

A Comparison of Balinese and Swiss German Swear Words Based on Their Referents

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ABSTRACT

The use of swear words is common worldwide and often leads to misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication, especially between native Balinese speakers and Swiss German speakers who frequently interact in Bali's tourism sector. This study aims to compare the similarities and differences in the references of swear words in the Balinese and Swiss German languages. The research uses a qualitative method using descriptive comparative design theory with a Naturalistic Inquiry approach. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with six native informants and document analysis of relevant theses. The results show that the references of swear words in both languages share several similarities, such as the use of themes (1) religion, (2) sex gender terms, (3) excrement, (4) animal terms, (5) personal background, (6) mental illness, and (7) sexual activity. Notable differences were also found, with the Balinese language exhibiting a diverse set of contextual terms strongly influenced by local culture, mythology, and social classification. Swiss German swear words tend to be more direct, vulgar, and rooted in a more universal Western social perspective. This study recommends implementing culturally sensitive language communication training for tourism practitioners and further research into cross-cultural sociolinguistic studies.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is very important in human life because it is not only a tool for communication but also a symbol of social and cultural identity (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). Through language, humans can interact, build relationships, and pass on their culture to the next generation (Chaer et al., 2010). One notable aspect of language is swearing, which carries strong social and emotional meanings. In communication, when someone is angry, they usually use swear words to emphasize their emotions. According to Stapleton et al. (2022), swear words can express or convey emotions, emphasize a point, such as anger, humor, frustration, or surprise, depending on the cultural and social context in which they are used, and even serve as a means of social bonding.

Comparing swear words between Balinese and Swiss German speakers is crucial to understanding how language and cultural differences shape the expression of strong emotions and social interactions. One interesting case is the potential misunderstanding that arises when Swiss German tourists in Bali use language or expressions that are commonplace in their home country, but may be considered highly offensive to Balinese speakers in Bali. Although Germany and

Switzerland share the same linguistic roots in German, Switzerland uses a local variety called Swiss German (*Schweizerdeutsch*), which differs from Standard German (*Hochdeutsch*) in pronunciation, vocabulary, and everyday usage. Swiss German is widely used in informal communication, including emotional expressions such as swearing.

The increase in the number of tourists from German-speaking countries visiting Bali strengthens intercultural communication. Studies by Artajaya and Yanti (2020) and the Bali Hotels Association (2023) show that Germany and Switzerland are among the countries with the highest number of visitors to Bali. These interactions create opportunities for cultural exchange, but also open up the possibility of misunderstandings, especially in the use of harsh words that may have different meanings and social implications in each culture.

Although intercultural interactions between Balinese people and visitors from German-speaking regions are increasing, previous research on swear words has mostly focused on a single language or a single cultural context. For example, a study conducted by Yanti (2025) examined swearing in German communication, and a study conducted by Saniada et al. (2023) examined and analyzed swear words used by the children in Poh Bergong Village. Studies comparing swear words across different cultural and linguistic contexts are limited, especially those involving Balinese and Swiss German speakers. Previous studies have examined swear words in Balinese and Standard German. However, no previous study has specifically investigated or compared the references of swear words in Balinese and Swiss German. Although Swiss German and Standard German belong to the same language family, Swiss German is an Alemannic dialect with its own distinct lexical, phonological, and cultural characteristics. Therefore, comparisons between Balinese and Swiss German have not yet been extensively explored. The absence of this comparative analysis creates a gap in understanding how swear words differ in reference between these two linguistic and cultural contexts.

This study aims to compare the swear words used by Balinese and Swiss German speakers by analyzing their references. The uniqueness of this study lies in its cross-cultural comparative analysis of swear words in Balinese and Swiss German, which has not been explored in existing literature. By providing insight into these linguistic differences, this study is expected to contribute to sociolinguistic research and raise awareness of cross-cultural communication. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research question: What are the similarities and differences in the references of the swear words between Balinese and Swiss German speakers?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics studies how language interacts with social and cultural norms. This field analyzes how language is used in different social contexts and how cultural values, social identity, power structures, and communication situations influence language choice (Hagen, 2013). Language is not only a system of symbols, but also a social tool that reflects cultural identity and social hierarchy.

Hagen (2013) states that language use cannot be separated from the social context in which it occurs. The meaning and function of an utterance, including taboo expressions, are influenced by social norms and values. Therefore, understanding the social and cultural background is very important in analyzing language variation.

Beers Fägersten (2007) explains that offensive or taboo language is not universal, but rather socially constructed and shaped by cultural values. Sociolinguistics also highlights how language reflects social identity, solidarity, and power relations. Word choice, speech style, and pronunciation can indicate social status, group affiliation, or attitude towards the interlocutor. Therefore, sociolinguistics provides a framework for analyzing language variation and intercultural communication.

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication and sociolinguistics are closely related in understanding how language and culture influence communication. Intercultural communication refers to the process of meaningful information exchange between individuals from different cultural backgrounds while maintaining mutual respect and minimizing potential conflicts (Sayer, 2013).

The sociolinguistic perspective explains how language functions within social structures and cultural environments. This perspective emphasizes the importance of verbal and nonverbal communication as well as the linguistic resources used by speakers from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, sociolinguistics helps explain the dynamics and complexity of intercultural communication.

Swear Words

Swear words are taboo expressions that are considered offensive, rude, or vulgar in certain cultural contexts. These words are often used to express strong emotions such as anger, frustration, humor, or surprise (Hagen, 2013). Beers Fägersten (2007) notes that swear words can also serve to emphasize, provide humor, or create social bonds depending on the context. In Balinese culture, swear words are closely related to social hierarchy and cultural values. Language reflects social status and respect, so the use of taboo words is regulated by norms of politeness (Wisudayanti, 2020). Harismayanti et al. (2017) found that adolescents in Singaraja use swear words humorously or expressively to build social identity, but their use is still controlled by social norms.

In contrast, studies on Standard German culture suggest that speakers often use coarse words as emotional or humorous expressions with fewer social restrictions. Cooper (2019) states that German culture tends to view language more directly, allowing the use of coarse words for emotional emphasis. Eder et al. (2019) also highlight that such expressions may reflect cultural acceptance of emotional authenticity. However, these findings primarily pertain to speakers of Standard German and may not fully represent regional varieties such as Swiss German, which has its own sociolinguistic norms and cultural nuances. Comparative studies show that cultural norms influence how swear words are perceived and used. In Balinese culture, swear words are related to social status and relationships, while in German culture, they are related to emotional expression.

References of Swear Words

Swear words can be categorized based on the objects they refer to, which often reflect cultural values, social norms, and emotional expressions within a society. Several experts have proposed different classifications for the objects referred to by swear words. Yani et al. (2017) identified seven main references found in American and Balinese cultures, namely sex, religion, excrement, animal terms, sexual activities, personal background, and mental disorders. Similarly, Sarnika (2018), in an analysis of swear words used in the American sitcom *How I Met Your Mother*, classified into five categories: sex, excrement, animals, personal background, and religion or taboo expressions. Afrilya et al. (2021), in their study of profanity used in PewDiePie videos, proposed four types of references: excretion, gender, bodily functions, and death. Although these studies employ different classifications, they generally highlight similar themes concerning socially sensitive or taboo topics. Religious references are often considered highly offensive in cultures with strong religious values, such as Balinese society, which is influenced by Hinduism, where such expressions are rarely used as swear words to avoid social consequences (Yani et al., 2017).

On the other hand, Swiss German culture tends to treat religious expression more casually due to its stronger secular perspective (Cooper, 2019). Swear words related to sex and gender often target biological sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation, and are considered highly inappropriate in Balinese culture due to norms of politeness and social hierarchy (Wisudayanti, 2020). In contrast, in Swiss German communication, such words may appear more casually (Eder

et al., 2019). Other common references include excrement and bodily processes, which are often used to express strong emotions such as disgust or anger (Afrilya et al., 2021). Animal terms are also frequently used metaphorically as insults, reflecting cultural associations with certain animal traits (Wijana, 2004). Additionally, insults referring to personal background, such as family status or social rank, reflect the hierarchical social structure of Balinese society (Harismayanti et al., 2017). References to mental disorders and sexual activity are also frequently found in swear words, although these expressions are considered highly taboo in conservative cultures such as Bali, while they may appear more frequently in informal conversation in German-speaking societies (Eder et al., 2019).

Comparative Contrastive Linguistics

Comparative-Contrastive Linguistics studies the similarities and differences between languages. This approach helps to analyze linguistic references across languages, as well as explaining potential misunderstandings in intercultural communication (Khansir & Pakdel, 2019). Therefore, this approach is relevant for analyzing the form, function, and reference of rude words in Balinese and Swiss German.

A comparative analysis of the study conducted by Yani et al. (2017) highlights their significant contribution in examining the use of profanity from an intercultural perspective, particularly in relation to broader social dynamics. Among these studies, the research by Dewi et al. (2017) stands out for its comprehensive categorization of forms of swear words and their semantic domains, while the research by Dewipayani et al. (2017) focuses on the interpersonal function of swear words, particularly in adolescent interactions. In addition, Wiyasa et al. (2017) analyzed the use of profanity among the Bali Aga community in Sidetapa Village and showed that local cultural values and traditional beliefs have a strong influence on the meaning and function of such expressions. Meanwhile, Saniada et al. (2023) studied the use of profanity among children in Poh Bergong Village and found that profanity can also appear in early social interactions and may serve as a form of emotional expression or communication between peers. Although offering valuable insights, several limitations remain. For example, the limited number of participants in Wisudayanti's (2020) study reduces the generalizability of the findings, and the emphasis on the local context may limit the application of the results to other cultural contexts.

These studies show that swear words have different references depending on the culture. In Bali, swear words are not only used to insult, but also to express emotions, build social relationships, and reflect local traditions, especially in traditional communities such as Bali Aga. In Germany, swear words are usually used to express anger, frustration, or disappointment. They can also be used to belittle or insult others. This shows that although the use of swear words is a universal phenomenon, their meaning is highly dependent on culture. These studies provide a strong and relevant basis for comparative research on swear words. However, it is important to note that all of the studies reviewed only used a qualitative descriptive approach. Therefore, further research using more diverse or mixed methods is highly recommended in order to explore the phenomenon of swear word usage in greater depth across different cultures.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive comparative design with a contrastive analysis approach. Qualitative methods are suitable for examining language use in natural contexts and understanding meaning from the speakers' perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The main objective of this study is to explore and identify similarities and differences in the references of swear words used by native speakers of Balinese and Swiss German. Research data were collected from primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with six informants, consisting of three native speakers of Balinese and three native speakers of Swiss German. In each language group, one informant serves as the main informant,

while the other two serve as supporting informants.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Informants

Informant	Native Language	Age	Gender	Place of Origin	Occupation
<i>B1</i>	Balinese	37	Female	Buleleng, Bali, Indonesia	Teacher
<i>B2</i>	Balinese	38	Female	Buleleng, Bali, Indonesia	Teacher
<i>B3</i>	Balinese	38	Male	Sawan, Bali, Indonesia	Entrepreneur
<i>SG1</i>	Swiss German	35	Female	Gelterkinden, Switzerland	Teacher
<i>SG2</i>	Swiss German	41	Male	Sissach, Switzerland	Entrepreneur
<i>SG3</i>	Swiss German	35	Male	Köniz, Switzerland	Painter

The informants were selected using a purposive sampling method. The inclusion criteria require participants to be native speakers of Balinese or Swiss German, between the ages of 25 and 65 years, and highly proficient in their native language through daily use, experienced in using the language in both formal and informal contexts, and willing to participate in interviews and follow-up assessments if necessary. Individuals who are not native speakers, are outside the specified age range, have limited proficiency in their native language, lack experience using the language in everyday communication, or are unwilling to participate in interviews or follow-up assessments are excluded from this study.

Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from the analysis of documents in the form of two academic theses published between 2020 and 2025, specifically discuss swear words in Balinese and Swiss German, namely Swear Words Used by German by Yanti (2025) and The Analysis of Swear Words Used by The Children in Poh Bergong Village by Saniada et al. (2023). Both theses are archived at the Faculty of Language and Arts Library, Ganesha University of Education. The selected documents specifically discussed swear words in Balinese and Swiss German. The data collection technique involved document analysis and interviews. Interviews were conducted in Balinese or Indonesian for local information and in English for Swiss German informants. All interviews were recorded and then translated into English for further analysis.

The main instrument in this study was the researcher, supported by interview guidelines and checklists to classify the data. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive qualitative methods, involving several stages such as data transcription, categorization based on reference (religion, sex gender, animal terms, personal background, mental illness, sexual activity). To ensure the credibility and validity of the data, this study employs a trustworthiness strategy through triangulation of methods (document and interview), member checking by the informant for data verification.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the research findings of a comparison of swear words in Balinese and Swiss German. The comparison focused on the types of references used in both languages based on the reference categories proposed by Yani et al. (2017). These categories include religion, sex gender, excrement, animal terms, personal background, mental illness, and sex activity. The findings are presented in tables showing the distribution of swear words by reference type in both languages. Each table is accompanied by a brief explanation to highlight the main patterns found in the use of references in Balinese and Swiss German swear words.

Religion

Table 2. The References of Swear Words in Terms of Religion

The References of Swearwords	Balinese		Swiss German	
	The Terms	The Meaning	The Terms	The Meaning
Religion	<i>pirate</i>	ancestor	<i>verdammt</i>	damned/curse
	<i>liak</i>	the devil	-	-
	<i>bangke</i>	die	-	-
	<i>gamang</i>	ghost	-	-
	<i>memedi</i>	ghost	-	-
	<i>madak mati</i>	hope to die	-	-

Based on the data, there are six Balinese swear words and one Swiss German swear word that refer to religion or spirituality. This similarity indicates that both languages use religious or supernatural concepts as the source of swear words and attach strong negative connotations to them. In both languages, these expressions serve to convey anger, frustration, and contempt, showing that religion and spirituality play an important emotional role. The differences lie in linguistic form, cultural uniqueness, and thematic focus. Balinese swear words, such as *liak* ‘devil’, *gamang*, *memedi* ‘ghost’, and *madak mati* ‘hope to die’, are deeply embedded in local mythology and Balinese Hindu cosmology, often including explicit references to supernatural beings and death. They carry a strong spiritual and cultural weight and can trigger fear or social taboos. On the other hand, Swiss German relies more on the abstract term *verdammt* ‘damned’, which stems from Christian beliefs about divine punishment, without referring to specific spiritual entities or the concept of death directly. Therefore, Balinese swear words demonstrate greater lexical diversity and cultural uniqueness, while Swiss German tends to rely on more general and abstract religious references.

Sex Gender

Table 3. The References of Swear Words in Terms of Sex Gender

The References of Swearwords	Balinese		Swiss German	
	The Terms	The Meaning	The Terms	The Meaning
Sex Gender	<i>naskeleng</i>	dick head	<i>hure</i>	whore
	<i>pletan</i>	male genital	<i>foitze</i>	cunt
	<i>teli</i>	female genital	<i>schlampe</i>	slovenly woman
	<i>celak</i>	male genital	<i>zicke</i>	bitch
	<i>jit</i>	ass	<i>drecksack</i>	scumbag
	<i>sunde le to</i>	that whore	<i>pisskopf</i>	pisshead
	<i>butuh</i>	male genital	<i>arschloch</i>	asshole
	<i>ndas teli</i>	female genital	<i>schwanz</i>	male genital
	<i>ndas celak</i>	male genital	-	-

Based on the data, nine Balinese swear words and eight Swiss German swear words refer to sex and gender. This similarity indicates that both languages use terms with sexual connotations, particularly references to male and female genitalia and gender labels, as a form of insult to express anger, frustration, and verbal aggression. In both contexts, derogatory terms directed at women, such as *sunde le to* ‘that whore’ in Balinese and *hure* ‘whore’ or *zicke* ‘bitch’ in Swiss German, show a shared tendency towards gendered and sexually sensitive verbal abuse. Differences arise in lexical diversity and gender representation. Balinese shows greater variation and creativity by combining anatomical references with evaluative elements (e.g., structured combinations referring to genital organs), reflecting culturally embedded patterns of insult. In Swiss German, on the other hand, sexual insults tend to be more direct and conventional, with less morphological variation, and more often directed at women, reinforcing stronger gender

stereotypes. Overall, although both languages use insults related to sex and gender as tools of verbal aggression, Balinese shows greater lexical diversity, while Swiss German emphasizes more direct, gender-focused expressions.

Excrement

Table 4. The References of Swear Words in Terms of Excrement

The References of Swearwords	Balinese		Swiss German	
	The Terms	The Meaning	The Terms	The Meaning
Excrement	<i>tai</i>	shit	<i>scheiße</i>	shit
	<i>bangke</i>	corpse	<i>kacke</i>	poop
	<i>dakin teli</i>	vagina excrement	<i>scheißhaus</i>	shithouse
	<i>jit bengu</i>	stinky bottom	<i>drecksau</i>	filthy pig
	<i>bangkaan</i>	dead body	<i>kotzbrocken</i>	disgusting
	-	-	<i>schweinerei</i>	person
	-	-	<i>sauerei</i>	filthy mess
				mess

Based on the table above, five Balinese swear words and seven Swiss German swear words refer to excrement. This similarity indicates that both languages use excrement-related terms as extreme insults to express disgust, contempt, and anger, especially in emotionally charged situations. In Balinese, words such as *tai* and compound expressions emphasizing bodily filth serve as humiliating insults, while in Swiss German, terms such as *scheiße* ‘shit’ and *kacke* ‘poop’ convey similar negative judgements. The difference lies in linguistic formation and contextual meaning. Balinese shows greater morphological variation and more lively physical imagery through compound expressions that emphasize the body, smell, and even associations with death and decay, thereby reinforcing the emotional impact. On the other hand, Swiss German tends to use more direct and conventional forms, and often extends insults related to excrement to express broader moral or social judgements about disorder and inappropriate behavior, rather than physical decay. Overall, although both languages use excrement references as a universal strategy of verbal aggression, Balinese emphasizes physical imagery and death, while Swiss German focuses more on moral and social judgements about filth.

Animal Term

Table 5. The References of Swear Words in Terms of Animal Terms

The References of Swearwords	Balinese		Swiss German	
	The Terms	The Meaning	The Terms	The Meaning
Animal Terms	<i>cicing</i>	dog	<i>schwein</i>	pig
	<i>bojog</i>	monkey	<i>sau</i>	female pig
	<i>kuluk</i>	dog	<i>hund</i>	dog
	<i>bangkung</i>	pig (female)	-	-
	<i>celeng</i>	pig	-	-
	<i>kaung</i>	pig (male)	-	-
	<i>ubuhan</i>	pet	-	-
			-	

Based on the data listed in the table, the analysis identified seven Balinese swear words and three Swiss German swear words that refer to animals. This similarity indicates that both languages use animal-based expressions to insult, mock, or belittle others, with pigs symbolizing filth, immorality, or dishonorable behavior in both cultures. Balinese terms such as *cicing* ‘dog’, *bojog* ‘monkey’, and *celeng* ‘pig’, as well as Swiss German terms such as *hund* ‘dog’, *schwein*, and *sau* ‘pig’, serve to convey negative character assessments. Differences arise in lexical diversity and cultural specificity. Balinese displays a broader range of animal metaphors and greater detail, including gendered terms such as *bangkung* ‘female pig’ and *kaung* ‘male pig’, as

well as *ubuhan* ‘pet’, which implies social degradation by positioning a person as owned or controlled. In contrast, Swiss German relies on a smaller set of animal terms with fewer gender distinctions and less metaphorical variation. Overall, although both languages use animal imagery to express negative social meanings, Balinese shows more expressiveness and specificity, while Swiss German uses more limited but symbolically stronger animal references.

Personal Background

Table 6. The References of Swear Words in Terms of Personal Background

The References of Swearwords	Balinese		Swiss German	
	The Terms	The Meaning	The Terms	The Meaning
Personal Background	<i>jeneng</i>	face	<i>hurensohn</i>	son of a whore
	<i>bangsat</i>	bastard	<i>bastard</i>	bastard
	<i>bodo</i>	stupid	<i>missgeburt</i>	freak people
	<i>berung</i>	scar	<i>chaschperli</i>	clown
	<i>sundel</i>	bitch/whore	<i>schlampe</i>	bitch/whore
	<i>gendong</i>	beggar	<i>bettler</i>	beggar

Based on the data above, the analysis identified six Balinese swear words and six Swiss German swear words that refer to personal background. This similarity indicates that both languages use insults that target personal identity, ancestry, physical characteristics, and moral status as a form of social humiliation. For example, *sundel* ‘bitch/whore’ and *schlampe* ‘bitch/whore’ attack a person's origins or morality, while *bodo* ‘ugly’ and *missgeburt* ‘freak people’ demean physical condition or existence. The term *bangsat* ‘bastard’ appears in both languages with similar meanings, indicating cross-cultural similarities in ancestry-based insults. The difference lies in lexical scope and emphasis. Balinese shows greater breadth and specificity, including insults related to profession, social status, gender, and physical characteristics. Swiss German, on the other hand, places greater emphasis on dignity, strangeness, and moral judgment, with fewer terms and less gender differentiation. Overall, although both languages use personal background as a source of verbal aggression, Balinese reflects a more socially nuanced and descriptive system, while Swiss German focuses more on perceived moral degradation and abnormality.

Mental Illness

Table 7. The References of Swear Words in Terms of Mental Illness

The References of Swearwords	Balinese		Swiss German	
	The Terms	The Meaning	The Terms	The Meaning
Mental Illness	<i>lengeh</i>	stupid	<i>dummkopf</i>	dumbhead/idiot
	<i>bengkung</i>	obstinate	<i>vollidiot</i>	complete idiot
	<i>buduh</i>	crazy	<i>depp</i>	idiot
	<i>belog</i>	stupid	<i>tubel</i>	idiot
	<i>matah gati</i>	very cringe	<i>chrüppel</i>	cripple
	<i>sedeng</i>	crazy	<i>dachschade</i>	crazy mental
	-	-	<i>vollpfosten</i>	full idiot
	-	-	<i>tschumpel</i>	clumsy person

Based on the data, there are six Balinese swear words and eight Swiss German swear words that refer to mental disorders or intellectual deficiencies. This similarity indicates that both languages use terms related to madness, stupidity, or abnormality, such as *buduh* ‘crazy’, *sedeng* ‘crazy’, and *belog* ‘stupid’ in Balinese, and *depp* ‘idiot’, *dummkopf* ‘dumbhead/idiot’, and *dachschade* ‘crazy mental’ in Swiss German, as forms of verbal abuse to express anger, frustration, or dominance in informal interactions. These expressions generally serve as a means

of emotional release in everyday conversation. Differences arise in lexical orientation and social sensitivity. Balinese language shows meanings embedded in culture and broader semantic nuances, sometimes associating mental abnormality with social shame, and some terms can be used jokingly among close friends. On the other hand, Swiss German tends to use more general or medically oriented terms that emphasize intellectual or physical disability, often carrying a stronger moral stigma and greater social sensitivity. Overall, although both languages use mental disorders as a source of insult, they differ in cultural connotations, vocabulary range, and societal attitudes towards mental health and normality.

Sex Activity

Table 8. The References of Swear Words in Terms of Sex Activity

The References of Swearwords	Balinese		Swiss German	
	The Terms	The Meaning	The Terms	The Meaning
Sex Activity	<i>katuk</i>	fuck	<i>arschfotze</i>	cuntass/anal
	<i>ngucut</i>	masturbate	<i>arschgeige</i>	asskiss/assface
	<i>ngangkuk</i>	have sex	<i>mutterficker</i>	motherfucker
	<i>nyundel</i>	doing prostitute	<i>arschkriecher</i>	sycophant
	<i>nyelek</i>	poke	-	-

Based on the data listed in the table, the analysis identified 5 Balinese swear words and 4 Swiss German swear words that refer to sexual activities. These similarities indicate that both languages use references to sexual acts as a form of verbal abuse to demean others and express strong negative emotions. Terms such as *katuk* ‘fuck’ and *ngangkuk* ‘have sex’ in Balinese, as well as expressions such as *mutterficker* ‘motherfucker’ in Swiss German, show how sexual activity is a source of aggression and moral contempt in both linguistic contexts. The differences are in lexical diversity, figurative language, and intensity. Balinese tend to use more literal and descriptive expressions related to sexual acts, with terms that are culturally specific and have no direct equivalents in Swiss German. On the other hand, Swiss German more often uses figurative or hyperbolic forms and displays stronger explicit vulgarity, often reinforcing character judgments. Overall, although both languages use sexual activity as a source of profanity, Balinese prefers direct and descriptive forms, while Swiss German emphasizes metaphorical and intense insults shaped by different cultural norms.

Findings indicate that swear words in Balinese and Swiss German reflect different socio-cultural orientations, leading to variations in the use of number reference. Ayu and Sudana (2016) found that Western, especially Swiss German speakers, tend to be more expressive than Balinese people or Indonesians who have not yet adopted Western culture. Overall, Balinese shows a greater number and diversity of swear words in various categories, especially in culturally sensitive domains such as spirituality, sexuality, and morality. This supports Beers Fägersten (2007) argument that taboo language is culturally constructed and reflects what a society considers emotionally and morally important. For example, vulgar words in Balinese, such as *liak* ‘devil’, *gamang* ‘ghost’, and *naskleng* ‘dick head’, originate from supernatural beliefs and sexual imagery, reflecting the strong influence of Balinese Hindu cosmology and community norms (Suwija et al., 2019). These expressions carry heavy emotional and moral weight and can symbolically violate social boundaries. On the other hand, swear words in Swiss German, such as *schlampe* ‘slut’, *penner* ‘homeless person’, and *mutterficker* ‘motherfucker/whore’s child’ tend to reflect modern social realities, gender stereotypes, and abstract moral judgements rather than mystical elements.

Despite these differences, the two languages share an important similarity. According to Jay (2009), swear words in Balinese and Swiss German serve as a means of emotional release, especially in situations of anger or frustration. For example, Balinese expressions such as *katuk* ‘fuck’ or *bangsat* ‘bastard’ and Swiss German terms such as *scheiße* ‘shit’ or *dummkopf* ‘idiot’ are used to reinforce emotional reactions. In Balinese society, where language use is governed by

hierarchy and norms of politeness (Suwija et al., 2019), swear words are highly context-dependent and can easily be considered offensive. In contrast, Swiss German allows for greater tolerance of coarse language in informal interactions between peers. This difference highlights the importance of pragmatic and cultural awareness in intercultural communication, as misunderstandings can arise from cultural interpretations rather than linguistic incompetence (Sayer, 2013). From a theoretical perspective, these findings are consistent with Naturalistic Inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and sociolinguistic perspectives that view language as a reflection of social identity, cultural values, and power relations (Holmes & Wilson, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that although swear words in Balinese and Swiss German share some universal semantic references, their cultural orientations are very different. Both languages use swear words related to common taboo domains such as sex gender, excrement, animals, personal background, and mental illness. However, Balinese exhibits a stronger tendency to use religious and supernatural references, as reflected in expressions such as *liak* 'the devil' and *gamang* 'ghost', while Swiss German contains only limited religious references, such as *verdammst* 'damned'. These findings indicate that the semantic references of swear words are strongly influenced by the cultural values and belief systems of each language community. While swear words in Balinese remain heavily influenced by local cosmology and traditional beliefs, those in Swiss German primarily reflect secular social values.

These findings confirm that swear words serve not only as expressions of taboo but also as linguistic representations of cultural identity and worldview. Further research is expected to involve a more diverse group of speakers from various regions, age groups, and social backgrounds to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural and social changes influence the semantic references of swear words in various languages.

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