expressive	Tend to be subtle, indirect, and maintain harmony
The role of religion	Islam as the main pillar of social and legal life	Islam blends with local culture, more flexible in religious practices
Cultural Diversity	Relatively with the dominance of Arabic and Islamic culture	Very diverse, consisting of Various religions
Social	More rigid in	More open,

Interaction	male-female relationships	especially in urban environments
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Both cultures emphasize collective life and familial relationships; however, the direction of loyalty differs. In Arab culture, loyalty tends to be vertical and centered on tribal structures, whereas in Indonesian culture, loyalty is more dispersed and based on broader social communities. The way these values are expressed also differs: Arab societies are generally expressive and direct, while Indonesian societies tend to maintain harmony through more gentle and considerate communication.

Insult Words between Indonesian Ethnic Groups and Arab Ethnic Groups

Cursing is a part of language expression that is often used in various social situations, whether to show anger, mockery, contempt, or even in the context of humour and familiarity. However, every culture has its own style and social boundaries in using swear words. Arabs and Indonesians differ in the structure, intensity, and social acceptance of swear words. In Indonesia, swear words are often used in varying degrees, from mild to harsh, and in some cases can be part of everyday social intercourse. Even in Indonesia, swear words are often used to greet people who have a very close relationship, giving the impression of closeness to others (Yusril, 2017). Meanwhile, in Arab culture, swearing tends to be more limited and is often associated with family and religious honour, so its impact can be greater.

In Arab culture, family honour and lineage are highly valued aspects. Therefore, slurs that attack a person's origins or honour are taken very seriously and can lead to major conflicts (Saumantri & Abdillah, 2020). Apart from curses that offend one's lineage, curses in Arabic culture look more sinister because of the use of cursed words to show emotional expression (Nurdin, Rahmad, 2019).

Table 2. Arabic curses that offend descendants

يا ابن الكلب	(Ya ibn al-kalb)	Puppy!
يا ابن الحرام	(Ya ibn al-haram)	Bastard child!
يا ابن القرد	(Ya ibn al-qird)	Monkey boy!
لعنة الله عليك	(La'natullāh 'alayk)	May Allah curse you!
يلعن دينك	(Yal'an dīnak)	May your religion be cursed!
يلعن أمك	(Yal'an ummak)	May your mother be cursed!

These expressions are very crude in Arab culture, especially as they touch on family lineage and honour. In some Arab countries, the use of such slurs can lead to physical altercations or even legal battles. In addition, since Arab society is very religious, swearing that involves religion or God is considered a very severe insult. Some curses can even result in punishment in countries where sharia law applies, such as the last two sentences. Such slurs are especially dangerous in Arab culture, as religion and family are two things that are highly respected. Therefore, the use of such curses is very rare in everyday situations except in extreme cases of anger.

As in many other cultures, animals are also often used as a form of insult in Arabic curses. These slurs are often used in situations of mild to moderate anger, but are still considered offensive in Arabic culture. For example, the use of donkey to refer to someone who is stupid

Table 3. Arabic curses relating to animals

حمار	(Himār)	Donkey!
كلب	(Kalb)	Dog!
قرد	(Qird)	Monkey!

Some Arabic curses are also delivered in the form of subtle innuendo or sarcasm, which sounds more polite but still hurtful. These sarcastic curses are more commonly used in everyday interactions compared to direct, harsh curses. For

example, the phrase Allāh yashfik is used in the context of sarcasm, such as insinuating that someone is stupid.

Table 4. Sarcastic Arabic insults

الله يشفيك	(Allāh yashfik)	May Allah heal you!
روح العب بعيد	(Rūh al'ab ba'īd)	Go play all the way!

In contrast to Arabic culture, Indonesian curses have a more flexible range of harshness, and in some regions, they can be used as an expression of familiarity or humour. Wijaya in (Triadi 2017) said that curses in Indonesian can be classified into various kinds: conditions, animals, objects, body parts, relationships, spirits, human and animal waste, people's conditions, professions, exclamations. In Indonesia, animal-based slurs are the most commonly used in a variety of situations, both in anger and in a joking context. They can be used in a humorous or serious context, depending on the tone and situation.

Table 5. Indonesian curses that smell like animals

Anjing!	(Generalised swearing that can be serious or joking)
Babi!	(Often used in angry situations, but very offensive to Muslims)
Monyet!	(Used to refer to people who are considered stupid or annoying)

Indonesian slurs also often refer to a person's stupidity or physical shortcomings. These slurs often appear in everyday speech, but their use can become very offensive if used in serious situations.

Table 6. Indonesian curses related to physicality and stupidity

Goblok!	Used to refer to someone who is considered stupid.
Tolol!	Similar in meaning to idiot, but often sounds more rude.
Cungkring!	A slur directed at people who are too thin.
Gendut!	Used to mock people who are fat.

In Indonesian culture, curses in the form of insinuations are also often used to avoid direct conflict. These insinuations are more subtle compared to direct cursing and are often used in everyday communication in Indonesia.

Table 7. Indonesian swear words with subtle innuendo

Pintar banget kamu!	Used in a tone of sarcasm to satirise someone's ignorance.
Lama banget kayak kura-kura!	Criticise someone who is slow at work.
Sabar, masih kreditan!	Used in a joking context to satirise someone who is still paying for things, especially vehicles.

Sociolinguistic Analysis of Indonesian and Arabic Entiste Cursing Expressions

Language not only functions as a means of communication, but also reflects social and cultural values in a society. One linguistic aspect that is interesting to study from a sociolinguistic perspective is cursing. Cursing is a form of expression that can be used for various purposes, such as venting emotions, showing familiarity, creating humour, or even expressing contempt (Ibrohim & Budi, 2018). In sociolinguistic studies, the use of cursing is strongly influenced by social factors, such as social status, culture, relationships between individuals, and the context of use. Indonesian and Arab ethnicities have significant differences in the use and acceptance of swearing, which is influenced by social norms, religion, and the value of honour in society.

Cursing is not always used in a negative context. In many situations, cursing is part of complex and meaningful social interactions. The use of cursing cannot be understood narrowly as a form of insult or verbal aggression, but must be seen in the context of social, cultural, and interpersonal relationships. In sociolinguistic studies, cursing has various functions depending on who utters it, to whom it is addressed, and in what kind of situation it is used. According to

(Andersson & Trudgill, 1990), there are several main functions of cursing in communication

Cursing often arises as a form of spontaneous expression of intense emotions, especially when one is frustrated, annoyed or angry. In this context, cursing functions as catharsis, which is the release of emotional distress through explosive speech. The use of cursing in this situation is not solely to attack the interlocutor, but rather as a channel to relieve inner tension. Psychologically, individuals feel more relieved after uttering a curse, although socially this action can have consequences depending on who and in what situation the curse is uttered. Therefore, the expression of anger through cursing has a pragmatic function in communication, but it is also vulnerable to misinterpretation if social context and relationships between individuals are not considered.

Outside the context of anger, swearing can also have different social meanings, especially in informal interactions between close friends or peer groups. In these situations, swearing can serve as a tool to emphasise emotional closeness and solidarity. For example, a group of friends can throw curses at each other in a joking tone without taking offence. In this case, cursing has undergone a shift in meaning: it is no longer a form of verbal aggression, but a symbol of relational closeness and intimacy. The use of this kind of cursing usually has a code or shared understanding among speakers that the utterance is not meant literally. This shows that language, including cursing, can be used creatively to strengthen social relations, as long as the context and relations between individuals are mutually understood.

Apart from being a form of expression of emotion and familiarity, cursing is also often used in a humorous or sarcastic style of communication. In comedy shows, television shows, or social media content, cursing is used to build comedic effect, subtly criticise, or express irony. In this context, cursing becomes part of a rhetorical strategy used to attract attention, create surprise, or assert a certain stance on

an issue. Although they contain harsh words, the use of swearing in humour is usually framed in a lighthearted manner and is not intended to be personally offensive. However, the effectiveness and acceptability of swearing in humour still depends on cultural norms and audience sensitivity, so its use should still be tailored to the prevailing social context.

CONCLUSION

Based on a sociolinguistic study of the use of swear words in Indonesian and Arabic society, it can be concluded that swearing is not just a form of expression of negative emotions, but also reflects the social values, culture, and norms prevailing in a community. In Indonesian culture, curses often have a more flexible meaning, which can be used in the context of anger, humour, and even familiarity. In contrast, in Arabic culture, curses are more restrictive and are often related to family honour, social status, and religious values, so they have a greater social impact.

This difference reflects the social structure of each society. Arab societies are more patriarchal and maintain family honour as a top priority, so cursing that touches on family or religious aspects can trigger serious conflict. Indonesian society, on the other hand, is more egalitarian, and in many cases, the use of swearing is acceptable in everyday social settings, depending on the social relationship and context. This shows that language is not only a means of communication, but also a reflection of cultural norms that govern social interactions between individuals in a particular society.

In terms of the structure and form of curses, Indonesians mostly use curses based on animals, ignorance, and physical deficiencies, such as Dog, Goblok, or Monkey. Meanwhile, in Arabic culture, curses tend to be more related to lineage, family honour, and religious aspects, such as Ya ibn al-kalb! (puppy) or *La'natullāh 'alayk!* (may Allah curse you). This difference shows how language reflects social hierarchies and fundamental values in a culture.

In the context of cross-cultural communication, these different perceptions of swearing can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts, especially in interactions between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. For example, the use of a slur such as Dog! in a joking context in Indonesia may be considered normal, but in Arab culture, a similar slur may be considered a severe insult. Therefore, understanding linguistic and cultural differences is important in maintaining harmonious cross-cultural communication, both in face-to-face conversations and in interactions on social media.

Overall, this study confirms that swearing has different social and pragmatic functions in each culture. The sociolinguistic analysis of swearwords in Indonesian and Arabic society provides new insights into how language reflects the social structure, cultural values, and norms prevailing in society. Understanding these differences is expected to increase awareness of cultural diversity in cross-ethnic communication, as well as help individuals interact more effectively and respect cultural differences in language use.

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