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Swear Words Used by Coastal People of Pidie Aceh

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Abstract

This study was done to find and describe the forms, the references, the meanings, and the purposes of swearing-in Acehnese by the people in Pidie Regency, Aceh, Indonesia. Swearing refers to utterances, usually with negative implications, which are used by people to express their feelings. This qualitative study displays spoken language used by the respondents within the sub-districts of Muara Tiga and Batee in Pidie. The data were processed in three phases: selecting, transcribing and analyzing the appropriate data. The analysis was done by interpreting the forms, references, and purposes of swearing. The forms of swearing were mono-morphemes, poly-morphemes, phrases, clauses, and sentences. Those referred to animals, supernatural beings, religious terms, body parts, family members, human activities, oaths, professions, diseases, and exclamations. The swearing had connotative and denotative meanings to express anger, annoyance, astonishment, insult, and jokes.

Keywords: Language analysis, swearing, coastal community, Aceh, Indonesia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language is the main way used by people to communicate with each other. Despite the existence of other forms of communication such as gestures, signs, codes and many others, language is still the most appropriate and the easiest way used to deliver messages. Keraf (1993) also agreed with this notion, saying that language produced by human speech organs was sounds produced for symbols.

As social beings, people always want to express their passions, thoughts, and feelings to each other. This agrees with Keraf (1993), who said that language, which is in the oral form, could deliver all the information and messages from one person to another without any limitations, particularly if it is compared to any other forms of communication. Thus, language can deliver various meanings, including positive and negative connotations. One of the interesting phenomenon relating to the use of language for expressing feelings, emotions, and thoughts are swearing.

One of the communities often uses swearing in their daily life are people living in the coastal area. As found by Grieve (2015) as cited in Ligato (2015), it is assumed that because of their hard living environment and other related reasons, they become people with strong characters who can freely express their feelings without any hesitation. Such communities also live in Pidie District, on the north-western coastal area of Aceh. This coastal area includes the sub-districts of Muara Tiga, Batee, Kota Sigli, Simpang Tiga, and Kembang Tanjong.

Based on the explanations above, it was considered interesting to research swearing within the area mentioned above. This study would aim to reveal the forms, references, and meanings, as well as the purpose of swearing, which was used by the people living there.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Swearing

Swearing refers to utterances, usually dirty, impolite and taboo words, which are used to express anger, annoyance, disgust, and abuse. In Indonesia, swearing is known as *makian* or *cacian*, which refers to using expressions for feelings in the form of impolite utterances (Depdiknas, 2002). Laksana (2009) noted that swearing is uttering dirty or taboo words in anger, disgust or annoyance. Then, Montague (1973) has previously said that swearing is using words impolitely to express strong emotional feelings and is often done to express frustration. Thus, it can be said that swear words are utterances used by people to express annoyance, feelings or emotions, often unique language, which is considered harsh and impolite. This includes expressing sympathy or showing the truth (Gardner & Umphress, 2019).

In Acehese culture, swearing is known as *teunak* or *teumenak*. Both terms refer to impolite and harsh language expressing anger and annoyance. Harun (2009) has said that the Acehese tend to use swear words and swearing to trigger fights between opposing parties; this is often done in a public place and is often slanderous. Besides, Harun (2009) has added that swearing is often related to taboos and actions that are prohibited. They are to be avoided by the society so that they are respected by other people (Jaya & Daud, 2017). Wijaya and Rohmadi (2013, p. 11) have categorized

taboos based on psychological motivations, including taboos towards fear, food, and property. Referring to which, swearing is considered as a taboo towards property since it is concerned with impolite actions.

2.2 Forms of Swearing

There are various forms of swearing. [Wijaya and Rohmadi \(2013\)](#) have said that swearing can appear in the form of words, phrases, and clauses. Similarly, [Husaini \(2013\)](#) has said that swearing can appear as a mono-morpheme, a poly-morpheme, a phrase or a sentence.

2.2.1 Mono-morpheme

A Mono-morpheme is similar to a free morpheme. A free morpheme refers to a morpheme, which can be used directly, as an individual word such as *putar* ‘turn’, *merah* ‘red’ and *pergi* ‘go’ ([Chaer, 2008, p. 17](#)). In the Acehnese language, such morphemes also exist as has been mentioned by [Sulaiman \(1979, p. 26\)](#) who said that a free morpheme in Acehnese can stand by itself as a word such as *plueng* ‘run’, *rumoh* ‘house’, *baroe* ‘yesterday’, and so on.

2.2.2 Poly-morpheme

A Poly-morpheme refers to a combination of morphemes that is produced by a morphemic process. This process combines free morphemes to bond them. [Muslich \(2008, p. 35\)](#) has listed three morphemic processes used in the Indonesian language, namely: (1) affixation, (2) repetition and (3) compounding. Meanwhile, [Sulaiman \(1979\)](#) only mentioned two forms of morphemic process, namely affixation by adding a prefix, an infix and/or a suffix, as well as by repetition as full or partial or affixed repetition.

2.2.3 Phrase

A phrase is a grammatical unit consisting of two or more words, which does not exceed a limit of a function ([Ba’dulu & Herman, 2010](#)). Syntactically, a phrase is a unit below a clause, yet it is above a word ([Chaer, 1994](#)). Then, phrases can be divided into nominal, numeral, adjectival and adverbial phrases.

A phrase cannot exceed certain functions, thus it will only act as a subject, a predicate, an object, or a complement ([Sulaiman, 1979](#)). If a phrase consists of more than two words, the words have to be free morphemes. [Sulaiman \(1979\)](#) added that the words forming a phrase could be a word and a word, a word and a phrase, a phrase, and a word, and a phrase and a phrase.

In the Acehnese language, the forms of phrases are similar to the forms of phrases in Indonesian and in English. There are nominal phrases e.g. *rumoh nyan* ‘that house’, verbal phrases e.g. *ban teuka* ‘just arrived’, adjectival phrases e.g. *kaya that* ‘very rich’, numerical phrases e.g. *limong droe* ‘five persons’, adverbial phrases e.g. *baroe seupot* ‘yesterday afternoon’, and prepositional phrases e.g. *bak jih* ‘at him’.

2.2.4 Clause

A clause is a syntactical unit higher than a phrase, yet lower than a sentence. In a clause, the existence of a subject and a predicate is necessary. Chaer (2002) has explained the difference between a clause and a sentence is that a sentence has a final intonation. Thus, without final intonation, a group of words containing a subject and a predicate is considered a clause.

References to the Acehnese language do not explain about clauses in detail. Yet, Sulaiman (1979) has stated that in Acehnese, a subject and a predicate might appear in one word, as in *geujak* 'he goes'. This word consists of a prefix *geu-* as the subject, and *jak*, as the predicate. Such a grammatical unit can be considered as a clause since it has no final intonation.

2.2.5 Sentence

Sulaiman (1976) has defined a sentence as a group of words having a complete meaning, which can stand-alone. He also added that a sentence refers to an utterance starting and finishing in silence. Then, it has intonation that expresses the completion of meaning (Sulaiman, 1979). A sentence has, at the least, a subject and a predicate. In Indonesian, there are several forms of sentences, namely: (1) a verbal sentence having a verb as its predicate, (2) a nominal sentence having another class of words, e.g. a noun, an adjective, a pronoun or a numeral, as the predicate, (3) an active sentence with emphasis on the subject and (4) a passive sentence with emphasis on the object or on an adverb. Wildan (2002) has also explained that a sentence is a comprehensive or complete unit of language, which in spoken form is connoted by rhythm, pause, and intonation, which, in written form, are noted by typographic symbols like a full stop or an exclamation mark.

2.3 References for Swearing

A referent is as a non-language unit referred to by language (Depdiknas, 2002), while McKechnie (1955) says "... in semantics the object referred to by a term". As an example, a "house" is the referent of the word *house*. The relationship between language and the referent has been explained by de Saussure (1959) as cited in Chaer (1994) by introducing the "*term of significance*" and *signified*; the first refers to the language and the last to the referent or the real object. Then, Pateda (2010) has mentioned the referent as the *acuan* or reference, which meant the thing, which is symbolized by the sign or the word.

Wijaya and Rohmadi (2013, p. 14) have mentioned eight referents for swearing, namely: conditions, animals, supernatural creatures, things, parts of the human body, kinship, activities, exclamations, and occupations. In Acehnese, Husaini (2013, p. 79) has listed nine referents of swearing, they are characteristics, animals, things, persons, parts of the human body, oaths, conditions, supernatural creatures, and diseases.

2.4 The Meaning of Swearing

The meaning of swearing relates to De Saussure's *theory of significance* and to *signify*. The units of language, which are represented by sounds, become of

significance, while the meanings refer to the objects signified. As an example, the word *bajingan* ‘rascal’ is represented by sounds /b/, /a/, /j/, /i/, /n/, /g/, /a/, /n/ as its significance, while the meaning of it is a person that commits bad activities. There is no exact relationship between significance and what is signified, as noted by [Ogden and Richards \(1923\)](#), then, [Chaer \(1994, p. 287\)](#) re-drew the triangle of meaning to explain the relationship between these two aspects of language.

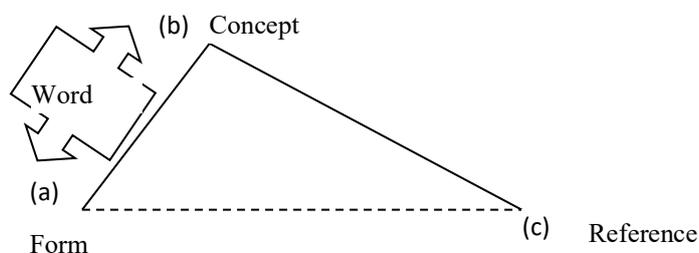


Figure 1. Triangle of Meaning.

Language is used by people, thus, the condition of society affects the meaning of it. [Keraf \(2004\)](#) has discussed denotative and connotative meanings. Similarly, [Chaer \(1994, p. 289\)](#) has described six different kinds of meanings: (1) lexical, grammatical, and contextual meanings, (2) referential and non-referential meanings, (3) denotative and connotative meanings, (4) conceptual and associative meanings, (5) word and terminological meanings, and (6) idiomatic and proverbial meanings.

2.4.1 Lexical, grammatical and contextual meanings

Lexical meaning refers to the meaning of a word without any relationship to any condition or context. As an example, the word horse or *kuda* refers to ‘four-legged animals that are often ridden by people’, but there are other kinds of horses like a gym horse or a carpenter’s horse and the word can be used as an adjective, e.g. horseshoe, horse cart or a verb as in to horse around or even an idiom as in a Trojan horse. Then, to the grammatical meaning can appear due to affixation, as in the example horse riding or *berkuda* means ‘to ride a horse’.

2.4.2 Referential and non-referential meanings

Referential meaning occurs when a word or words have a reference in a real-world situation. Thus, the words *a black stallion* with a picture of one are considered as words with referential meaning. Contrarily, the non-referential meaning has no reference in real-world matters, such as the words because, or, and, etc.

2.4.3 Denotative and connotative meanings

Denotative meaning is the real meaning of a word or lexeme [Chaer \(1994\)](#). This kind of meaning is not affected by the condition in which the word(s) is/are used. An example is the word *monkey*. This word refers to a primate that lives in a jungle and some ways resemble a human being. On the other hand, the word *monkey* can be used with a connotative meaning, which uses the word, without referring to the real object

(Chaer, 2004). Thus, in the case of the word *monkey*, it can be used to playfully refer to a child as in ‘*the little monkey*’ or to insult or denigrate someone by saying that he is like a monkey.

2.4.4 Conceptual and associative meanings

Leech (1974) as cited in Chaer (1994) described the notions of conceptual and associative meaning. Conceptual meaning is the meaning of a word without any association with a certain condition. Thus, conceptual meaning refers to denotative, lexical, or referential meaning. The associative meaning, on the other hand, deals with the concepts added to the original word.

2.4.5 Word and terminological meanings

Word meaning may be affected by the condition in which the word is used. As an example, the word *head* may be used with *a master* to build a new meaning. On the other hand, the terminological meaning is affected by the field of knowledge in which a word is used. For example, the word *operate* may have different meanings relating to the field; in which it is used, thus in the medical field it refers to surgery, in civil engineering, it refers to the operation of heavy equipment and in the military, it refers to a raid, attack or ambush.

2.4.6 Idiomatic and proverbial meanings

An idiom is an utterance with an unpredictable meaning, either due to lexical or grammatical meaning (Chaer, 1994). Fromkin et al. (2003) also expressed a similar argument that an idiom referred to words that have a meaning, which is related to intra-linguistic aspects to find its meaning. Idioms require the acquisition and learning to understand their meanings. As an example, in Indonesian, the phrase *menjual rumah* ‘to sell a house’ refers to the act of getting money in exchange for a house. Yet, the phrase *menjual gigi*, literally ‘to sell a tooth’, is idiomatic and means to laugh. Similarly, to call someone *a dark horse* means that that person is a surprise candidate in some form of contest.

2.5 The Purpose of Swearing

In general, people swear to express their feelings, especially for annoyance, dislike, astonishment, and even for joking. Wijaya and Rohmadi (2013) have stated that, for the person who is the object of the swearing, it might be insulting to hear such words, yet, for the person who is doing the swearing, it is a way to express her feelings.

Then, the study by McEnery (2006, p. 6) stated that the purposes of swearing are:

- (1) to insult,
- (2) to redirect the topic of speaking from one to another,
- (3) to play a joke,
- (4) to respond to a previous insult,
- (5) to expel the listener, and
- (6) to ask someone to do something.

3. METHODS

A qualitative approach was used since the object of this study was the real-world phenomena existing within society, in this case, the coastal society in Pidie District. Thus Sugiyono (2008) has stated that qualitative research examines objects in nature with the researcher as a key instrument. This is a descriptive study to describe the uses, meanings, references, and purposes of swearing done by the people in the study area. Then, the sample was selected using purposive sampling by selecting two coastal sub-districts: Muara Tiga and Batee in Pidie.

The data collection encompassed 150 participants from different background. The age of them was on the range of 19-80 years old as they also had a various occupation, as teachers, fishermen, farmers, students, and owners of coffee shops; the data was collected at different areas and places to ensure that all swearing existing within the community was recorded well.

The data was gathered by listening, interacting, communicating and recording (Mahsun, 2005). A recorder was used to record the conversations. The recorded conversations were transcribed by using a systematical list by Bousfield (2008). Practically, the data collection was accomplished by recording the conversations of the respondents without knowing that their utterances would be studied. It was conducted in several locations, such as traditional coffee shops, ports, and *balai* 'halls, offices'. Data analysis was done by describing the forms, references, and meanings, while pragmatic analysis was done to revealing the purpose of swearing.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Forms of Swearing

The result showed that the swearing done by people living in these two coastal areas in Pidie had five forms, namely: mono-morphemes, poly-morphemes, phrases, clauses, and sentences.

4.1.1 Mono-morphemes

Mono-morphemes are similar to free morphemes. They can be used independently and have a specific meaning. Some examples mono-morpheme swearwords used by people, living in these coastal areas in Pidie, are the following:

<i>Asei</i>	'dog'
<i>Bui</i>	'pig'
<i>Bukuem</i>	'puffer fish'

4.1.2 Poly-morphemes

Some words had been formed by a morphological process. Some examples of such swear words are the following.

<i>Bloh-bloh</i>	'to trample on'
<i>Meu-jen</i>	'to be possessed by a genie'

Ma-keuh 'your mother'
Seu-majoh 'eat'

4.1.3 Phrases

Swearing using phrases only occurred with a nominal phrase and verbal phrase, as in the examples that follow:

Nominal phrases

Aneuk aseu 'puppy'
Aneuk bui 'piglet'
Aneuk manyak 'toddler'

Verbal phrases

Careuh that 'really careless'
Kureung aja 'rude, wicked, uneducated, disrespectful'

4.1.4 Clauses

Swearing using clauses was often done as a complement to an adverb, as in the example which follows.

Kameng batok 'a goat that coughs'

As in the sentence:

Hi kameng batok kah meunye kah lagei nyan. 'If you did that, you would look like a goat that's coughing'.

Manok keumarom 'a hen that's laying (eggs)'

As in the sentence:

That karu si nong nyan, lagei manok keumarom. 'She is so noisy like a hen that's laying (eggs)'.

4.1.5 Sentences

People living in these coastal areas in Pidie also swore using sentences. These are some examples.

Lagei leumo tepeuteungoh lam mon! '(somebody) looks like a cow that's been rescued from the well!'

Mate ma kah jeut? 'do you want your mother to die?'

Beubrok lidah keuh! 'may your tongue rot!'

4.2 The References Used in Swearing

Several types of references were used for swearing by these people as in the examples below.

4.2.1 *Animals*

Swearing referring to an animal means to have the character of such an animal in that person. Some examples were as follows:

<i>Asei</i>	‘dog’
<i>Bui</i>	‘pig’
<i>Siben</i>	‘monkey’
<i>Jampok</i>	‘owl’

4.2.2 *Supernatural creatures*

Acehnese people also believe in supernatural beings, so swearing related to them usually refers to the bad character as in the examples in the following.

<i>Jen</i>	‘genie’
<i>Aneuk jen</i>	‘son of genie’
<i>Jen Afred</i>	‘genie of Afrid’

4.2.3 *Things*

Some things become referents for swearing. Usually, people use dirty things when swearing, as in the examples below.

<i>Broh</i>	‘rubbish’
<i>Leuhob</i>	‘mud’
<i>Boh jeulatang</i>	‘fruit of Jelatang (<i>Toxicodendron radicans</i>)’

4.2.4 *Religious terms*

Religious terms used for swearing also usually refer to a bad thing, as in the examples below.

<i>Simalu’un</i>	‘dunce’
<i>Kafe</i>	‘infidel’
<i>Dajeu</i>	‘Dajjal (antichrist)’

4.2.5 *Parts of the human body*

Certain parts of the human body, usually genitalia, are used for swearing by these people as in the examples below.

<i>Mata kah</i>	‘your eyes’
<i>Pukoe</i>	‘private part’
<i>Tet ma</i>	‘your mother’s private part’

4.2.6 *Kinship*

Sometimes, people use terms of address to swear, as in the following examples.

<i>Ma keuh</i>	‘your mother’
<i>Abu syik</i>	‘grandpa’
<i>Nek tu</i>	‘great grandparent’

4.2.7 People

Several terms referring to people are also used to swear, as in these examples.

<i>Aneuk miet</i>	‘toddler’
<i>Anuek manyak</i>	‘toddler’
<i>Apa ben</i>	‘dunce’

4.2.8 Characteristics

Negative characteristics are often used to swear, as in the examples below.

<i>Kureung aja</i>	‘uneducated’
<i>Careuh that</i>	‘very busy’
<i>Kurek akai</i>	‘slick’
<i>Klo priep</i>	‘stubborn’

4.2.9 Activities

Activities, which are harmful or should be avoided, are used to swear. Sometimes, those were followed by the name of an animal as shown below.

<i>Jak pap</i>	‘go kick’
<i>Pap aseï</i>	‘kick the dog’
<i>Pap leumo</i>	‘kick the cow’

4.2.10 Oaths

People use oaths to swear, for example praying that a bad accident will occur, as in the exam

<i>Mate ma jeut</i>	‘may your mother die’
<i>Meubudok keuh</i>	‘may you get scabies’
<i>Meupurei keuh</i>	‘may your body itch’

4.2.11 Occupations

Bad occupations are also used for swearing, as in the examples below.

<i>Pancuri</i>	‘thief’
<i>Maleng</i>	‘robber’
<i>Toke buntut</i>	‘illegal lottery seller’

4.2.12 Diseases

Sometimes, the names of diseases are used to swear. Some examples are given below.

<i>Pungo bui</i>	‘epilepsy’
<i>Kude</i>	‘scabies’
<i>Kurap</i>	‘ringworm’

4.2.13 Exclamations

Exclamations with no meaning, are used as utterance to express feelings. People living in these coastal areas often use the following exclamations to swear.

<i>Citeh</i>	‘exclamation term’
<i>Yehai</i>	‘exclamation term’

4.3 The Meaning of Swearing

Swearing relates to a certain condition, thus, the meaning of swearing is contextual or in other words, it has connotative meaning. Based on the analysis, there are two types of meaning for the swearing used by these people: firstly, words with multiple meanings; and secondly words with negative meanings.

4.3.1 Words with multiple meanings

Words with many meanings refer to the meaning of words that are determined by the context in which they are used; this may mean a positive utterance or a negative utterance depending on the situation. One word often used is *ileh* ‘eel’. This word may refer to a positive condition such as clever or smart. However, it can also be used negatively to mean slick or slimy.

4.3.2 Words with negative implications

These kinds of swear words are used to express negative feelings. There are many such swear words used to express negative feelings with many varied forms. Some of these swear words are words in Indonesian or Acehnese that mean disgusting, annoying, thieving, idiotic, weak, lazy, stubborn, useless, despicable, greedy, confused, slow, fussy, and so on. People in these coastal areas tended to use swear words to express their negative feelings that included expressions for various forms of swearing including references to animals, kinship, conditions and so forth.

4.4 The Purpose of Swearing

As explained above, swearing serves many purposes. Based on the analysis of the results from this study, people living in these coastal areas of Pidie used swearing for seven purposes:

- (1) to express anger,
- (2) to express annoyance,
- (3) to intimidate,
- (4) to express amazement,
- (5) to insult,
- (6) to intimate, and
- (7) to joke around.

From the purposes above, it can be concluded that the foremost drive to swearing is to articulate emotions, particularly to express anger and frustration. The effect of emotion from swearing depends on the speakers’ experience with their culture and the languages they speak.

5. DISCUSSION

Even though the analysis showed that swearing has several forms, people living in these two coastal areas of Pidie mostly use phrases to swear. They were often used as a complement in a sentence or as a response on certain occasions. Relating to the referents, the most-commonly occurring referents were activities (47 occurrences), animals (38 occurrences), characteristics (34 occurrences), and things (24 occurrences). Then, the dominant meanings in swearing were connotative.

There were also words for swearing that were used exclusively by these people. There was the word *siguepoh* that has a certain historical association for the people of Muara Tiga, which made people living there very angry if outsiders used it. The word refers to the legendary culprit who was beaten by an Islamic figure in the past. Also, the people living in Batee had such word of *bangsa* meaning 'nation'. This word was forbidden to be used for swearing by the people of Batee, like in the utterance "*Sit kameunan droe bangsa Teupin Jeu*" 'people living in Teupin Jeu were like that'. It was forbidden to use it since it not only referred to a person but all the people living there, including their ancestors.

There were several interesting facts related to the swearing used by these people. Firstly, swearing was often used when a person was talking about another person or an occasion. Secondly, searing to intimidate and to insult was often used by people with high social status towards people of lower status. Moreover, people with similar social status used swearing to build an intimate situation and for joking. Thirdly, as the situation became less formal, people would use swearing more often. Lastly, young people, especially teenagers, were the most common users of swearing. They used it in their casual talk to build intimate relationships, including showing their feelings and empathy, amongst themselves.

6. CONCLUSION

Swearing is a part of language use that has a certain function in communication. It may be used to express feelings, to intimidate, to insult, or even just to make the relationship become closer and even for joking around. The fact that people living in coastal areas often use swearing in their daily communications does not mean that they are impolite. On the contrary, such a condition reveals that these people live in an open-minded society where they can express their feelings freely, even by using harsh swear words. They rarely used such words to intimidate or to insult, yet, they swore just for fun, for joking around, for showing their feelings, and to make their relationships closer and more intimate.

Nevertheless, this study had a very limited scope only covering people living in two coastal sub-district areas in Pidie. Thus, other researchers can do similar research over larger areas to get clearer images of the use of swearing by the Acehnese. Furthermore, sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects of swearing should also be studied in future research.

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