

# ***“Damn! I Completely Forgot”: The Use of Swear Words by Millennial Women***

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**Abstract-** The use of non-standard languages has mushroomed in the community even including the use of bad languages, the so-called swearing. People, nowadays, tend to swear a lot than they used to be. In recent years, swearing has become a part of everyday language use and it is not difficult at all to find many people use swear words within their daily interaction. Gender plays a significant role in swearing. There is a stereotype in most cultures that men are judged to swear more than women. Also, much research has revealed that males are likely to swear more than females in most cases. However, it has raised a question about the continuity of this belief. Based on the available literature, it is believed that the long-held assumption and stereotype seems no longer accurate. The purpose of this study was to find out the use of swear words by millennial women. This survey, then, was conducted at English Department of Samudra University involving 44 female students. The students were required to complete an anonymous survey on swearing. They were asked to fill out the questions related to rating the most offensive swear word; frequency of use of swear words in their everyday life; and also the most preferred words to be used within several occasions. The study successfully revealed the most common words used by millennial women. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the stereotype no longer fits with the current phenomena since females are getting familiar with a wide range of offensive words and even swearing becomes a part of their everyday language use now. Surprisingly, most respondents do not only prefer to use those taboo terms within same-sex companions but they also tend to swear in mixed-sex interaction.

**Keywords:** *Swear words, millennial women, same-sex companions, and mixed-sex interaction.*

## **Introduction and Literature Survey**

Language is one of the most important aspects within human life. Not only is it used to interact with each other but also to express social and cultural identities. Language is a form of expression where people express and talk differently. In recent years, preferring a non standard language to the standard one by its speakers has become a macro level global issue since it is widely believed that non standard language seems more sociable. The use of non-standard languages, hence, has grown rapidly in the community even including the use of ‘bad language’ the so-called swearing that has attracted many linguists and sociolinguists to work on this particular issue.

Swearing itself has two meanings referring to either take an oath or use offensive language. According to Jay and Janschewitz (2008, p. 268) and Burns (2008, p.62), swearing is utilizing taboo words aiming to express emotional meaning and to carry out specific purposes. Not only will swearing be found in English but also in other languages in the world. Swearing is not always considered completely aggressive, obscene, offensive and rude for the meaning itself is connotative (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008, p. 268). On the other hand, Fagerston (2000, p. 125) argues that swearing might not have semantic role but it does convey social interpretation. Although swear words

used by each community could be completely different, Allan and Burrige (2006, p. 1) suggest that it might create inconvenience within society and even clash with social norms should those words, deemed taboo, are regularly used in everyday life. Thus, it is not unusual to find out that many societies have strict rules about the use of swear words within daily interaction.

People, in contrast, tend to swear a lot than they used to. Swearing is considered as a normal thing now and quite easy to find people use swear words now since it has become a part of everyday language use recently. For instances, one of the most sensational videos leaked online, surprisingly, shows even Kevin Rudd, former Prime Minister of Australia, is swearing while recording a Chinese language message in Canberra ("Leaked Video", 2012). It seems swearing has become more common and acceptable as a part of our everyday lives (Thelwall, 2008, p. 86). Therefore, it is not unusual to find many people who are no longer annoyed with the use of 'fuck' on public domains (Allan & Burrige, 2006, p. 10).

Swear words used mostly nowadays, furthermore, are varied among cultures in the world. Klerk (1992, p. 277) argued that every society has their own swear words derived from the taboos within that particular culture. Taboo words are commonly determined by two factors, the so-called 'inappropriateness and offensiveness'. Swear words, in general, are likely related to religion (e.g. hell and damn), sex (e.g. fuck), scatology (e.g. shit), and ancestry (e.g. bitch and son of a bitch). In Bahasa Indonesia, there are several swear words commonly found in the movies, songs and also easily heard within the millennial interaction, viz. *anjing* (dog), *babi* (pig), *kampret* (bat/shuck), *bangsat* (bastard), *taik* (shit), *goblok* (idiot/dumbass), *sialan* (damn), *brengsek* (asshole), *lonte* (whore/prostitute/bitch), and *setan* (devil/satan).

In addition, gender plays a very important role in swearing. There is a stereotype in most cultures that men are generally judged to swear more than women. Much research has revealed that males are likely to swear more than females in any cases. Stapleton (2003, p. 22) states that a swearing female will be judged less moral and males, conversely, are supposed to swear more to represent their masculinity. Swearing is also seen as loss of self-control for women and a threat for the sake of relationship (Bird and Harris, 1990 as cited in Jay & Janschewitz, 2008, p. 271). There is an inevitable belief that women are more polite and reluctant to use strong swear words.

However, it has raised a question about the continuity of this belief. According to Thelwall (2008, p. 83), this issue is no longer true since gender roles have strictly changed being almost no significant differences between males and females in applying swear words particularly young females nowadays who are getting accustomed to swearing even more than men and using the most offensive swear words. It is supported by the findings of McEnery (2006, p. 320) revealing that men and women are equal now in terms of using bad language words; for instance, some words such as fuck, Jesus, cunt, and motherfucker are used more by men while bugger, bitch, pissed, shit and damn preferred more by women. Hence, the use of obscene words can be deciphered as an identity of particular social group (Burns, 2008, p. 64).

This phenomenon is believed due to the raise of 'ladette culture' also reported by ABC News ("Ladette Culture", 2011) about Ladette culture where the women start to swear more than they used to in the past. Surprisingly, a study conducted by Lancaster University and Cambridge University Press (The Daily Mail, 2016) revealed that British women swear more than men today. Based on the available literature, it is strongly believed that the long held assumption and stereotype seems no longer

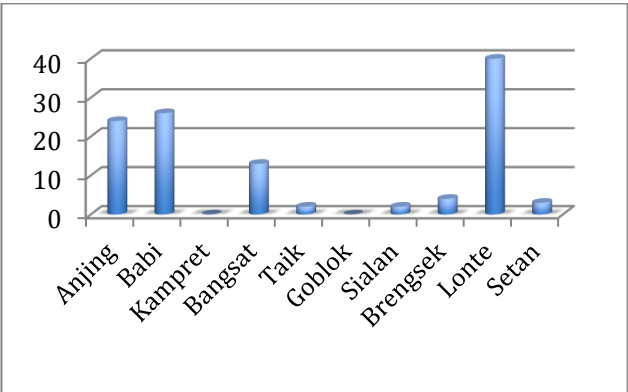
accurate. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to find out the use of swear words by millennial generation especially female students at English Department of Samudra University located in Aceh Province, Indonesia.

### Methodology

The participants of the study were 44 female students over the age of 18. They were, then, required to complete anonymous survey on swearing. They were asked to fill out the questions related to rating the most offensive swear word where 10 is the most offensive and 1 is, conversely, the least offensive; rating their frequency of use for each swear word (Daily, Weekly, Monthly. or Never); and participants’ behavior on swearing in their everyday interaction. The writer, then, distributed the survey to female students at English Department of Samudra University who were interested and agreed to take part in this study. Snowball sampling, moreover, was also used in collecting the data.

### Results and Discussion

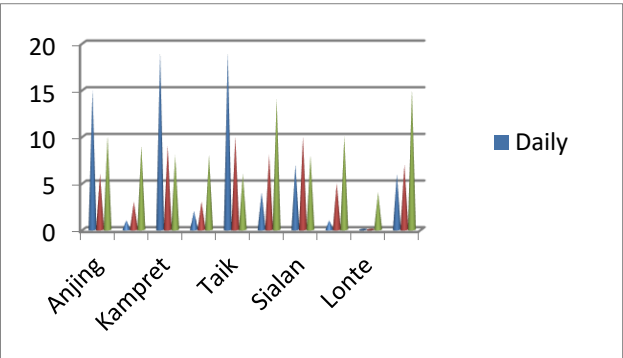
Owing to the research’s findings that can be seen on the following table, all female respondents view the terms referred to ancestral terms (*lonte*/whore/bitch/prostitute) and followed by animal names (pig and dog) as the most obscene and rude words.



**Table 1:** Numbers of women who rate each of these words for offensiveness.

The results show that almost all participants considered ‘whore’ as the most offensive term, and followed by ‘pig and dog’ in the second and third position respectively. It is all simply because a whore/prostitute is a profession that is strictly forbidden for women in Islam. This situation also applies for both pig and dog, which are perceived as forbidden (*haram*) and impure (*najis*) animals in Muslim faith. Yet, the pattern has nothing to do with a bat. Even though *kampret* (bat) is an animal, none of the participants prefers the term as the obscene word. Returning to the issue of offensiveness, several words are always deemed completely obscene due to “a persistent belief that the form of an expression somehow communicates the essential nature of whatever is being referred to” (Allan & Burrridge, 2006, p. 40). Moreover, Fine and Johnson (1984 as cited in Stapleton, 2003, p. 27) also argued that there is almost always one term, which would be judged as the most powerful and taboo in every society.

In addition, the following chart reveals almost all participants remain comfortable in using other obscene terms weekly even daily. Kaye and Spolsky (2004, p. 912 as cited in Burns 2008, p. 63) said that every single person has different perception in terms of considering how taboo some words are and how they are perceived either appropriate or inappropriate to be used in particular situation.



**Table 2:** The frequencies (daily, weekly, and monthly) of using those terms by respondents.

Furthermore, it can be seen that *kampret* (bat) and *taik* (shit) are two swear words mostly used in their daily interaction. Both the former and the latter are perceived as two least offensive terms. Surprisingly, the word ‘dog’ is in the third position in terms of the frequency of use. The word ‘*anjing*’ is used by women in their daily communication compared to the other terms though they agree that it is considered as one of the most offensive words. However, a few respondents admit they tend to develop euphemism in order to avoid the actual pronunciation of swear words for instances, they tend to pronounce *anjir/anjrit/anjay* instead of *anjing* for the word ‘dog’.

It, hence, shows a contradiction between the data and the general stereotypes of women not using strong obscene words. The results reveal that women are now getting used to utilize strong swearwords in their daily life. Both males and females have already used equal swear words in their daily interaction lately (Stapleton, 2003, p. 27). The result of Klerk’s (1992, p. 288) study also strongly suggests that female language has changed recently and no longer meet with common belief and perception. The number of young women who get into the habit of using strong taboo words is increasing. This is probably due to “....a reaction to traditional sex role stereotypes and ....result from gradual erosion of these sex role norms” (Burns, 2008, p. 67).

Next, there is a long-held assumption that both genders are reluctant to swear in mixed-sex group. Both men and women are more likely to use much more swear words in same sex interaction rather than in mixed sex (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008, p. 274, Thelwall, 2008, p. 89 and Allan & Burrige, 2006, p. 78). In spite of the theory supported by many researchers, the data obtained in this survey

show a paradox where most of female participants get accustomed to using swear words even considered the most obscene in mixed sex interaction. The results show that female participants frequently use the terms of ‘*anjing*’, ‘*taik*’, ‘*kampret*’ and ‘*sialan*’, when they are dropping something heavy whether in public domains (e.g. at campus and store) or in private situation (e.g. with same- or mixed sex friends). The use of those terms is quite identical both in same sex and mixed sex interaction. Interestingly, there are two respondents admit using the word ‘*lonte*’ and ‘*babi*’ in same sex and mixed sex interaction respectively. The finding appears to contradict the common belief, for instances, Fargensten (2000, p. 102-103) arguing females will likely avoid swearing in mixed sex-context.

In addition, 17 out of 44 respondents are likely to say the word ‘*kampret*’, ‘*taik*’, and ‘*sialan*’ should they drop something heavy in front of their parents. According to Jay and Janschewitz (2008, p. 268), human beings basically have knowledge about when, where and to whom swear words are either acceptable or unacceptable to be used because it is influenced by contextual variables. In this case, Burns (2008, p. 63) suggests there are a number of swear words, which are likely to be used in different situations due to their resilience.

## Conclusion

Swearing behavior change is inevitably because it is supposed to change and evolve over time. Many researchers believed that women are not used to swear as frequently as men due to their politeness while not a few scholars have already discovered that women swearing behavior has alternated lately. This survey has shown some variance in swearing behavior among millennial women, also supported by much recent research on this issue. The results of this survey disclose that it is

completely incompatible with a common perception about swearing behavior by females, who are now likely to use strong and offensive words in their daily interaction. Although most taboo terms are not equally used in socio cultural interaction, many swear words used by female students in their everyday life have almost no differences especially in terms of specific word choice even deemed strongly obscene. In brief, according to the findings, it can be concluded that the stereotype no longer fits with the current phenomena since females are getting familiar with a wide range of offensive words and even swearing becomes a part of their everyday language use now. Surprisingly, most respondents do not only prefer to use those taboo terms within same-sex companions but they also tend to swear in mixed-sex interaction.

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