



Forms and Meanings of Profanity and Insults in the Bajau Language in Torosiaje Laut Village, Popayato District, Pohuwato Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the forms, meanings, and underlying factors regarding the use of profanity and insults in the Bajau language in Torosiaje Laut Village, Popayato District, Pohuwato Regency. The study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a sociolinguistic approach. Data were obtained from the speech of Bajau speakers using non-participatory observation, in-depth interviews, recording, and note-taking techniques. Data analysis involved identifying, classifying, and describing the forms, meanings, and underlying factors of profanity and insult usage based on field data. The results reveal 43 data points, comprising 20 forms of profanity and 23 forms of insults. Formally, these expressions appear as words (including monomorphemic and polymorphemic forms), phrases, and clauses. Semantically, profanity and insults in the Bajau language utilize both denotative and connotative meanings, associating the subject with animals, physical conditions, and matters considered taboo within the community. The factors underlying their use include emotion and familiarity; emotional expression serves as an outlet for frustration, whereas familiarity-based usage occurs in social interactions to strengthen relationships and solidarity among the Bajau people.

Keywords : forms and meanings, profanity, insults, Bajau language

Bentuk dan Makna Makian dan Hinaan dalam Bahasa Bajau di Desa Torosiaje Laut Kecamatan Popayato Kabupaten Pohuwato

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan bentuk, makna, dan faktor yang melatarbelakangi penggunaan makian dan hinaan dalam bahasa Bajau di Desa Torosiaje Laut, Kecamatan Popayato, Kabupaten Pohuwato. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan sosiolinguistik. Data penelitian diperoleh dari tuturan masyarakat penutur bahasa Bajau melalui teknik simak bebas libat cakap, wawancara mendalam, rekam, dan catat. Analisis data dilakukan dengan mengidentifikasi, mengklasifikasikan, dan mendeskripsikan bentuk, makna, serta faktor yang melatarbelakangi penggunaan makian dan hinaan berdasarkan data yang diperoleh di lapangan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan terdapat 43 data yang terdiri atas 20 bentuk makian dan 23 bentuk hinaan. Secara formal, makian dan hinaan tersebut muncul dalam bentuk kata, yang meliputi bentuk monomorfemis dan polimorfemis, bentuk frasa, serta bentuk klausa. Dari segi makna, makian dan hinaan dalam bahasa Bajau memanfaatkan makna denotasi dan konotasi. Makna tersebut mengaitkan subjek dengan binatang, kondisi fisik, serta hal-hal yang dianggap tabu dalam masyarakat. Adapun faktor yang melatarbelakangi penggunaan makian dan hinaan terdiri atas faktor emosi dan faktor keakraban. Faktor emosi digunakan sebagai bentuk pelampiasan kekesalan, sedangkan faktor keakraban digunakan dalam interaksi sosial untuk mempererat hubungan dan solidaritas antarmasyarakat Bajau.

Kata kunci: bentuk dan makna, makian, hinaan, bahasa Bajau

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a primary tool for human communication that functions not only logically but also affectively. Language usage often serves as an indicator of the speaker's emotions, giving rise to linguistic variations in social interactions. One such variation is the emergence of profanity and insults used by communities in specific situations, including among the Bajau people of Torosiaje Laut Village. Sociolinguistics views this phenomenon not merely as a breach of politeness norms, but as a reflection of social realities, cultural values, and the dynamics of interpersonal relationships (Wijana, 2021).

The phenomenon of using profanity has been widely studied across various speech communities. Research by Jannah et al. (2017) on the forms and meanings of profanity at the Purabaya Terminal in Surabaya demonstrated that profanity is not used solely when a speaker is angry; it can also appear in intimate and casual settings. The study revealed that profanity serves diverse purposes, ranging from insulting, belittling, and expressing disappointment or astonishment to even conveying praise.

Manurung's (2023) study on profanity in the Toba Batak language similarly showed that profanity manifests in the forms of words, phrases, and clauses. Furthermore, the study identified various functions of profanity, including the expression of annoyance, strong emotion, familiarity, insult, frustration, and astonishment. These findings demonstrate that the use of profanity is closely linked to the social context and the speaker's communicative intent.

Another study was conducted by Susiati regarding profanity in the Kaledupa dialect of the Wakatobi language. This research showed that profanity in regional languages can take various linguistic forms, such as words, phrases, and other grammatical structures. It also highlighted that profanity in regional languages cannot be separated from the social and cultural background of the speech community.

Research on the use of profanity is also evident in Almajid's (2019) study regarding verbal abuse in the game *Mobile Legends* in Indonesia. Research indicates that the use of offensive language can be examined from a sociolinguistic perspective, as it relates to social interaction, communication situations, and the speaker's communicative intent. Furthermore, studies on profanity in the Minangkabau and Batak languages demonstrate that such expressions can carry meanings linked to the cultural background of the speech community.

These studies reveal that profanity and insults exhibit diverse forms, meanings, and functions, all of which are influenced by the social and cultural contexts of the speakers. However, research regarding profanity and insults in the Bajau language—specifically among the Bajau community in Torosiaje Laut Village—remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to examine profanity and insults in the Bajau language by analyzing their linguistic forms and meanings, as well as the factors underlying their use in social interactions.

The research questions addressed in this study are: (1) what are the forms of profanity and insults in the Bajau language? (2) what are the structural forms of these expressions? (3) what do these expressions mean? and (4) what factors influence their use?

The objective of this study is to describe the forms, meanings, and triggering factors of profanity and insults in the Bajau language. This research is expected to contribute to the documentation of regional languages and serve as a reference for future sociolinguistic studies.

Theoretically, profanity is defined as an emotional expression that is often taboo and violates social norms (Jay, 2009). Andersson and Trudgill (1990:153–161) explain that, in certain contexts, profanity can function as a marker of solidarity. Based on this premise, the study views profanity and insults not merely as forms of coarse language, but as aspects of language use linked to the emotions, social relationships, and culture of the speech community.



METHOD

This study was conducted in Torosiaje Laut Village, Popayato District, Pohuwato Regency, Gorontalo Province, from May to August 2025. It employs a qualitative descriptive approach from a sociolinguistic perspective. The descriptive approach was selected to provide a factual and accurate account of profanity and insults in the Bajau language (Djajasudarma in Budiarti, 2013).

The data source for this study consists of native Bajau speakers residing in Torosiaje Laut Village. Informants included traditional leaders, community figures, and ordinary residents proficient in the Bajau language. The research data comprise utterances or conversations containing profanity and insults—manifested as words, phrases, and clauses—in the Bajau language.

Four data collection techniques were employed. First, the *simak bebas libas cakap* technique (unobtrusive observation), wherein the researcher does not directly intervene in the generation of data (Sudaryanto, 1993; Razak, 2017; Abubakara, 2021). Second, collaboration with informants through in-depth interviews to elicit information regarding profanity and insults. Third, a recording technique using recording equipment to capture authentic speech. Fourth, a note-taking technique to record data derived from observation and recording sessions. The data analysis process involved several stages. The researcher transcribed the data from recordings, translated Bajau-language profanities and insults into Indonesian, identified the forms of these expressions, interpreted their meanings, described their forms and meanings—along with the influencing factors—analyzed the data, and drew conclusions from the research.

RESULTS

Based on the data analysis performed, the research findings are presented descriptively to address the four established research questions.

First, regarding the inventory of speech forms, the study successfully identified 43 instances of profanity and insults used by the Bajau speech

community in daily interactions. Of the total data collected, 20 speech forms were identified as profanities—exemplified by terms such as *Kimmanu*, *Botu*, and *Baler*—while 23 forms were classified as insults.

Secondly, regarding their formal structure, profanities and insults in the Bajau language are distributed across three linguistic forms: words, phrases, and clauses. At the word level, two structural variations are found: monomorphemic forms (such as *Kimmanu*, *Botu*, *Baler*, and *Raha'*) and polymorphemic forms (such as *Pukimmanu*, *Ngakalang*, and *Pa nginung*). At the phrase level, profanities and insults appear as sequences of words forming a meaningful unit that expresses anger, such as *Piddi malele* ('extremely painful') and *Pasilalu sekali* ('just like a real prostitute'). Meanwhile, at the clause level, the utterances are characterized by constructions containing a complete predicative relationship, as demonstrated by the utterance *Leba tarek manuko kakubor* ('may your mother take you to the grave').

Thirdly, regarding meaning, profanities and insults in the Bajau language utilize only two types of meaning: denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (associative meaning). Data findings indicate that connotative meanings in Bajau are often closely associated with cultural value systems, local beliefs regarding sea spirits, and religious norms. This is evident in the profanity *alanunea dapuboe* ('let the sea dweller take him'), which connotatively embodies traditional beliefs about sea spirits; the profanity *alaneiye* ('let God take him'), which carries the connotation of an ill-wished prayer or religious curse; and the insult *unggo* ('pig'), which carries a high degree of offensiveness because it refers to an animal considered both religiously and socially impure and taboo.

Fourthly, regarding the factors influencing their emergence, the use of profanities and insults in the Bajau language is driven by two primary conditions. Emotional factors serve as the most dominant driver; these utterances are expressed when the speaker experiences negative emotions—

such as anger, annoyance, disappointment, or offense—directed at the interlocutor. Furthermore, the factor of social familiarity was found to influence speech; in the context of close relationships, certain forms of profanity and insults actually serve as a source of humor or a marker of social solidarity between speakers, without triggering conflict.

DISCUSSION

The research identified 43 instances of data—comprising 20 forms of profanity and 23 forms of insults—in the Bajau language as used by the community in Torosiaje Laut Village. These data indicate that profanity and insults are part of the Bajau community's everyday language use. The use of such forms is not always linked to conflict or anger; in certain situations, they may also appear within close social relationships. Therefore, profanity and insults in the Bajau language cannot be understood merely as coarse language; rather, they must be viewed in light of the usage context, the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor, and the intended meaning.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language use is inextricably linked to the social conditions of the speech community. This is evident in the Bajau community's use of profanity and insults, which can reflect both the emotional state and the social relationship between interlocutors. When used in conflict situations, profanity and insults tend to serve as a means to vent anger, annoyance, hatred, or disappointment. Conversely, when used between speakers with close relationships, these same forms can shift in function to become a form of banter or a marker of familiarity. Thus, social context plays a crucial role in determining how a specific form of profanity or insult is interpreted.

In terms of linguistic form, profanities and insults in the Bajau language appear as words, phrases, and clauses. Word forms include both monomorphemic and polymorphemic types. Monomorphemic forms—such as *kimmanu*, *botu*, and *unggo*—can stand alone as linguistic units with specific lexical meanings. Meanwhile, polymorphemic forms consist of more than one

morpheme, such as *pa langgau* and *pa gilli*. The use of these word forms demonstrates that profanities and insults can be conveyed concisely and directly. Despite their simple structure, they can be highly expressive, as each word carries specific references and associations for the speech community.

The word *kimmanu*, for instance, denotes the female sexual organ. When used as a profanity, however, it ceases to function merely as a term for a body part and instead serves to demean the interlocutor. A similar pattern is observed with the word **botu**, which denotes the male sexual organ. The use of these forms illustrates how body parts considered taboo can become sources for the creation of profanities; this taboo status imbues the words with negative connotations when they are employed to attack or belittle someone.

However, the use of these words does not always yield the same function. Among close friends, *kimmanu* or *botu* may be used as a form of playful address. In such contexts, the social meaning conveyed differs from that found in arguments. This indicates that the context and the social relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor are crucial in determining how a profanity is interpreted. These findings align with research by Jannah et al. (2017), which demonstrates that profanities are not used solely during moments of anger but can also occur in intimate and casual situations.

In addition to word forms, this study identified phrase forms. One example is *piddi malele*, meaning "extremely painful." This form consists of a combination of elements that produce a more specific meaning than the use of a single word. The word **piddi** ("painful") is intensified by the element **malele**, which indicates a high degree of intensity. Thus, the use of such a phrase not only conveys a state of illness but also indicates a heightened level of suffering. In the context of verbal abuse, this intensification reveals the intensity of the emotion the speaker wishes to convey to the addressee.

Other phrasal forms demonstrate that an in-



sult can be constructed by combining elements that assign a specific judgment to the target of the utterance. The use of phrases allows the speaker to convey a more targeted intent, as the constituent elements complement one another in shaping the meaning. This indicates that profanity and insults in the Bajau language are not limited to single words but can also be formed through more complex constructions. These findings align with the research of Manurung et al. (2023), who discovered that profanity in the Toba Batak language can take the form of words, phrases, and clauses.

The clausal forms identified in this study demonstrate more complex constructions of profanity and insults, as they involve predicative relationships and convey more complete communicative intent. One example is *leba tarek manuko kakubor*, which translates to "may your mother take you to the grave." This form does more than merely utter a taboo word; it conveys a malevolent wish directed at the interlocutor. The inclusion of elements such as "mother" and "the grave" imbues the expression with heightened emotional weight due to their associations with family and death. Thus, clausal forms enable speakers to convey longer and more specific expressions compared to single-word forms.

The presence of these word, phrase, and clause forms reveals a wide structural variety in Bajau profanity and insults. These findings reinforce the results of Manurung et al. (2023), who identified these three forms in the Toba Batak language. However, the forms and referents used in Bajau possess unique characteristics shaped by the social and cultural environment of the Bajau community in Torosiaje Laut Village. Consequently, structural similarities between this study and previous research do not imply that the meanings and functions of the specific profanities are identical.

In terms of meaning, the study shows that Bajau profanity and insults employ both denotative and connotative meanings. Denotative meaning refers to the literal or fundamental definition of a word, whereas connotative meaning refers to

additional layers of meaning arising from societal associations, feelings, judgments, or values. Both types of meaning are evident in the various forms of profanity and insults identified in the study.

Denotative meaning is observed in words such as *botu*, which directly refers to the male sexual organ; *kimmanu*, referring to the female sexual organ; and *unggo*, referring to a pig. These constitute the fundamental meanings that serve as the starting point for understanding the words' usage. However, when employed as profanity or insults, these words acquire additional significance that extends beyond their literal referents. This added value arises from social judgments attached to the referents themselves. Connotative meaning becomes more apparent when a word or expression is used to cast a negative judgment on someone. *Unggo*, for instance, denotes "pig," but when used as an insult, it is not intended merely to refer to the animal itself. Instead, the word serves to negatively characterize a person by equating them with the animal serving as the basis for the insult. Consequently, the meaning perceived by the listener derives not only from the word's literal definition but also from the negative associations attached to it.

A similar instance can be observed in the expression *alanunea dapuboe*, which translates to "let the sea dweller take him." Denotatively, the expression refers to an inhabitant of the sea. However, within the context of Bajau society, it carries a connotative meaning linked to beliefs regarding sea spirits or supernatural forces. Consequently, understanding the expression requires knowledge of the speakers' cultural background. Meaning is shaped not only by the relationship between a word and its referent but also by the experiences and beliefs shared by the community.

Connotative meaning is also evident in the expression *alaneie*, meaning "let God take him." The inclusion of the element of "God" imbues the expression with a religious dimension. When used as an expletive or insult, it can be understood as a way of surrendering the interlocutor's fate to God,

reflecting the speaker's emotional state. This demonstrates that beliefs and religious values play a role in shaping the meaning of expletives and insults in the Bajau language.

Based on these findings, it is evident that the meaning of expletives and insults in Bajau cannot be grasped through literal translation alone. Certain expressions carry additional meanings tied to culture, belief, social relationships, and societal perceptions of an object. Thus, connotative meaning is crucial for understanding the use of expletives and insults, as it explains how a word with a specific literal meaning can shift function to become an insult when used in a particular context.

Beyond form and meaning, this study reveals that the use of expletives and insults is influenced by two primary factors: emotion and familiarity. Emotion is among the most visible factors in the use of such language. Speakers resort to expletives when experiencing emotional states such as anger, annoyance, disappointment, offense, or dissatisfaction with a situation. In these instances, expletives serve as a medium for the speaker to vent their feelings. The use of *piddi malele*—meaning "intense pain"—illustrates, for instance, how an emotional state can manifest as a wish for the interlocutor to suffer. Similarly, *piddi marina*—meaning "severe illness"—reflects a desire for the other person to endure a wretched state. These variations in phrasing also demonstrate that the intensity of an insult can correlate with the level of emotion experienced by the speaker.

Emotional factors are also evident in the use of *dia' neko*, meaning "may [you/they] fall ill." This expression can arise spontaneously when the speaker is angry. Meanwhile, phrases such as *ya' niloca* or *ya' suloca*—meaning "just spear him/her"—show that emotion can be expressed through the imagery of aggressive action. Although such utterances do not always translate into actual physical acts, their use reveals a strong emotional impulse directed at the interlocutor.

Curses involving body parts, diseases, and death also demonstrate how speakers utilize con-

cepts considered sensitive to intensify the emotional impact of their speech. For instance, the phrase *ancor-ancor tanganimu*—meaning "may your hands be crushed"—expresses a malevolent wish regarding the addressee's body part. Targeting body parts in this manner reveals that aspects directly linked to a person's physical condition can serve as vehicles for expressing anger.

Beyond emotional factors, the degree of familiarity emerged as a significant finding in this study. In specific social relationships, curses can be employed without the intent to genuinely insult. Words such as *kimmanu* and *botu*, for example, may be used among peers as part of informal conversation and banter. In such instances, the close relationship between the speaker and the addressee ensures that the use of words literally deemed offensive does not necessarily lead to conflict.

This situation illustrates that the social meaning of a curse is highly context-dependent. The same word can yield different effects depending on the person to whom it is addressed. When directed at someone with whom there is no close bond, the expression may be perceived as an insult; conversely, among close friends, the same term can signify closeness and solidarity. Thus, the factor of familiarity demonstrates that the use of curses is not inherently offensive.

These findings regarding familiarity align with the views of Andersson and Trudgill (1990), who posited that offensive language can function as a marker of solidarity in certain contexts. They also concur with research by Jannah et al. (2017), which found that cursing can occur in intimate and casual settings. Consequently, the study of the Bajau community reveals a similar pattern: the function of a curse varies according to the social relationship between the speaker and the addressee.

When compared to previous studies, this research presents both similarities and differences. Like the study by Jannah et al. (2017), this research shows that cursing is linked to social context and



can be employed both during moments of high emotion and within close relationships. Meanwhile, Manurung et al. (2023) shares similarities with the present study regarding linguistic forms, as both identified words, phrases, and clauses. However, they differ in terms of language, location, cultural context, and the specific subject matter examined. This study specifically analyzes profanity and insults in the Bajau language within the village of Torosiaje Laut, yielding findings that shed light on the cultural characteristics and social life of the Bajau people.

A distinctive feature of this study is the emergence of various forms of profanity and insults related to the marine environment, community beliefs, family members, body parts, diseases, and taboos. These findings demonstrate that profanity and insults can serve as a valuable data source for understanding the relationship between language and culture. The Bajau language, as examined here, not only reveals how speakers express emotions or insults but also illustrates the values the community places on family, the body, the environment, beliefs, and social relationships. Thus, the use of profanity and insults in the Bajau language can be understood as a linguistic phenomenon closely linked to the social lives of its speakers. These expressions take the form of words, phrases, and clauses; they carry both denotative and connotative meanings; and their usage is influenced by factors such as emotion and social familiarity. These findings demonstrate that offensive language cannot be understood solely based on linguistic form; rather, it must be analyzed by considering the context of use, social relationships, meaning, and underlying cultural values. In the context of the Bajau community in Torosiaje Laut Village, the use of profanity and insults thus becomes part of the communicative dynamics that reflect both the emotional expressions and the social relationships of the speakers.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, four main conclusions can be drawn. First, a total of 43 expressions of profanity and insults were identified in the Bajau language of Torosiaje Laut Village, comprising 20 instances of profanity and 23 insults. Second, in terms of form, these expressions are classified into three categories: word forms (monomorphemic and polymorphemic), phrase forms, and clause forms. Third, the meanings conveyed by these expressions fall into only two categories: denotative and connotative. Fourth, the factors influencing the use of profanity and insults are emotion—serving as an outlet for anger—and familiarity, which functions to strengthen social bonds.

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