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THE WORD DOG AS A SWEAR SOCIOCULTURAL STUDY

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Abstrak

Penggunaan kata anjing dan variasinya sebagai umpatan merupakan fenomena linguistik yang mencerminkan dinamika nilai, norma, dan kebiasaan dalam masyarakat Indonesia. Umpatan ini tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai ekspresi emosi negatif, tetapi juga memiliki makna sosial yang dipengaruhi oleh perkembangan budaya digital dan interaksi antargenerasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis makna sosiokultural penggunaan kata anjing dengan meninjau bagaimana nilai sosial budaya, norma kesopanan, dan kebiasaan masyarakat berperan dalam membentuk fungsi serta penerimaan kata tersebut. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teori sosiokultural Vygotsky (1978) sebagai dasar analisis. Data dikumpulkan melalui Google Form yang melibatkan 102 responden dari tiga rentang usia (15–25 tahun, 26–35 tahun, dan 36–45 tahun). Data kemudian dianalisis melalui proses seleksi, kategorisasi, dan interpretasi berbasis makna. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya pergeseran makna penggunaan kata anjing antar generasi. Generasi muda cenderung memaknai umpatan ini sebagai ekspresi spontan, candaan, dan simbol keakraban, sementara generasi dewasa dan tua lebih memandangnya sebagai pelanggaran norma kesopanan dan nilai moral. Fenomena ini menampilkan pelonggaran batas norma linguistik serta terbentuknya kebiasaan baru yang dipengaruhi oleh media digital dan lingkungan pertemanan. Secara sosiokultural, penggunaan kata anjing mencerminkan proses internalisasi nilai budaya dan adaptasi bahasa terhadap perubahan sosial. Penelitian ini berimplikasi pada pemahaman bahwa umpatan tidak sekedar bentuk ekspresi negatif, tetapi juga representasi identitas sosial dan perubahan budaya dalam masyarakat Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *kata anjing, umpatan, nilai sosial, norma kesopanan, kajian sosiokultural*

Abstract

The use of the word anjing (dog) and its variations as an expletive is a linguistic phenomenon that reflects the dynamics of values, norms, and customs in Indonesian society. This expletive not only serves as an expression of negative emotions, but also has social meanings that are influenced by the development of digital culture and intergenerational interactions. This study aims to analyse the sociocultural meaning of the use of the word anjing by examining how socio-cultural values, norms of politeness, and community customs play a role in shaping the function and acceptance of this word. The study uses a qualitative approach with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory as the basis for analysis. Data were collected through a Google Form involving 102 respondents from three age groups (15–25 years, 26–35 years, and 36–45 years). The data were then analysed through a process of selection, categorisation, and meaning-based interpretation. The results of the study show a shift in the meaning of the word anjing between generations. The younger generation tends to interpret this expletive as a spontaneous expression, a joke, and a symbol of familiarity, while the older generations view it more as a violation of norms of politeness and moral values. This phenomenon reflects a loosening of linguistic norms and the formation of new habits influenced by digital media and social circles. Socioculturally, the use of the word anjing reflects the process of internalising cultural values and adapting language to social change. This research implies that swear words are not merely a form of negative expression, but also a representation of social identity and cultural change in Indonesian society.

Keywords: dog-related words, swear word, social values, norms of decency, sociocultural study

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary communication tool used by humans to express thoughts, feelings, and emotions. In practice, language not only serves as a means of conveying information but also as a medium for expressing both positive and negative emotions (Aldiansyah et al., 2024). One form of negative emotion that often arises in verbal communication is swearing. Swear words are a form of verbal expression used by individuals to articulate various emotions, such as anger, annoyance, or even humor in communication   (Azzam & Pratita, 2025). Al Edhen et al (2023) state that verbal expressions like swearing can also reflect the complex psychological and cultural dynamics of society, where language becomes a tool for venting emotions while simultaneously building social solidarity. The use of swear words is an interesting linguistic phenomenon because it showcases how speakers use language to express anger, frustration, or even intimacy (Laksita et al., 2025). According to Prasetiyo & Arief (2024), the form of swearing used often arises spontaneously to express emotions or strengthen social interactions, and can take the form of direct insults, expressions, or sarcasm, depending on the context of communication.

Language plays a crucial role as a cultural tool mediating the relationship between individuals and society (Vygotsky, 1978). Through language, humans not only communicate but also shape ways of thinking, instill values, norms, and habits that exist within their social environment. Vygotsky adds that the development of the meaning of language occurs through social interaction, where the social function of an utterance is then internalized as part of individual consciousness. Thus, every use of language, including swearing, reflects the values and cultural norms of the society that underpins it. In this context, the phenomenon of using animal names as insults can be understood not merely as spontaneous linguistic expressions, but as a result of socio-cultural construction that influences how society interprets emotions, closeness, and forms of verbal expression deemed acceptable in certain situations. Research by Sadda et al (2022) emphasizes that swearing is a linguistic phenomenon that has become part of the communication habits of society, even used to express emotional closeness or social intimacy. Common examples of animal-related insults found in various texts include *dog* (with variations such as anjir, anjay, and others), *pig*, *jangkrik*, *bangsat*, and others.

Based on initial data, swearing is used to insult friends, people who are envious of others' success, annoying individuals, and those who are wrong. Research by Gege et al (2025) shows that swearing or vulgar language like *dog* or *pig* is often considered a violation of language politeness norms. In certain social contexts, its use can be understood as part of legitimate cultural expression, as long as the formal and informal contexts are considered. With several existing swears, respondents typically swore in friendship circles, outside the home, in any place, in public areas, everywhere except in formal forums, and in " hanging out" (a gathering place for casual activities with friends). By swearing, the relationship between respondents and the person being insulted can be fine, more intimate and casual, or even tighter, while some relationships may sometimes be fine and sometimes not, depending on the moment of swearing. From respondents' findings, some consider swearing merely a joke; however, others view it as an insult or hatred, and it can appear, from another's perspective, as hate or excessive emotional outburst.

The word *dog* is one of the most frequently found forms of swearing in Indonesian. Denotatively, *dog* means a four-legged loyal animal, but connotatively, this word is often used to express anger or insult. The word *dog* in Indonesian used to be considered a harsh insult as

89

it reflects the characteristics of a disgusting animal, but it has now undergone a process of softening into milder forms such as *anjay, anjir, njir,* dan *anjrit* (Prayogi & Nadaraning, 2024). This shift represents a form of social adaptation to politeness norms and is evidence that society creates new linguistic strategies to reduce the harsh connotation without eliminating the emotional function of the word. The use of "dog" as a swear word is also prevalent on social media, in daily conversations, and even in bold communities such as the "*Komunitas Marah-Marah*" on platform X, where references to animal-related insults dominate up to 53% of the total angry utterances collected (Nova & Winarti, 2024). This phenomenon indicates that animals, particularly dogs, hold a certain symbolic position in Indonesian culture.

The phenomenon of variations of the word *dog* demonstrates a creative process in language use influenced by the social and cultural contexts of its usage. Based on survey results, various derivative forms were found, such as *anjir, anjirr, anjirrr, anjrit, anjriitt, anjay, anying, njir* hingga plesetan seperti *banjir, ciceng, asu, kirek, patek,* dan *celeng*. These variations arise from the habits of young speakers who often use these words spontaneously, reflexively, or simply to follow social media trends. For example, the words *anjir* and *anjay* are often considered softer and funnier compared to their original form *dog*, making them more acceptable in casual conversations among friends. Most respondents use this swearing in friendship circles, both verbally and in writing, in hangout spots, on social media, and even in informal public spaces. This variation also indicates a change in meaning from harsh insults to expressions of familiarity, sensation, or mild annoyance.

Thus, the development of variations of the word *dog* reflects social dynamics in modern society, where politeness norms are adjusted according to context, closeness of relationships, and the evolution of digital culture, which renders swearing not always negative, but also a part of a linguistic style that marks solidarity among speakers. A similar phenomenon was also found by Pratama et al (2024) in his study on swearing in online gaming. He discovered that the word *dog* and its variations (anjir, anjay, anying) are used not only to express anger but also admiration, closeness, and solidarity among players. This shows that the form and meaning of swearing are dynamic and influenced by social situations. Research by Wibowo (2020) states that swearing, despite its negative connotation, plays an important role in social interactions as it can strengthen emotional expression and regulate social hierarchies in everyday conversations.

However, the meaning and function of the word *dog* are not always negative. Swear words can help create a friendly atmosphere, especially among youth who use them as a form of closeness and verbal humor (Helmiyanti et al., 2020). This reinforces the view that the social meaning of swearing heavily depends on the context of use, the relationships between speakers, and the social norms applicable within that scope. In certain societies, swear words can even become symbols of emotional intimacy. Meanwhile, research by Attazky et al (2020) shows that utterances that are sarcastic or contain swearing are often used as a strategy to assert opinions or build group solidarity. In a broader context, the use of swearing like *dog* reflects how society shapes linguistic expression based on cultural value systems and social situations. This phenomenon displays a change in meaning from forms of insult to forms of emotional expression that can be accepted in certain situations.

Regardless of the substantial amount of research on swearing, studies specifically addressing the socio-cultural meanings of animal words remain limited. Most previous research has focused on linguistic forms and functions (Nugraha et al., 2022), but few have explained how society constructs the cultural values behind the use of these words. Indeed, the interpretation

of the word dog not only demonstrates linguistic function but also reflects social and cultural perspectives on that animal as a symbol of manifestation and closeness.

Based on the above exposition, this study aims to examine the use of the word "dog" as a swear word with animal symbolism within a socio-cultural framework. This research is expected to uncover the social functions, cultural meanings, and contexts of the use of the word "dog" in Indonesian communication. Thus, the results can expand understanding of the relationship between language, culture, and social behavior in everyday life.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a sociocultural perspective because it focuses on the social values and contextual use of animal terms as swear words. The qualitative approach was chosen to obtain in-depth and meaningful data, where meaning represents the essence of the actual data—namely, the values hidden behind the externally visible information (Sugiyono, 2017). The sociocultural perspective is used to examine the relationship between language and culture, as explained by Vygotsky (1978) who states that language serves as a cultural symbol that reflects a society's system of thinking and values.

The research data were collected through a Google Form to explore public perceptions regarding values, norms, and habits in the use of the word *anjing* and its variations. The research instrument consisted of eight questions: two concerning values, three concerning norms, and three concerning habitual use. The instrument grid was designed to capture the public's views on cultural values, levels of politeness, norm violations, and the contextual use of swear words in social interactions. A total of 102 respondents participated in this study, consisting of 48 respondents aged 15–25, 29 respondents aged 26–35, and 25 respondents aged 36–45.

Data collection was carried out by distributing the Google Form via WhatsApp Story and WhatsApp Groups. Data analysis was conducted by selecting respondents' answers, categorizing them into values, norms, and habits, and then drawing conclusions by examining the meanings contained in each category. This process aimed to describe how societal values, norms, and habits are reflected in the use of animal terms as expressions of emotion and social identity.

The validity of the data was ensured through triangulation and accuracy enhancement techniques as suggested by Sugiyono (2017). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing responses from different participants to identify similarities, differences, and unique perspectives. Meanwhile, theoretical triangulation was performed by interpreting the data through Vygotsky (1978) sociocultural theory as the main analytical lens, supported by other relevant linguistic and sociolinguistic theories. Accuracy was strengthened by repeatedly reading and reviewing the data to ensure that the interpretations genuinely represented the meaning of the phenomenon under study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data findings and analysis of the responses from participants who filled out the Google Form, the word *dog* as an insult is examined from the perspectives of social and cultural values, norms of politeness, and societal habits. The discussion is as follows:

Social and Cultural Values of Society Regarding Insults

Based on the analysis of data from the third age group, it is evident that perceptions of the word *dog* as an insult reflect notable differences in values. In the 15–25 age group, the majority of respondents believe that the word indeed carries a harsh and negative meaning, but its usage is

considered commonplace and not always intended to insult. For the younger generation, the use of this insult is often understood as a form of spontaneous expression and can sometimes become a symbol of closeness among peers. This indicates a shift in values from something once considered taboo to being more flexible according to social context. In contrast, the 26–35 age group presents a more cautious viewpoint. They still uphold values of politeness but recognize that modern social contexts have made the word more frequently heard and sometimes accepted in certain situations, such as during casual joking. Meanwhile, the 36–45 age group holds a more normative and religious perspective. They believe that the use of the word *dog* as an insult reflects a lack of moral and ethical standards in a person, and it is even considered contrary to religious teachings and cultural values. Thus, overall, these differences in values indicate a shift in meaning and social acceptance of the insult *dog*, moving from something deemed taboo by older generations to being more contextual among younger generations.

Values represent individual beliefs regarding what is considered good or bad in social life. Values play a crucial role in forming social norms, as it is from these values that rules or guidelines emerge to direct human behavior in accordance with societal expectations and accepted standards (Syarubany et al., 2021). Social values grow and evolve alongside the dynamics of community life, serving as a measure to determine appropriate, acceptable, and fitting behavior in social environments. Through these social values, a shared belief system is formed that guides society in interactions and moral decision-making. Furthermore, social and cultural values not only function as guidelines for action but also reflect the identity, character, and worldview of a community (Puspitasari, 2021). Social values grow and evolve alongside the dynamics of community life, serving as a measure to

determine appropriate, acceptable, and fitting behavior in social environments. Through these social values, a shared belief system is formed that guides society in interactions and moral decision-making. Furthermore, social and cultural values not only function as guidelines for action but also reflect the identity, character, and worldview of a community, Chandra et al (2021) emphasize that social and cultural values play an important role in fostering multicultural attitudes, tolerance, and social harmony within diverse societies. Thus, social and cultural values can be understood as a set of principles embraced by society to regulate ways of thinking and behaving, thereby shaping a harmonious and orderly life that reflects the collective identity of a community.

Vygotsky (1978) asserts that the social values of a community are transmitted through social interaction and mediated by language. In the context of this research, the use of the word *dog* as an insult reflects the process of social value transmission within its speaking community. Based on the data, the majority of respondents believe that the word *dog* does not always carry a meaning of insult, but rather depends on the context and the intention of the speaker. For the younger generation, this word is often used as an expression of emotion or humor. This indicates a shift in meaning, where the negative value associated with the word becomes more relative and contextual. In line with Vygotsky's perspective, language serves as a cultural tool that reflects the value systems of society. Thus, the use of the insult *dog* among the younger generation illustrates the dynamics of social values that are increasingly tolerant of coarse language as long as it is used in contexts of familiarity.

This research shows that the social and cultural values regarding the use of the word *dog* and its variations have undergone a shift in meaning. This insult is no longer understood solely as a form of insult but also as an emotional

92

expression and a symbol of closeness, particularly among the younger generation. For younger respondents, this word serves to reinforce social solidarity and intimacy among speakers, while for older adults, the use of this word is still considered a violation of ethics and politeness. These differing perspectives indicate that social and cultural values are dynamic and continuously adapt to changes in time, media, and communication patterns within society.

Social Norms of Politeness Regarding Insults

From the perspective of norms, the third age group also displays different levels of compliance and tolerance towards the use of the word *dog* in everyday communication. In the 15–25 age group, norms of politeness are still recognized, but their boundaries are beginning to shift. The majority of respondents believe that the insult still violates norms, but variations like *anjir* or *anjay* are considered milder and acceptable in certain situations, especially among peers or on social media. This indicates that norms within the younger age group are adaptive and situational, keeping pace with the development of popular language styles. Similarly, the 26–35 age group still upholds social norms and politeness, even though they understand that changing times have made the word more frequently used. They tend to view norm violations as occurring but can be tolerated in contexts of joking or light emotional expression. Meanwhile, the 36–45 age group holds a much stricter viewpoint. They agree that the use of the insult *dog* clearly violates norms of politeness, culture, and religion. For this group, social norms are non-negotiable, and thus the word is deemed inappropriate under any circumstances. This aligns with the perspective of Mijianti & Tamami (2023) which emphasizes the importance of linguistic politeness as a form of respect for cultural values and norms in societal communication. These differences illustrate that language norms are experiencing relaxation in line with generational changes and media

influences, where younger groups are more permissive while older groups maintain traditional values of politeness.

Norms are a collection of social rules that serve as guidelines for individuals in the context of social life. According to Syarubany et al (2021) norms can be understood as standards or references that regulate human actions to align with social expectations and prevailing values. One important form of norms in social life is the norm of politeness, which consists of a set of rules that govern a person's behavior to remain in harmony with etiquette, propriety, and respect for others. Norms of politeness are derived from customs, culture, and moral values that are passed down through generations and internalized through social interaction processes within society. As explained by Subroto (2021), norms of politeness function to maintain social harmony by guiding individuals to act according to a sense of appropriateness and decency. The essence of these norms lies in the values of propriety and social habits that are collectively accepted as a form of respect for others. Norms of politeness are not only formal but also dynamic as they continuously adjust to cultural changes and the developments of modern society. In the context of social interaction, violations of norms of politeness often lead to social sanctions in the form of reprimands or rejection, while adherence to these norms strengthens solidarity and harmony in human relationships.

Vygotsky (1978) explains that social norms are formed through the internalization of results from social interactions that then become guidelines for behavior and communication. Based on the research findings, language norms related to the use of the word "dog" show differences between formal and informal contexts. The majority of respondents consider this word inappropriate to say in public places or formal situations, but it is deemed acceptable and familiar in casual conversations among friends. This indicates that linguistic norms are dynamic

93

and adapted to social contexts. The younger generation, particularly Gen Z, tends to be more permissive towards the use of insults as long as they do not offend others. The use of variations like *anjir*, *anjay*, or *bjir* becomes a form of softening the meaning to remain expressive without violating politeness. This phenomenon reflects Vygotsky's view that norms and language continuously evolve through social interactions, where changes in values and culture affect the boundaries of formality and acceptance of certain language forms.

This study shows that the norms of politeness in the use of the word "dog" are now more flexible and adaptive, especially among the younger generation. The 15–25 age group understands that the word still falls into the category of insults, but its use in friendship circles is not always considered a violation of social norms as long as the context and intent are not offensive. For them, insults serve as emotional expressions and symbols of closeness. Meanwhile, the 26–35 age group tends to be moderate, maintaining politeness while being more accepting of changing language styles in the digital realm. Conversely, the 36–45 age group still firmly upholds traditional norms and views the word "dog" as a moral and polite violation. This difference indicates that norms of politeness are subject to negotiation across generations, where the younger generation is more permissive regarding language variations, while the older generation clings to classical values of politeness.

Community Habits Regarding Insults

In terms of habits, there are different patterns of usage among age groups that reflect the sociolinguistic dynamics of society. In the 15–25 age group, the use of the word *dog* and its variations, such as *anjir* or *anjay*, has become part of everyday language habits. This word is often used in emotional moments, during jokes, and even as a sign of closeness among friends. They perceive it as a form of spontaneous expression

that does not always imply insult. This indicates that among the younger group, these insults have taken on a new social function, transforming from aggressive expressions into symbols of solidarity and closeness. The 26–35 age group exhibits more limited habits. They admit to using this insult occasionally when angry, surprised, or joking, but they still recognize that such words should be avoided in formal situations or in the presence of elders. In other words, this group tends to restrict usage based on context and audience. Meanwhile, in the 36–45 age group, the habit of using the word dog is almost nonexistent. They consider such words inappropriate in any conversation, and when hearing them from younger generations, they view it as a sign of declining ethics in speech. Thus, from the perspective of habits, it can be concluded that the use of the word dog as an insult is increasing among the younger generation and decreasing among the older generation, in line with the changing social functions of language influenced by digital culture and modern interactions.

The term "habits" has the meanings: 1) n something that is commonly done, etc.; 2) n a pattern for responding to certain situations that an individual learns and repeats for the same thing (Badan pembinaan dan pengembangan bahasa 2025). Habits occupy a strategic position in social life as they are often seen as consistent life guidelines, actions repeated not merely by coincidence, but because they are considered correct, liked, and socially accepted within the community (Jannah, 2022). In the sociocultural realm, habits reflect the internalization of norms and cultural values, as seen in studies examining the adaptation of new habits in school environments, where the habits formed then become widely accepted social norms (Kurnia et al., 2023). Therefore, habits not only reflect an individual's personal activities but also indicate how individuals participate in the social system, how values and norms are translated into everyday practices, and how communities shape

what is considered "normal" or "acceptable" in their cultural contexts.

Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that all human mental activities are mediated by culture, including ways of thinking, speaking, and interacting. In the context of this research, the habit of using the word *dog* as a curse reflects how culture and the social environment shape the language practices of the community. Based on the data, most respondents, particularly the younger generation, admit to frequently using the word *dog* or its variations in informal conversations due to the influence of their social circles, not to insult. In this context, cursing functions as a marker of familiarity and a spontaneous expression of emotion. However, in formal situations or in the presence of respected individuals, this word is still deemed inappropriate. This indicates that language habits are contextual and flexible. In line with Vygotsky's view, language serves as a cultural tool that not only conveys thoughts but also shapes social identity. Thus, linguistic habits such as the use of curses reflect the internalization of cultural values and social interactions, where forms of language that may seem coarse can be interpreted as symbols of familiarity within certain cultural contexts.

From the perspective of habits, the research findings indicate that the use of the word *dog* and its variations has become part of daily communication practices, especially among the younger generation in informal contexts. This curse often arises spontaneously during joking, gaming, or in response to surprising situations, and is considered a normal emotional expression. This habit is formed through social interactions as well as the influence of digital media, which reinforces language patterns in young speaker communities. This aligns with Vygotsky, (1978) view that language habits are formed through processes of social and cultural mediation. Meanwhile, older and adult age groups exhibit more controlled and contextual habits, avoiding

the use of such words in public spaces or towards elder individuals. These findings reveal a generational difference, where the younger generation views cursing as part of their communication style and emotional expression, while the older generation still regards it as an impolite form of speech that is inappropriate to use.

The research results show that the use of the word *dog* and its variations reflects a shift in values, norms, and habits within Indonesian society. From a socio-cultural perspective, the younger generation sees this word as a spontaneous expression and a form of familiarity, while the older generation disagrees with its moral implications and notions of politeness. In terms of norms, there is a relaxation of boundaries regarding politeness, especially among the youth who believe that cursing is acceptable as long as it does not offend others. Habitually, the use of the word *dog* has become part of everyday communication, influenced by friendship circles and digital media. Socio-culturally, this phenomenon indicates that language continuously adapts to the changing times. Cursing is no longer merely a negative expression but also a means of social interaction that reflects the cultural dynamics and identity of Indonesia's younger generation.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the use of the word dog and its variations has a complex social meaning and cannot be understood only as a form of rude language. In the perspective of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, language acts as a cultural tool that reflects social values, norms and habits of society. The social values that are developing among the younger generation show a shift in meaning from negative swearing to a symbol of emotional expression and closeness. From the norm aspect, it was found that violations of politeness norms are contextual. Swearing is

95

considered inappropriate in formal situations, but acceptable in informal communication between friends. Meanwhile, in terms of habits, the younger generation makes the use of swearing part of their daily communication style, while the older generation continues to reject its use because it is considered to be contrary to moral and religious values. Thus, the phenomenon of using the word dog describes social changes in society. Language is a medium for cultural adaptation that reflects shifting values and interaction patterns between generations in today's society. This research confirms that swearing is not just a spontaneous linguistic expression, but rather a manifestation of the socio-cultural construction that lives in society.

This study has several limitations, including the fact that data collection was conducted solely through Google Forms, which means that respondents tended to come from digitally active groups. The number of respondents across age groups was also uneven, which may have limited the diversity of perspectives. In addition, the focus of the study was restricted to the word *dog* and its variations, so it does not fully represent the broader phenomenon of animal-based swear words in Indonesian society. Despite these limitations, this research contributes to providing a sociocultural depiction of the shifting values, norms, and habits surrounding the use of *anjing* as a swear word. It also enriches linguistic and sociolinguistic studies related to language dynamics among younger generations and can serve as a foundation for future research seeking to expand the object of study or employ more diverse data collection methods.

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