

Swearing Words in Holy Scriptures: A Pragmatic Study of the Quran

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Abstract

The term "swearing words" refers to diction that is deemed taboo, unpleasant, cursing, and restricted in discourse. However, there is no way to avoid it. It has so existed since the beginning of human spoken communication and continues to this day. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the swearing phrases in one of the holy scriptures, the holy Quran. This was done to determine whether swearing words exist in the sacred place or not. The researchers collected data by reading scripture and noting each indicated verse. The efforts were done three times to measure there was no any single datum which was left. Next, a data selection process was carried out to ensure the accuracy of the data by consulting Al Tabari's Tafseer book. After collecting a large amount of data, the researchers conducted a thorough analysis to determine: 1) the function of swearing words and 2) the origin of swearing phrases as depicted in holy text. The investigation revealed that there are two roles of cursing. According to the findings, the swear words acquired are employed to insult, to curse, and show furious emotions. The second discovery is that swearing words can come from five different sources. The categories are animal, mental, physical, safety, and respectability.

Keywords: Swearing words, Holy Scripture, Qur'an.

Introduction

The term swearing words is a type of diction that is considered taboo, impolite, cursing, and prohibited to employ in conversation (Montagu, 2001; Ljung, 2011; Reranta, 2023). The statement underlines that swearing words potentially curse the referred object so it is prohibited to apply. According to Beers Fägersten (2017), the prohibition comes out since swearing words have negative connotations from a social and cultural standpoint. Automatically, providing it would primarily lead to disputes among speakers (Jay, 2009). In addition, Hughes (1991) stated that someone who delivers it is mainly perceived by society as an unfriendly, rude, and uneducated person. In the English context, some examples of swearing words are shit, piss, and prick (Stapleton, et al, 2022).

Although swearing word is generally deemed undesirable and implied to be forbidden, people cannot resist using it in communication (Huges, 1991). Furthermore, it has evolved throughout thousands of years (Chirico, 2014; Vingerhoets & Bylsma, 2013). Moreover, Montagu (2001) also mentioned that it is the same age as the human civilization of spoken communication. in the same way, Sudaryanto (1992) said that it is an impactful term that serves as the starting point for communication. According to the assertions above, the swearing word is implicitly defined as a fundamental aspect of communication and cannot be abolished in human verbal interaction.

Swearing words cannot be abolished from human conversation since they reflect intense emotions. Ljung (2011) and Vingerhoets & Bylsma (2013) claimed that swearing words are commonly employed to indicate a speaker's intense emotion. Swearing,

defined as 'an act of uttering swearing words', is an act of expressing powerful emotions (Finn, 2017; Holmes, 2017; Löbner, 2013; and Ljung, 2011). Meanwhile, normal people will surely experience certain emotions when something happens; the more unexpected the incident, the stronger the emotions that emerge (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004). According to Goleman (2002), emotions encourage humans to engage in natural response behaviors, such as saying unique and involved words. Thus, it is apparent that as long as humans have emotions, cursing will be difficult to avoid.

Beers Fägersten and Stapleton (2017) stated that apart from expressing strong emotions, it was also found that people mention swearing words for several other functions. First, swearing words are said to generate humor. Swearing with the above intention is swearing in a lighthearted manner to create an intimate setting. Second, swearing words are used to express social unity. In this part, swearing is utilized as a mode of communication in a social society, therefore it is still employed as a symbol of solidarity. Third, swearing words are used to establish identity. The objective of this curse is nearly identical to that of the preceding curse, with the exception that it is individual. Moreover, Bulton and Hutton (1997) has also proposed other function of swearing. It is to insult. According to them, insulting means lowering other's reputations so they will be embarrassed. Furthermore, Bulton and Hutton (1997) explained that the phenomenon of insulting mostly comes from the dislike of insulter towards what the object of insult does.

According to Beers Fägersten (2017), swearing words originate from certain sources and have a negative connotation. Accordingly, Wibowo (2020) classified cursing terms based on their provenance. The classifications can be found in the following table with an adaptation made to generalize the context:

Table 1. Provenance of Swearing Words (Adapted from Wibowo, 2020)

No.	Source	Example of Words
1	Part of body	Penis, Vagina, and Head
2	Personality	Stingy
3	Mental	Crazy
4	Activity	Fuck
5	Animal	Monkey
6	Occupation	Criminal
7	Figure/Person	<i>Bolot</i> , an Indonesian actor who always does stupid acting expertively
8	Food	Egg Crust
9	Ghost	Zombie
10	Family Relations	Mother
11	Ethnicity	Negroid
12	Origin	Asia

As mentioned in the first paragraph, swearing words deal with social and custom points of view. Therefore, a word can be judged as a swearing word in a social context while it is not in another social context. Subroto (2011) explained that the term 'dog' is used as a swearing word in Indonesian Muslim society since they consider the animal unclean, meanwhile, in Western society, it is not since they consider the animal as a smart and friendly animal. Accordingly, the difference leads researchers to do research in different social contexts, such as Reranta (2023) in the Lampungnese context, Drummond (2020) in the United Kingdom context, and Cressman et al (2009) in the United States context.

However, the analysis of swearing words is limited to daily conversations of people so far. Currently, there is no analysis of swearing words in a document which also has an important role in constructing social context, such as holy scriptures, whereas, it is passed down from generation to generation. In accordance, the holy scripture is claimed to have a vital effect in shaping society (I-Morphé, 2012). So, investigating it will aid in the process of determining the causes of cultural phenomena, in this case, it is swearing words. On the other hand, it is to

highlight whether the swearing words is part of religious scripture or not. In addition, the analysis can also be a source of learning in the religious area, for example showing certain actions that invite the swearing of God, prophet, or other character in a holy scripture.

Given the preceding discussion, this research team opted to examine holy books to determine whether or not swearing words are documented in them. If they are collected, they will be contextually explored to determine (1) the source of swearing and (2) the reason for swearing. By exploring both, the swearing words of holy scripture will be much more understood, thus the application of the research findings will be broader, not only in linguistics studies, but also in social, teaching, and religious studies.

This study was intended to investigate various spiritual texts from major religions around the world, including the Bible, the Quran, Veda, Tripitaka, and Talmud. However, due to time, distance, and the research team's knowledge of the culture and language of the books mentioned above, the research team confined the research sources used in this study to solely the Quran, Muslims' holy scripture. Others will be investigated in the future after competent study partners have been identified. In this regard, research on the books mentioned above might be conducted within 5 years of the research being published.

Theory and Method

This study uses qualitative research. According to (Leavy, 2014), qualitative research focused on social and behavioral reflection is used to examine, explain, and clarify phenomena, disclose the importance people place on actions, events, and artifacts, and gain a better knowledge of social existence. In the same line, Zaluchu (2020) said that qualitative research is research that originates from a phenomenological view as the basis for its approach. Mulyadi (2013) also noted that qualitative research is utilized to construct hypotheses based on experience. This study was done to develop a hypothesis concerning swearing words in the holy Quran, its source and function. Considering the statements above, this research applied a qualitative approach to analyze and provide findings.

The data in this study are verses of the holy Quran that have harsh or taboo meanings in Arab culture, which is where the book was revealed. These verses were acquired using a multi-stage selection procedure. The first level involves reading the scripture in Arabic. During this approach, verses suspected of having harmful implications were gathered by two members of the research team who understand Arabic and culture. In this part, the holy Quran used was published by *Kementrian Agama RI*, "the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia" (Kementrian Agama RI, 2015). In the scripture, there are 6.214 verses and all were read comprehensively to gain swearing words. Simultaneously, the other members of the research team made the same effort using the holy Quran English translation to ensure the data collecting process did not leave any single swearing verses. In this part, the English holy Quran used was published by Oxford University Press (Haleem, 2005). Accordingly, the research team consists of four people, two of them master Arabic, and the rest master English.

After the data were collected, they were qualitatively investigated to determine the context '*asbab an-nuzul*' and the real meaning '*tafseer*' of each data by referring to the Quran interpretation book *Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an* 'The Commentary on the Qur'an, also known as *tafseer al-Tabari*, written by Jarir Al-Tabari in 804 A.D. Accordingly, the book was chosen by considering three factors. The first is its reputation in Islamic thought and history. In accordance, the book is considered the biggest Quran tafsir book and most books in the field refer to the book (Drajat, 2017). The second one is the researchers' mastery of the science of the Quran. One of the researchers was certified as having an authentic understanding of the book. The last one is the limitation of the study. The researchers planned to refer to more Quran tafsir books. However, the limitation of time, finance, and capability kept them to refer to only one book. In this part, tafsir al-Tabari used by the researchers was published by Oxford University Press (Al Tabari, 1989). Moreover, the verse will be mentioned in the form of code 'name of surah: number of verses', for example, the code 'Al-Fatiha: 1' means it is the first

verse in surah Al-Fatiha. On the other hand, verses will be presented in tabular form if there is more than one consecutive verse in a sub-discussion.

Next, after understanding the context and meaning of verses collected, determining whether or not each datum contains swearing words could be done objectively. Furthermore, these allusions assisted the research team in examining the function and source of swearing words in the scripture. In accordance, this research applied the theory of Beers-Fägersten and Stapleton, et al (2022) and Bulton and Hutton (1997) to examine the function and the finding of Wibowo (2020) to examine the provenance of each datum. The findings and conclusion would then be given in a paragraph format. To be clear, this study primarily focuses on the semantic analysis of swearing words, which includes provenance and function, rather than discussing the unique moral or spiritual qualities and lessons of each verse stated because it is linguistic in nature. The researchers intend to write on the moral and spiritual value under a different study title.

Findings and Discussion

After extensive data collection and analysis done, 123 Quranic verses containing swearing words were found. However, the researchers left out 99 verses since their asbab anzul and tafseer do not support swearing, after referring all data to the book of Tafseer Al-Tabari (2022). Although they technically contain swearing words in this instance, the language is not used in a swearing manner. Below, Al-Maida: 60 is an example of the left data;

Say, 'Shall I tell you who deserves a worse punishment from God than [the one you wish upon] us? Those God distanced from Himself, was angry with, and condemned as apes and pigs, and those who worship idols: they are worse in rank and have strayed further from the right path. (Haleem, 2005)

The words express God's wrath towards humanity and his condemnation of them as pigs and apes. Accordingly, because of their traits—pigs are dirty and apes are greedy—apes and pigs have negative connotations in Arabic. It sounds like swearing, then. Al Tabari's interpretation, on the other hand, claims that the verse responds to those who disparage Islam by stating that it is the worst faith by narrating the tale of two people who were denounced as pigs and apes for acting in the same ways as other people (Al-Tabari, 1989). Therefore, the foul words in the verse are used to tell a story rather than to swear. Therefore, researchers left the verse and the remaining 99. Next, the analyzed 21 data will be presented in the sub-fields according to their function and provenance.

According to the study, the holy Quran contains two uses for swearing words. In the first, swearing words are used to insult. It is discovered that the insults are aimed at either Iblees or individuals who possess certain categorized traits. In the first, people who do not accept Islam as the only true faith are being insulted. In accordance, fourteen verses declare it. First, some themes of swearing words are repetitively implied in ten verses. Those are recited in the table below:

Table 2. Repetitive Theme of Swearing Words

Surah	Order	Verse
Al-Maida	71	<i>They thought there would be no consequences, so they turned a blind eye and a deaf ear. Yet Allah turned to them in forgiveness 'after their repentance', but again many became blind and deaf. And Allah is All-Seeing of what they do.</i>
Al-Anam	39	<i>Those who deny Our signs are 'wilfully' deaf and dumb—lost in darkness. Allah leaves whoever He wills to stray and guides whoever He wills to the Straight Way.</i>

<i>Al-Araaf</i>	79	<i>And We have certainly created for Hell many of the jinn and mankind. They have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear. Those are like livestock; rather, they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless.</i>
<i>Yunus</i>	42	<i>Some of them listen to what you say, but can you make the deaf hear even though they do not understand</i>
<i>Huud</i>	42	<i>The example of these two parties is that of the blind and the deaf, compared to the seeing and the hearing. Can the two be equal? Will you not then be mindful?</i>
<i>An-Nahl</i>	108	<i>They are the ones whose hearts, ears, and eyes are sealed by Allah, and it is they who are 'truly' heedless.</i>
<i>Al-Kahf</i>	101	<i>Those who turned a blind eye to My Reminder¹ and could not stand listening 'to it'.</i>
<i>Al-Hajj</i>	46	<i>Have they not traveled throughout the land so their hearts may reason, and their ears may listen? Indeed, it is not the eyes that are blind, but it is the hearts in the chests that grow blind.</i>
<i>Ruum</i>	52	<i>So you 'O Prophet' certainly cannot make the dead hear 'the truth'. Nor can you make the deaf hear the call when they turn their backs and walk away.</i>
<i>Ruum</i>	53	<i>Nor can you lead the blind out of their misguidance. You can make none hear 'the truth' except those who believe in Our revelations, 'fully' submitting 'to Allah'.</i> (Haleem, 2005)

In those recited verses, the terms *blind* 'صم', *dumb* 'عمي', and *deaf* 'بكم' are consistently discovered although they exist in some different word construction. According to Al-Tabari (1989), those three words are metaphors. In accordance, the blinds refer to people who cannot see the truth, the deafs refer to people to do not take lessons after hearing the Quran, and the dumbs refer to people who do not speak the truth (Al-Tabari, 1989). However, the dictions state that physical condition is portrayed in the Quran as a provenance of swearing words.

Next, the insult of the Quran also takes place in the verse of Al-Anfal: 49. It says, "Remember' when the hypocrites and those with sickness in their hearts said, "These believers are deluded by their faith." But whoever puts their trust in Allah, surely Allah is Almighty, All-Wise (Haleem, 2005). According to Al-Tabari (1989), the verse historically revealed before a holy war between the Muslims in Medina versus the Mecca Quraish, who did not recognize Mohammed as an apostle. Before the war, Mohammed invited his followers to join the war. However, some of them rejected the invitation with no tolerable reason. In relation, the verses were revealed to insult them. In the verse, those were called as hypocrites 'الْمُنَافِقُونَ' and having sickness in their hearts 'فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ'. From the verse, it is discovered that mental illness takes place in the Quran as one of the provenances of swearing words.

Furthermore, Al-Jumua: 5 verse of the Quran also brings an insult. It says, "The example of those who were entrusted with 'observing; the Torah but failed to do so, is that of a donkey carrying books. How evil is the example of those who reject Allah's signs! For Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people (Haleem, 2005). According to Al-Tabari (1989), the verse refers to Muslims who did not rush to go to the mosque even though the call to prayer had been sounded. Those were matched by the verse to the people of Moses who did not obey the holy Torah. In addition, they are all matched to a carrying books donkey. Al-Tabari (1989) said this is one of the worst insulting metaphors of the culture spread in the period. Based on him, Arabs in the era recognized donkeys as stupid animals. Moreover, its stupidity makes it impossible for the animal to learn knowledge although it carries boxes of books.

Moreover, Al-Bayyina: 6 is also one of the findings which can be categorized as previous verses discussed. It says, *“Indeed, those who disbelieve from the People of the Book and the polytheists will be in the Fire of Hell, to stay there forever. They are the worst of ‘all’ beings”* (Haleem, 2005). According to Al-Tabari (1989), the verse was revealed when some disbelievers disrupted Mohammed's preaching. In the moment, the verse was mentioned by him in front of his followers the disbelievers as the remainder to both sides. Explicitly, the verse claims that those disrupting people are the worst of all beings *‘شَرُّ الْبَرِيَّةِ’*. Implicitly, the claim refers to the reputation. Based on the verse, they are even worse than any other beings, including animals and soil (Al-Tabari: 1989)

The second one, the function of swearing words discovered in the Quran is to curse. Firstly, the verse of Al-Araf: 166 also curse people who disobey the rule of God. The verse said, *“But when they stubbornly persisted in violation, We said to them, “Be disgraced apes!”* (Haleem, 2005). According to Al-Tabari (1989), the verse refers to the Children of Israel who disobey God’s rule, even after they obtained the remainder from God. The God cursed them with the words of *Ape*. Al-Tabari (1989) added that Islamic scholars mostly interpret the word as the expression of anger only, not as God’s will. From the analysis, it is listed that animal, especially apes, is one of the swearing words provenance discovery in this research.

Then, the verses of Al-Humaza: 1, 2, and 3 also reflect the curse of God. The verses say, *“(1) Woe to everyone who is a scandalmonger and slanderer. (2) Who amassed wealth and counted it. (3) He thinks that his wealth would make him last forever* (Haleem, 2005). According to Al-Tabari (1989), those verses were revealed when society in Mecca mostly was proud of their wealth. Besides, they also regularly used to tease and mock Mohammed’s followers because of their modest and moral lifestyle. These actions of theirs had drawn criticism and the curse of God. Another perspective, the word *Woe* *‘وَيْلٌ’* brings a threat to the safety of the object. In other words, safety can be listed as another swearing provenance found in the Quran.

The third one, the function of swearing words reflected in the Quran is to express strong emotion. Concerning the feeling, the results demonstrate that fury is the only emotion conveyed through the verses. Firstly, the target of the curse is Iblees, who defied Adam, the first person according to the Islamic faith. The emotional words are found in Al-Isra: 63 and Al-A'raf: 13 and 18. Accordingly, those verses can be observed table 3 below:

Table 3. Swearing Words to Iblees Discovered in the Quran

<i>Surat</i>	<i>Order</i>	<i>Verse</i>
<i>Al-Isra</i>	63	<i>Allah responded, “Be gone! Whoever of them follows you, Hell will surely be the reward for all of you—an ample reward.</i>
<i>Al-A’raf</i>	13	<i>Allah says: “Come down from Paradise, for it is not fitting for you to boast therein, so come out; indeed, you are of the despised.</i>
<i>Al-A’raf</i>	18	<i>Allah said, ‘Come out of Paradise as despised and expelled. Indeed, whoever of them follows you, I will indeed fill the Hellfire with you all.</i> (Haleem, 2005)

Summarized from those verses tafseer written by Al-Tabari (1989), the story behind those verses took setting in paradise when God just established his first human creation. In the establishment, God required all creatures to prostrate to Adam. Unfortunately, Iblees defied the requirement due to he thought he was better than the first human. Obtaining his answer which was full of arrogance, God with his strong emotion referred him swearing words as his response toward the arrogance and disobedience of Iblees. In accordance, the swearing words contain curse and expulsion so then Iblees with his community had to leave the paradise. Besides those verses are the reflection of strong emotion, they can be calculated also as the cursing verses as

they contain it. As the previous discussion, Iblees's safety becomes the object of cursing and it indicates the provenance of swearing words in those verses is it.

To ease the observation, the researchers inputted both swearing word function and provenance finding into these following tables below:

Table 4. Findings of Swearing Words Functions in the Quran

General Function	Detail Function	Verse
To insult	To insult disbelievers	Al-Maida: 71, Al-Anam, Al-Araaf: 79, Yunus: 42, Huud: 42, An-Nahl: 108, Al-Kahf: 101, Al-Hajj: 46, Ruum: 52 and 53.
	To insult Muslims who did not join a holy war	Al-Anfal: 49
	To insult Muslims who did not rush to attend prayers	Al-Jumua: 5
	To insult disbelievers who disrupted Mohammad's preaching	Al-Bayyina: 6
To curse	To curse Children of Israel who disobey the teaching of Torah	Al-Araf: 166
	To curse disbelievers who live with wealth and mock modest and moral lifestyle of Muslims	Al-Humaza: 1, 2, and 3
	To curse Iblees who defied to prostrate Adam	Al-Isra: 63 Al-A'raf: 13 and 18
To express strong emotion	To exorcise Iblees from paradise	Al-Isra: 63 Al-A'raf: 13 and 18

Table 5. Findings of Swearing Words Provenance in the Quran

Provenance	Detail Provenance	Verse
Physical Condition	Blind, Dumbs, and Deaf	Al-Maida: 71, Al-Anam, Al-Araaf: 79, Yunus: 42, Huud: 42, An-Nahl: 108, Al-Kahf: 101, Al-Hajj: 46, Ruum: 52 and 53.
Mental Disorders	Have sickness in hearts	Al-Anfal: 49
Animal	Donkey	Al-Jumua: 5
	Ape	Al-Araf: 166
Safety	Threatening safety	Al-Isra: 63, Al-A'raf: 13 and 18, Al-Humaza: 1, 2, and 3
Respectability	The worst all beings	Al-Bayyina: 6

Conclusion

It was found through the investigation in the preceding chapter that the holy Quran contains swearing words. This expands on the mention of linguistic research, particularly those related to semantic studies of swearing. As was previously mentioned, over thousands of years, swear words have changed (Chirico, 2014; Mohr, 2013; Vingerhoets & Bylsma, 2013). Huges (1991) even claimed that swearing is as old as spoken communication in humans. This study adds a fresh, conclusive claim: swearing words are part of the holy Scriptures as well. Put another way, the holy scripture itself attests to the impossibility of avoiding swearing.

The findings demonstrate that swearing words in the holy Quran has three functions. Firstly, it is to insult. Second, it is to curse. Lastly, it is to express anger emotions. Besides, five provenances for swearing words were discovered as the results on analysis. They are animal, mental, physical, safety, and respectability.

However, because the researchers only referred to a single Tafseer book, the conclusion is not convincing enough. To ensure more accurate results, the researchers have mandated that more tafseer volumes be included in the future study. On the other hand, the limitation of time allocated for this research may cause the process of collecting data done imperfectly. So, it is possible to find more swearing verses in the scripture in future research. Therefore, the researchers propose the continuity of this research to complete the reference of study, especially in the field of linguistics, morals, and religion.

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