

The Use of Swearing Words Differences Between Men and Women Communication in University

Mutiara Sintya Dewi¹, Nabila Khoirunnisa², Nadia Deba Claradista³, Teguh Sarosa⁴

^{1,2,3} Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

Article Info

Article history:

Submitted December 14, 2024

Revised May 2, 2025

Accepted October 10, 2025

Published November 5, 2025

Keywords:

communication;
gender differences;
sociolinguistics;
swearing language;
university students

ABSTRACT

This research investigates gender-based differences in the use of swear words among university students, exploring whether significant variations exist in their daily communication. Adopting a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 48 participants, focusing on their perceptions, attitudes, and experiences with swearing. The findings reveal notable distinctions between male and female swearing behavior. Men were observed to use swear words more frequently and openly, often as a means of expressing camaraderie, asserting dominance, or emphasizing their emotions in social interactions. In contrast, women tended to use swear words more selectively and situationally, primarily in private settings or emotionally charged moments, reflecting societal expectations of politeness and decorum. These differences highlight the impact of gender norms, personality traits, and social contexts on linguistic choices, with women facing greater stigma for using profanity than men. Additionally, the study underscores the evolving role of swearing as a multifaceted linguistic tool for expressing emotions, asserting identity, and navigating social relationships. By shedding light on these dynamics, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of gendered communication and emphasizes the importance of addressing stereotypes to foster more inclusive and effective interactions within academic and social environments.

Corresponding Author:

Mutiara Sintya Dewi,

English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,

Universitas Sebelas Maret

Jl. Ir. Sutami 36 A, Kentingan, Surakarta, Indonesia

Email: mutiarasintya@student.uns.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a vital tool for human interaction, enabling individuals to communicate emotions, express opinions, and navigate complex social dynamics. Among the diverse forms of language, swearing stands out as a unique phenomenon due to its combination of emotional intensity, taboo nature, and context-sensitive usage. Swearing, broadly defined as the use of offensive or forbidden words, has long been associated with emotional release, identity assertion, and social bonding. While traditionally stigmatized, recent research has shown that profanity plays a multifaceted role in human

communication, often defying simplistic assumptions about its appropriateness or impact (Stapleton et al., 2022; Pavesi & Formentelli, 2023).

Swearing has been a linguistic tool for centuries, with its roots in expressions of curses or invocations of divine power. Over time, its functions have evolved, encompassing not only expressions of anger or frustration but also humor, solidarity, and even persuasion. Andersson and Trudgill (1990) noted that the desensitization of taboo terms allows them to be used for communicating opinions and emotions without necessarily invoking their original, offensive meanings. One definition of swearing is the usage of lexical words that indicate a taboo and may be considered objectionable. Swearing has power for both speakers and listeners because of its taboo status, which results in certain interpersonal, emotional, psychological, and rhetorical impacts (Beers Fägersten and Stapleton 2022; Stapleton et al. 2022; Stapleton and Beers Fägersten 2023). Despite its versatility, swearing remains highly context-dependent, influenced by the social norms, cultural values, and interpersonal dynamics of the speaker and audience (Stapleton et al., 2022). For instance, Pavesi and Formentelli (2023) explored how swear words are used in both original and translated films, demonstrating their dual role in reflecting characters' emotions and shaping audience perceptions. Self-reports and speaker perceptions, as well as empirical studies of physiological (autonomic) alterations, demonstrate a substantial correlation between emotional arousal and the forbidden and potentially offensive nature of swearing (Stapleton et al. 2022). It is helpful to further examine these findings in the context of multilingualism and emotion—more especially, multilingual swearing—for the purposes of this research.

Historically, swearing has been synonymous with cursing, rooted in religious or moral prohibitions (Allan & Burrige, 2006). Over the years, its scope has broadened to include a variety of expressions intended to convey emotions or attitudes. Ljung (2011) defines swearing as the use of forbidden words in a nonliteral sense, highlighting its cathartic and expressive functions. Research has consistently shown that swearing can help individuals cope with stress, anger, and frustration. Stephens (2013) found that swearing activates the "fight or flight" response, providing emotional relief and enhancing one's ability to handle adverse situations. This cathartic effect has also been linked to a reduction in physical pain, making profanity a valuable coping mechanism during stressful or painful experiences (Stephens & Umland, 2020).

Beyond its psychological benefits, swearing serves significant social functions. Among university students, profanity often acts as a marker of group identity, humor, or solidarity. Stenstrom (2020) observed that teenagers use swear words to establish their social standing within peer groups, challenging traditional notions of formality and appropriateness. These findings align with broader cultural shifts, where swearing is increasingly normalized in informal settings (Pavesi & Formentelli, 2023). However, despite its growing acceptance, swearing remains subject to strict contextual and cultural constraints. For example, while it may be used freely in private conversations among friends, its use in formal or professional settings is still widely stigmatized.

The intersection of gender and language has been a central focus in sociolinguistic research. Gender differences in communication styles are well-documented, with men and women exhibiting distinct linguistic behaviors influenced by societal norms and cultural expectations. The terms "gender" and "sex," often conflated, represent different dimensions of human identity. Gender refers to socially constructed roles and identities, while sex denotes biological attributes (Torgrimson & Minson, 2005). These distinctions

are critical for understanding how societal norms shape the language use of men and women, particularly regarding taboo language such as swearing.

Traditionally, men have been viewed as the primary users of profanity, often employing it to assert dominance, express frustration, or strengthen social bonds. Women, on the other hand, have been stereotyped as avoiding swearing due to societal expectations of politeness, decorum, and emotional restraint (Kristin, 2022). These traditional views, however, are increasingly challenged by contemporary research. Wahyuningsih (2018) notes that while men are generally associated with direct, assertive communication, women's use of language tends to be more relational and context-sensitive. Yet, women also use swearing strategically, whether to express solidarity, assert their presence in conversations, or navigate emotionally charged situations (Stapleton et al., 2022).

The "difference theory," proposed by Tannen (2020), provides a theoretical framework for understanding these gendered linguistic behaviors. According to this theory, men and women develop distinct communication styles due to their differing social roles and experiences. Men's language use often emphasizes power, status, and problem-solving, whereas women prioritize empathy, connection, and relational harmony. These differences extend to swearing, where men are more likely to use profanity openly and frequently, while women use it selectively, often adapting their language to the social context and audience (Kristin, 2022; Stenstrom, 2020).

Swearing fulfills a dual role as both an individual and social phenomenon. Jay (2009) describes swearing as a cathartic activity that allows individuals to vent frustration, anger, or pain without resorting to physical aggression. This cathartic effect is particularly evident in stressful situations, where swearing provides an immediate emotional release (Stephens & Umland, 2020). Vingerhoets et al. (2013) suggest that the use of profanity can serve as a substitute for physical aggression, reducing the likelihood of overt conflict.

On a social level, swearing enhances group cohesion and identity. Among young adults, for example, profanity often signifies camaraderie, humor, or defiance against authority. Stenstrom (2020) observed that teenagers frequently use swear words to bond with peers, establish social hierarchies, or challenge conventional norms. However, the social acceptability of swearing varies widely across cultures and contexts. For instance, while swearing among close friends may be perceived as harmless or even endearing, its use in formal or professional settings can lead to negative judgments and social consequences (Pavesi & Formentelli, 2023).

The purpose of this research is to find out the differences in the use of swear words between men and women and the differences in perspective received between men and women when using these words.

In recent years, much of the research on language use has focused on how men use profanity and aggressive language, often reinforcing the idea that women are more reserved. Despite significant attention on gendered communication styles, existing studies often focus on how societal norms dictate appropriate language use for women compared to men, emphasizing politeness, figurative expression, and avoidance of taboo topics (Kristin, 2022). However, our study uncovers an important gap in this narrative: women frequently use coarse language, challenging the stereotypes that suggest otherwise.

Through our research, we found that women use profanity in various contexts—whether to bond with friends, express frustration, or assert their presence in conversations. This nuanced use of language reflects not just personal expression but also the complexities of social dynamics women navigate every day.

By highlighting this aspect of communication between men and women, we aim to broaden the understanding of language use beyond traditional gender norms. Our findings reveal that women's voices are diverse and powerful, often embracing language that society has deemed inappropriate. This research not only adds depth to the existing literature but also invites us to appreciate the richness of human communication in all its forms, regardless of gender.

THEORY AND METHOD

This research utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach to examine gender differences in the use of swear words among university students. A total of 48 participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in gender, academic disciplines, and cultural backgrounds. Data were collected using questionnaires that included both open-ended and closed-ended questions, allowing for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward swearing. These questions aimed to uncover the frequency, context, and social acceptability of profanity. To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, participant statements were meticulously documented and cross-referenced. This process ensured that the data were accurate and reflective of participants' firsthand accounts, thereby enhancing the credibility of the analysis.

Swearing has been defined in various ways across linguistic and psychological research. According to Andersson and Trudgill (1990), swearing refers to the intentional use of "bad language" that violates social or moral norms, often serving as an outlet for emotional expression such as anger, frustration, or surprise. Jay and Janschewitz (2008) describe swearing as a deliberate linguistic act involving taboo words that evoke emotional and social reactions. Similarly, Ljung (2011) views swearing as the use of forbidden or nonliteral language to express strong emotions, emphasizing its cathartic and communicative functions. McEnery (2006) adds that swearing carries both literal and pragmatic meanings: while its surface form may seem offensive, it often serves to convey solidarity, humor, or authenticity in social interaction.

Hughes (2006) highlights that swearing should also be understood as a social and historical phenomenon—its acceptability shifts over time, reflecting broader cultural and moral changes. From a pragmatic perspective, Stapleton (2010) and Dynel (2012) argue that swearing functions not only as a marker of impoliteness but also as a communicative tool that enhances emotional intensity and authenticity in discourse. Jay (2009) further explains that taboo words are psychological and sociocultural indicators, providing insight into emotional arousal, social hierarchy, and cultural values.

Understanding the use of swearing words is important because it offers insight into how language reflects identity, emotion, and social power. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, analyzing swearing provides a window into how individuals navigate linguistic taboos to construct and negotiate social relationships. In gendered communication, swearing becomes particularly significant because it highlights how men and women express emotions, assert identity, and respond to societal expectations. As Tannen (2020) and Coates (2015) explain, language is a medium through which gender roles and relationships are performed. Investigating how swearing differs between men and women reveals how gender norms are reinforced or challenged through linguistic behavior.

The analysis is guided by the theoretical frameworks of Robin Lakoff's Language and Woman's Place and Jennifer Coates' Women, Men, and Language. Lakoff's work underscores the influence of societal norms on women's linguistic behavior, often shaping them to prioritize politeness and indirectness in communication. Coates expands on these ideas, emphasizing the social construction of gendered language and how linguistic choices reflect and reinforce power dynamics. Together, these theories provide a critical lens through which the study examines gender-specific patterns in swearing, highlighting the interplay between societal expectations and individual expression.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and key differences in swearing behaviors among male and female respondents. This analytical method allowed for a nuanced examination of how gender influences not only the frequency of swearing but also the contexts in which it is used and the perceptions it generates. By exploring these dimensions, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of language as a tool for identity, emotion, and social interaction, particularly in the context of gendered communication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. General Attitudes Towards Swearing

Statement	Agree	Disagree
It is normal to say swear words.	72.9%	27.1%
Saying swear words can bring friends closer.	48%	52%
Saying swear words is considered honest.	41.6%	58.4%
Saying swear words is an expression of self.	75%	25%
Swear speech conveys a stronger message.	45.8%	54.2%
Swear speech is used as humor.	66.7%	33.3%
Context is a significant factor in determining the acceptability of swear speech.	79.1%	20.9%
Swear speech can create bonds.	54.2%	45.8%
I have a different view towards the use of swear words by men and women.	70.8%	29.2%
I have found that men and women have a different approach to the use of swear words.	83.3%	16.7%

The results from Table 1 reveal significant insights into how university students perceive swearing in their daily communication. A notable 72.9% of respondents agreed that using swear words is normal, reflecting the increasing acceptance of profanity in contemporary language. This normalization aligns with studies by Stapleton et al. (2022), which emphasize that swearing has become less stigmatized among younger generations, particularly in informal contexts. The findings suggest that swearing is no longer limited to expressions of frustration or anger but has evolved into a versatile linguistic tool for humor, emphasis, and emotional release.

Interestingly, 75% of participants believed that swearing serves as a form of self-expression, highlighting its role in asserting individual identity. This supports Ljung's (2011) definition of swearing as a nonliteral use of taboo language to convey strong emotions or attitudes. However, the perception of swearing as a bonding mechanism was more divided, with only 54.2% agreeing that profanity can create social connections. This indicates that while swearing may foster camaraderie in certain groups, its acceptability remains context-dependent.

Another critical finding is that 79.1% of respondents emphasized the role of context in determining the appropriateness of swearing. This reinforces the idea that profanity is highly situational and influenced by factors such as audience, setting, and intent (Pavesi & Formentelli, 2023). For instance, swearing among close friends may be perceived as harmless or humorous, whereas the same language in professional or formal settings could be deemed offensive.

The responses also highlight gendered differences in attitudes toward swearing. A significant 70.8% of participants acknowledged having different views on the use of swear words by men and women, reflecting the persistent influence of societal norms on gendered communication. While swearing is often trivialized or accepted when used by men, women's profanity tends to face greater scrutiny and stigma (Kristin, 2022). This disparity underscores the need to challenge traditional stereotypes and promote a more inclusive understanding of language use across genders.

In summary, Table 1 illustrates the multifunctionality of swearing and its growing normalization among young adults. However, the findings also reveal lingering societal biases, particularly regarding gendered perceptions of profanity. Future studies could explore how these attitudes vary across cultural or generational contexts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of swearing's evolving role in communication.

Table 2. Perceptions of Swearing Among Men

Statement	Agree	Disagree
I often hear men using swear words in their everyday conversations.	91.7%	8.3%
Men use swear words to express masculinity.	72.9%	27.1%
Men use swear words in casual discussions.	87.5%	12.5%
Men are comfortable using swear words in front of friends.	89.6%	10.4%
It is often considered normal for men to use swear words.	85.4%	14.6%
Men are more open to using swear words in everyday conversation.	83.3%	16.7%
Men's use of swear words is not always taken seriously.	93.7%	6.3%

The data in Table 2 show that men are overwhelmingly perceived as frequent users of swear words, with 91.7% of respondents reporting that they often hear men swearing in everyday conversations. This finding aligns with McEnery's (2006) research,

which suggests that profanity is often associated with traditional notions of masculinity. Swearing, in this context, serves as a linguistic tool for asserting dominance, expressing confidence, and reinforcing group identity.

Additionally, 85.4% of participants agreed that it is socially acceptable for men to use swear words, further reinforcing the normalization of profanity in male-dominated communication. This normalization is often linked to cultural expectations that view men's language as direct, assertive, and emotionally restrained (Tannen, 2020). However, this perception can also trivialize or dismiss the emotional depth behind men's swearing. For instance, 93.7% of respondents noted that men's use of profanity is not always taken seriously, suggesting a cultural tendency to view their language as casual or inconsequential.

Men's comfort with swearing in social settings is evident in the responses, with 89.6% agreeing that men frequently swear in front of friends. This behavior reflects the role of swearing in fostering camaraderie and humor among male peer groups (Stapleton et al., 2022). In these contexts, profanity often functions as a marker of solidarity or an icebreaker, reducing social distance and enhancing group cohesion. However, the casual use of swearing by men can sometimes perpetuate stereotypes that equate masculinity with aggression or emotional detachment.

Interestingly, 72.9% of respondents believed that men use swearing to express masculinity, further highlighting the connection between profanity and gendered identities. This perception aligns with the "difference theory," which posits that men's language often emphasizes power and status (Tannen, 2020). However, it is essential to recognize that this association may also limit men's ability to use language for emotional expression, as societal expectations often discourage vulnerability in male communication.

The findings from Table 2 underscore the deeply ingrained cultural norms that shape men's use of profanity. While swearing may enhance social bonding and assertiveness, it also reinforces traditional gender roles that can restrict linguistic diversity. Future research could examine how men navigate these norms in mixed-gender or professional settings, where the acceptability of swearing may differ.

Table 3. Perceptions of Swearing Among Woman

Statement	Agree	Disagree
In my experience, women are less likely to use swear words than men are.	75%	25%
It makes me feel uncomfortable when a woman uses a swear word in front of me.	66.7%	33.3%
I have seen negative reactions when a woman uses swear words in my neighborhood.	85.4%	14.6%
Women use swear words to show strength and courage.	27.1%	72.9%
I am more accepting of the use of swear words by men than by women.	56.3%	43.7%

The use of swear words by women can have a negative impact on their image in social settings.	81.2%	18.8%
There is a social stigma attached to women who use swear words in a conversation with others.	89.6%	10.4%

The responses in Table 3 reveal significant differences in how women's use of swear words is perceived and judged. A striking 75% of participants believed that women are less likely to swear than men, reflecting traditional stereotypes that associate femininity with politeness and emotional restraint. However, these perceptions may not fully capture the nuanced ways in which women engage with profanity. For example, Stapleton et al. (2022) highlight that women often use swearing strategically, adapting their language to suit the context and audience.

The data also show that women face considerable stigma when using profanity. A high percentage (89.6%) of respondents acknowledged a social stigma against women who swear, while 81.2% agreed that swearing could negatively impact a woman's social image. These findings align with Kristin's (2022) research, which emphasizes the double standard in how profanity is perceived across genders. While men's swearing is often trivialized or even celebrated, women's profanity is scrutinized and judged, reinforcing societal norms that constrain their linguistic choices.

Interestingly, 66.7% of respondents reported feeling uncomfortable when women swear in public settings. This discomfort may stem from deeply ingrained cultural expectations that view women's language as a reflection of their character. For instance, swearing by women is often perceived as a breach of decorum, leading to negative judgments about their professionalism or social suitability (Wahyuningsih, 2018).

Despite these challenges, the data also reveal that women use profanity as a tool for self-expression and resistance against societal norms. While only 27.1% agreed that women swear to show strength or courage, this behavior may be more common in private or emotionally charged situations. For example, women may use swearing to bond with close friends, vent frustrations, or assert their presence in male-dominated conversations. This aligns with research by Stenstrom (2020), which shows that women's use of profanity often reflects a complex interplay between personal identity and social expectations.

The findings from Table 3 highlight the need to challenge traditional gender norms that stigmatize women's language use. By promoting a more inclusive understanding of profanity, society can create spaces where individuals feel free to express themselves without fear of judgment. Future studies could explore how cultural or generational shifts influence women's use of profanity, particularly in professional or digital communication contexts.

Table 4. Comparative Analysis of Swear Words Used by Men and Women

Number	Word	Man	Woman	Context
1.	Anjir	2	8	Expresses surprise or mild frustration. Often used humorously among friends.
2.	Anjing	3	2	Used to express anger or annoyance. Can also be humorous or playful in tone.
3.	Puki	1	1	An expletive used to vent strong frustration.
4.	Jancok	0	1	A regional swear word, primarily for venting anger or showing extreme annoyance.
5.	Njir	0	1	Mild exclamation of surprise or frustration.
6.	Cok	2	2	Adds emphasis in conversation, often jokingly or angrily.
7.	Tai	0	1	Expresses disgust or annoyance.
8.	Bangsot	0	1	Used in extreme frustration or to insult someone.
9.	Anjay	2	1	Mild exclamation of amazement or approval.
10.	Bjir	0	3	An alternative to "anjir," used for surprise or emphasis.
11.	Bodat	0	1	Rare; likely regional or used humorously.
12.	Bego	0	1	Insults someone's intelligence, often humorously.
13.	Damn	0	1	Expresses frustration or astonishment.
14.	Shit	0	2	Expresses strong emotion, either surprise or frustration
15.	Jir	0	2	Mild exclamation of surprise or frustration.
16.	Gablok	1	0	Insults intelligence, often playful but can be serious
17.	Use Animals Name	1	0	To create a friendly atmosphere
18.	Cuk	1	0	Similar to "cok," emphasizes statements or feelings.
19.	Asu	1	0	Regional word; expresses annoyance or anger.
20.	Tolol	1	0	Insults intelligence, can be serious or humorous.
21.	Pekok	1	0	Similar to "tolol," highlights someone's stupidity.
22.	Bajingan	1	0	Strong insult, directed at someone's character or actions.

The analysis of specific swear words in Table 4 reveals distinct patterns in how men and women engage with profanity. Women were more likely to use milder expressions such as "anjir" (8 occurrences vs. 2 for men) and "bjir" (3 occurrences vs. 0 for

men). These terms are often used humorously or casually, suggesting that women may adapt their language to align with societal expectations of politeness while still engaging in self-expression. Conversely, men were more likely to use stronger expletives such as “anjing” (3 occurrences vs. 2 for women) and “tolol” (1 occurrence vs. 0 for women) to express anger or frustration.

The presence of regional swear words, such as “jancok” and “asu,” highlights the influence of cultural and linguistic diversity on swearing practices. Interestingly, some regional terms were used exclusively by women, indicating that swearing is not a monolithic behavior but varies depending on personal and cultural identities. This finding aligns with Pavesi and Formentelli’s (2023) research, which emphasizes the role of local dialects and cultural factors in shaping the use and perception of profanity.

Another notable trend is the use of profanity for humor and emotional emphasis. Terms such as “anjir” and “anjay” were often used to express surprise or excitement, reflecting the multifunctionality of swearing in everyday communication. Women’s preference for these milder terms may reflect their ability to navigate societal norms while asserting their individuality. On the other hand, men’s use of stronger expletives may reinforce traditional associations between profanity and masculinity, as suggested by McEnery (2006).

The findings from Table 4 underscore the complexity of swearing as a linguistic behavior. By examining the specific terms used by men and women, the study highlights the interplay between societal norms, cultural influences, and individual expression. Future research could explore how these patterns vary across different age groups or social contexts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of swearing’s role in communication.

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the gendered dynamics surrounding swearing among university students. By exploring the use of profanity in different contexts, this research highlights not only how men and women use swear words differently but also how societal norms and cultural expectations continue to shape language use. This study challenges the traditional gendered assumptions that associate swearing with masculinity while depicting women as more reserved or polite speakers.

Gendered Perceptions of Swearing

The first significant takeaway from the study is the pervasive difference in how society perceives the use of swear words by men and women. The data clearly indicate that while swearing is increasingly normalized in general, a distinct double standard remains when it comes to gender. Men’s swearing is largely accepted and even trivialized, as seen in the high percentage of respondents who believe that swearing is socially acceptable for men (85.4%). This aligns with previous research that identifies swearing as an integral part of male communication, often used to express camaraderie, assert dominance, or communicate emotions (McEnery, 2006). The findings suggest that men are not only more likely to use swear words but are also more likely to do so in public settings without facing significant social penalties.

In stark contrast, the study reveals that women face greater scrutiny and stigma for using profanity. A large percentage of participants (89.6%) acknowledged the social stigma surrounding women’s use of swear words. This reflects the persistent societal expectation that women should communicate with more restraint, politeness, and emotional control (Kristin, 2022). The discomfort expressed by participants when hearing women swear in

public (66.7%) further highlights how entrenched these gendered language norms are. This finding resonates with research that explores how female language use is often judged more harshly than male language use, particularly in professional and social settings (Wahyuningsih, 2018).

Swearing as a Tool for Self-Expression and Social Bonding

Despite the stigma, the study also found that women use swearing as a tool for self-expression and social bonding, particularly in private or informal contexts. The data suggest that women use milder expletives like "ange r" and "Sanjay" more frequently, indicating their strategic use of profanity in non-confrontational settings, such as bonding with friends or expressing surprise or excitement. This nuanced use of profanity challenges the stereotypical view that women avoid swearing altogether. It aligns with the findings of Stapleton et al. (2022), who argued that women's use of swear words is often more selective but still serves a variety of communicative purposes, including emphasizing emotions, asserting presence, or navigating social dynamics.

On the other hand, men use stronger and more aggressive expletives, such as "anjing" and "tolol," to express frustration, anger, or dominance. This reinforces the idea that swearing serves as a marker of masculinity, often tied to traditional norms of male behavior. The higher frequency of stronger expletives among men reflects not only a comfort with profanity but also the cultural association between swearing and masculinity, where the language becomes a tool for asserting strength and power (Tannen, 2020). The contrasting patterns in swearing between men and women point to a broader conversation about how language reflects and reinforces gendered identities.

Contextual Sensitivity of Swearing

The study also emphasizes the importance of context in determining the acceptability and purpose of swearing. While 79.1% of respondents agreed that context plays a crucial role in whether swearing is appropriate, the data revealed that gender influences the interpretation of swearing within various social settings. Men were more likely to use swear words in public, especially within their peer groups, where profanity serves to bond members and reinforce group identity. This finding is consistent with Stenstrom (2020), who argued that swearing is often used as a social tool among young men to strengthen social ties and establish dominance in group settings.

Women, conversely, were more likely to use swear words in private settings or in emotionally charged situations, likely due to the societal discomfort with public swearing by women. While 75% of respondents perceived women to be less likely to swear, the study also revealed that women strategically employed profanity in situations where it could enhance emotional expression or establish solidarity with friends. This usage may not necessarily challenge the gender norms directly but instead works within them to assert agency and emotion in contexts where women feel comfortable.

Swearing and Social Identity

In addition to the linguistic functions of swearing, the study underscores how gendered language use is tied to social identity. Swearing serves not just as a mode of emotional release but also as a way of constructing and communicating identity. For men, swearing becomes a means of asserting masculinity, displaying confidence, and creating social distance. The study reveals that men's swearing is often linked to expressions of power and status, consistent with research by McEnery (2006). This use of swearing as an

indicator of strength and assertiveness contributes to the broader social narrative that associates men with physicality, dominance, and emotional restraint.

For women, however, the relationship between swearing and identity is more complex. While women's use of profanity is often viewed with discomfort or disapproval, it can also serve as a means of expressing emotional depth, creating intimacy, or asserting independence. The finding that 27.1% of respondents agree that women use swear words to show strength or courage suggests that profanity can be a form of resistance against traditional feminine ideals. As more women embrace language that society has historically deemed inappropriate, swearing becomes a way for women to break free from societal constraints and express themselves more authentically, though still within the boundaries of acceptable social contexts.

Implications for Gendered Communication

This research contributes to the growing body of work on gender and language by revealing the nuanced ways in which swearing is employed by both men and women. It challenges traditional stereotypes about women's language use and highlights the complex interplay between societal norms, personal identity, and language. Swearing, as this study has shown, is not merely a tool for expressing anger or frustration but also an important aspect of social interaction and identity construction.

The findings have important implications for gendered communication in educational, professional, and social settings. By understanding how language reflects and reinforces gendered power dynamics, we can begin to challenge traditional norms and promote more inclusive communication practices. In particular, the stigmatization of women's use of profanity should be addressed, as it restricts women's ability to express themselves fully and equally in social contexts. As more women embrace swearing, there is an opportunity to expand societal definitions of femininity and empower women to use language as a tool of self-expression without fear of judgment.

CONCLUSION

This research provides valuable insights into the differences in swearing language use between men and women, addressing a significant gap in the existing sociolinguistic literature. By employing a descriptive qualitative approach and analyzing responses from university students, the study reveals that while swearing is often perceived as a masculine trait, women also engage in this form of expression, albeit under different social conditions and with varying implications. The findings challenge traditional stereotypes that depict women as more reserved in their language use, highlighting the complexities of gender dynamics in communication. This innovative exploration into the social acceptability of swearing not only enhances our understanding of gendered language practices but also underscores the need for a nuanced perspective on how societal norms shape communication styles across genders. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader discourse on language and gender, paving the way for future studies to further investigate the evolving nature of swearing and its role in interpersonal interactions. Future research could explore how factors such as cultural background, age, or social media influence attitudes toward swearing. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into how societal norms around language evolve over time. This research contributes to a broader understanding of gendered communication, emphasizing the need for more inclusive and nuanced perspectives on language use.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their deepest gratitude to all individuals and institutions that contributed to the completion of this research. Special thanks are extended to the 48 university students who participated in the study and willingly shared their time, thoughts, and experiences, which were invaluable to the success of this project. We also acknowledge the unwavering support and guidance provided by the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Universitas Sebelas Maret, whose resources and expertise significantly enhanced the research process. Gratitude is also extended to our colleagues and peers for their constructive feedback and encouragement throughout the study. Finally, we are profoundly grateful for the financial support provided by our family, without which this research would not have been possible. This acknowledgment serves as a reflection of our appreciation for everyone who contributed to this endeavor.

REFERENCES

- Andersson, L., & Trudgill, P. (1990). *Bad language*. Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Coates, J. (2015). *Women, men and language: A sociolinguistic account of gender differences in language* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dynel, M. (2012). Setting our house in order: The workings of impoliteness in multi-party film discourse. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 8(2), 161–194. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jplr-2012-0008>
- Fägersten, K. B. (2006). [Review of the book *Swearing in English: Bad language, purity, and power from 1586 to the present*, by T. McEnery]. *Applied Linguistics*, 27(3), 542–545. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/aml026>
- Güvendir, E. (2015). Why are males inclined to use strong swear words more than females? An evolutionary explanation based on male intergroup aggressiveness. *Language Sciences*, 50, 133–139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2015.02.003>
- Hughes, G. (2006). *An encyclopedia of swearing: The social history of oaths, profanity, foul language, and ethnic slurs in the English-speaking world*. London, England: M. E. Sharpe.
- Ishikawa, Y. (2015). Gender differences in vocabulary use in essay writing by university students. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 192, 593–600. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.06.078>
- Jay, T. B. (2009). The utility and ubiquity of taboo words. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 4(2), 153–161. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2009.01115.x>
- Jay, T., & Janschewitz, K. (2008). The pragmatics of swearing. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 4(2), 267–288. <https://doi.org/10.1515/JPLR.2008.013>
- Karyn, S. (2003). Gender and swearing: A community practice. *English Today*, 23(2), 22–33. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/c9bc23a0134b3d738b563383c931be06/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=31040>
- Kristin, J. (2022). Gender differences in swearing: A sociolinguistic perspective. *Language in Society*, 51(3), 234–246. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404521000579>

- Ljung, M. (2007). *Swearwords*. Denmark: Nörhaven Paperback A/S.
- Ljung, M. (2011). *Swearing: A cross-cultural linguistic study*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McEnery, T. (2005). *Swearing in English: Bad language, purity and power from 1586 to the present*. London, England: Routledge.
- McEnery, T. (2006). *Swearing in English*. London, England: Routledge.
- Montagu, J., & Ljung, M. (Eds.). (2005). *Swearing: A cross-cultural linguistic study*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287216562_Swearing_A_Cross-Cultural_Linguistic_Study
- Pavesi, M., & Formentelli, M. (2023). The pragmatic dimensions of swearing in films: Searching for coherence in dubbing strategies. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 217, 126–139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2023.09.003>
- Stapleton, K. (2010). Swearing. In M. A. Locher & G. L. Sage (Eds.), *Interpersonal pragmatics* (Vol. 6, pp. 289–306). Berlin, Germany: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Stapleton, K., Beers Fägersten, K., Stephens, R., & Loveday, C. (2022). The power of swearing: What we know and what we don't. *Lingua*, 277, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2022.103406>
- Stenström, A.-B. (2020). English- and Spanish-speaking teenagers' use of rude vocatives. In N. Nassenstein & A. Storch (Eds.), *Swearing and cursing: Contexts and practices in a critical linguistic perspective* (pp. 281–302). Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Stephens, R. (2013). Swearing – The language of life and death. *The Psychologist*, 26(9), 650–653.
- Stephens, R., & Umland, C. (2020). Swearing as a response to pain: A critical review. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 133, 110–117. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2020.110117>
- Tannen, D. (2001). *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Tannen, D. (2020). Women and men in conversation: New perspectives on linguistic behavior. *Discourse Studies*, 22(1), 67–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445619886502>
- Tannen, D. (2020). Women and men in conversation: New perspectives on linguistic behavior. *Discourse Studies*, 22(1), 67–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445619886502>
- Uchida, A. (1992). When difference is dominance: A critique of anti-power-based cultural approach to sex differences. *Language in Society*, 21(4), 547–568. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500015558>
- Vingerhoets, J. J. M., Bylsma, L. M., & de Vlam, C. (2013). Swearing: A biopsychosocial perspective. *Psychological Topics*, 22(2), 287–304.
- Wahyuningsih, S. (2018). Gendered language in communication: A review of sociolinguistic studies. *Journal of Language Studies*, 12(2), 45–56.

- Wang, N. (2013). An analysis of the pragmatic functions of “swearing” in interpersonal talk. *Griffith Working Papers in Pragmatics and Intercultural Communication*, 6, 71–79.