



Emotions, identity, and profanity: Swearing as expression in the *Heartbeat* novel

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ABSTRACT

Swearing is a linguistic phenomenon that serves multiple functions in communication, including the expression of emotions, reinforcement of social bonds, and intensification of speech. The novel *Heartbeat* by Jealousy features characters who frequently engage in swearing across various contexts. However, there is limited research examining the types and motivations of swearing in contemporary literary works, particularly in modern novels. This study aims to identify the types of swearing (Ljung, 2011) employed by the characters and to analyze the motivations behind their usage (Andersson & Trudgill, 1992). Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research involves close reading and note-taking to examine instances of swearing within the text. The data were categorized into types of swearing and the motivations behind swearing. The analysis focuses on the context, function, and underlying reasons for each instance. The findings reveal that the characters use swearing 44 times throughout the novel, with expletive interjections identified as the most frequently used type. Psychological motivations, such as expressing anger, frustration, or surprise, emerge as the most dominant reasons for swearing. These findings suggest that swearing contributes significantly to character development and the authenticity of dialogue in fictional narratives. Future research may investigate how swearing differs across literary genres or how it affects readers' perceptions.



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INTRODUCTION

Language functions as a dynamic and evolving system that adapts over time to fulfil the communicative needs of its speakers (Mufwene, 2004). One important function of language is its capacity to express emotions, enabling individuals to show others who they are, demonstrate their belonging to a group, and shape how they see and experience the world around them (Cavanaugh, 2020). Among these, swearing stands out as a particularly expressive and impactful form of communication. Swearing, often perceived as impolite or offensive, serves crucial roles in everyday interactions, literature, and media. It is a linguistic tool that intensifies speech and is frequently accompanied by specific intonations, stress patterns, and gestures that enhance the speaker's expressive intent (Ljung, 2011). Despite its controversial nature, swearing is deeply embedded in human communication and serves multiple purposes beyond vulgarity (Aziz et al., 2020). As noted by Jay (2009), swearing is a natural part of language with cognitive and social dimensions that help speakers manage emotions, assert identity, and navigate social hierarchies.

Swearing serves as a powerful form of language that expresses strong emotions and triggers various physiological, mental, and social responses (Stapleton et al., 2022). Recognizing and understanding swear words is known to enrich an individual's informal vocabulary, equipping them to use such expressions more appropriately across different social contexts (Prayuda et al., 2019). While some groups see swearing as rude or aggressive, others use it to build friendship, feel closer to each other, or show they belong to the same group (Stapleton et al., 2022; Dynel, 2012).

In literary works, authors strategically incorporate swearing to construct realistic dialogues, develop characters, and portray authentic social interactions. While there are some studies on swearing in Indonesian films that highlight the types, references, and functions of swearing (Hasibuan, 2021; Khairunnisa & Damayanti, 2022; Muthalib et al., 2022), however, very few studies investigate types and functions of swearing in Indonesian novels, which focus on swearing in the local language rather than Indonesian. Prior studies have examined the presence of swearing in various novels, analyzing its linguistic, cultural, and narrative functions. Juidah et al. (2022) examined Javanese swearing words in Kelir Slindet by Kedung Darma Romansha. It

reveals how swear words are employed to convey emotions such as anger, disappointment, intimacy, and admiration among characters. Juidah et al. (2024) also observed the use of swearing in the novel *Aib dan Nasib* by Minanto, specifically focusing on the types and functions of Indramayu Javanese swearing words. It identified nine categories of swear words and discusses their various functions within the narrative, such as creating attention, discrediting, and providing catharsis. These studies reveal that swearing in literature is not merely provocative language but a deliberate stylistic device that enhances character depth and narrative authenticity (Culpeper, 2011; Bednarek, 2018). This research addresses a gap in the study of swearing in Indonesian literature by focusing on a contemporary novel written in Indonesian rather than local languages. By examining both the types and motivations for swearing in *Heartbeat*, this study contributes to understanding how swearing functions as a narrative tool in modern Indonesian fiction. The findings can enrich literary criticism and sociolinguistic perspectives on language use in literature.

Hence, this study fills the research gap by examining swearing in an Indonesian novel that uses mostly Indonesian and accommodates code-switching in Indonesian and English. The present study investigates the use of swearing in *Heartbeat* by Jealousy (2016), an Indonesian novel that prominently features swearing in both English and Indonesian. The novel follows the story of Seraphine Alana, a tomboyish protagonist who navigates emotional conflicts, personal struggles, and social pressures. Throughout the narrative, characters frequently engage in swearing, making the text a rich source for linguistic analysis. Hence, this study aims to identify the types of swear words used in the novel and analyze the motivations behind their usage, employing Ljung's (2011) classification of swearing types and Andersson and Trudgill's (1992) framework for understanding the reasons for swearing. By examining these elements in *Heartbeat*, this research contributes to a broader understanding of swearing as both a linguistic and social phenomenon. It explores how swearing is used in fictional dialogue and how it shows the characters' emotions and relationships with each other. Therefore, the research addresses two questions:

- (1) What types of swear words are used by the characters in *Heartbeat*?
- (2) What motivations underlie the use of these swear words?

Sociolinguistics and Swearing

Sociolinguistics is the study of how language is used in social contexts, focusing on the connection between language and social behavior (Wardhaugh, 2006). It looks at how cultural norms, social status, and relationships affect the way people speak (Wardhaugh, 2006). Language and society are closely linked, shaping and influencing each other in a balanced,

two-way relationship rather than one relying solely on the other (Aikhenvald et al., 2021). Language should be understood as a cultural tool that people use in real-life situations, emphasizing different ways of interpreting how it functions within specific contexts (Fele, 2019).

Meyerhoff (2018) points out that sociolinguistics uses systematic methods to find patterns in how people speak, because they often reflect someone's social background and role in their community. Holmes (2013) adds that sociolinguistics studies how people talk in different social settings and takes into account factors like gender, age, ethnicity, and class. By looking at these patterns, sociolinguistics helps us understand how language is not just a tool for communication but also a way to express identity, maintain relationships, and navigate culture.

Swearing is an important but often overlooked part of this picture. While it is sometimes seen as rude or inappropriate (Aziz et al., 2020), swearing plays a significant role in sociolinguistic analysis. Scholars such as Jay (2009) and Ljung (2011) have shown that taboo language or swearing can reveal how speakers express strong emotions, build group identity, or challenge social expectations. From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, swearing is not just an emotional outburst, but it is a powerful linguistic strategy that reflects cultural norms and social meaning (Stapleton et al., 2022).

Language Variation and Swearing

Language variation refers to how people change their speech depending on social situations. These changes might involve differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, or spelling (Holmes, 2013). Such variation is influenced by a person's social background, education, class, and the situation they are in (Holmes, 2013). People naturally adjust their speech depending on who they are talking to, what they are talking about, and where the conversation is happening. Penny (2000) explains that both geographic location and social identity can affect the way language is used and shape everything from pronunciation to grammar and word choice.

People often change the way they speak to either fit in with a group or to set themselves apart. These changes can signal formality, politeness, or even intimacy and group solidarity. Within this framework, swearing becomes a meaningful variation. Rather than being seen as purely offensive, swearing can serve key communicative roles. It can help show closeness between speakers, reduce social distance, or even challenge authority, depending on the context (Jay, 2009; Ljung, 2011). Stapleton et al. (2010) emphasize that swearing can reinforce group bonds or assert individuality. When viewed through a sociolinguistic lens, swearing reflects not just personal emotion but broader social patterns in how people relate to one another.

Types of Swearing

Swear words are a group of offensive expressions used to express strong emotions. Although often seen as rude or inappropriate, they can act as a natural way for people to release feelings they might otherwise unexpressed (Setyaningtias et al., 2023). While swearing is often linked with taboo language, the two are not precisely the same. Ljung (2011) points out four main features that distinguish swearing from general taboo words. First, swearing involves the use of forbidden or socially restricted words that help emphasize the speaker's message. Second, even if these words have vulgar meanings, their literal definitions are not always important in context. Third, swearing usually follows fixed patterns in language, with limits on word choice, phrasing, and grammar. Lastly, swearing works as a form of emotional expression, showing the speaker's feelings and attitudes

According to Ljung (2011), swearing can be categorized based on its theme and function. Swearing functions are classified into two main types: stand-alone functions and slot-filler functions. Stand-alone swearing consists of independent expressions that function as complete utterances, including curses, unpleasant suggestions, and expletive interjections. They are further explained below, Ljung (2011):

- Curses: express a speaker's wish to cause harm to another. In modern English, curses often omit the subject and appear as short phrases like "Damn you!" or "Fuck you!"
- Unpleasant Suggestions: are direct aggression toward someone, though not as literal commands. They range from religious phrases like "Go to hell!" to vulgar remarks such as "Kiss my ass!" or references to unrealistic sexual actions.
- Expletive Interjections: express strong emotions in response to unexpected events, with common examples including "Fuck!" "Shit!" and "Damn!"

In contrast, slot-filler swearing integrates swear words into larger sentences to intensify meaning. This category includes emphasis, anaphoric epithets, adjectives of dislike, and adverbial or adjectival intensifiers. These distinctions illustrate the varied ways in which swearing operates within language, serving both structural and expressive purposes. They are further explained below (Ljung, 2011):

- Emphasis: highlights nouns, often before or after adverbs, interrogatives, or infixes. Examples include: "I need a glass of water, not a bloody bathtub!" and "Why the fuck...!"
- Anaphoric Use of Epithet: noun-based swear words used anaphorically, such as 'asshole', 'bastard', or 'son of a bitch'.

- Adjectives of Dislike: express distaste toward a noun's referent, often overlapping with emphasis. For example: "He's a bloody fool!"
- Adverbial or Adjectival Intensifier: enhances the meaning of an adjective or adverb, similar to 'very' or 'great'. For example: "It's bloody marvellous!"

Reasons for Swearing

According to Andersson and Trudgill (1992), there are three categories of reasons why people swear: linguistic, social, and psychological. They are further explained below:

- Psychological Reasons: Karjalainen (2002) explains that frustration and anger are common emotions, and people often release them through physical actions or verbal expressions like shouting or swearing.
- Social Reasons: swearing is not always impulsive or driven by anger; it can also serve intentional social purposes (Karjalainen, 2002). People swear to assert identity, entertain, express solidarity, or strengthen social bonds. However, successful communication depends on mutual understanding, such as what may be friendly in one context could be misinterpreted in another.
- Linguistic Reasons: swearing can serve to emphasize a word, enhance clarity, or express surprise (Hasanah et al., 2023).

Heartbeat by Jealousy

Heartbeat, a novel by Jealousy, was first published on October 26, 2016, by Loveable, an imprint of Ufuk Publishing Group. Spanning 528 pages, the novel blends Indonesian and English and originated as a Wattpad story before gaining popularity and transitioning into print. It was previously featured in Wattpad's hot teen fiction category, reflecting its strong appeal among young adult readers. Similar to other popular teen novels, this book contains swear words in both Indonesian and English. The phenomenon of code-switching, where the author alternates between languages within dialogues and narrative passages, is common, especially in works targeting young adult audiences, as it mirrors the real-life bilingual communication patterns of Indonesian youth (Yusuf et al., 2020; Yusuf et al., 2021). Code-switching in Indonesian novels is a reflection of societal bilingualism and is used to enhance narrative depth (Yusuf et al., 2020; Yusuf et al., 2021).

Heartbeat follows the story of Seraphine Alana, known as Fina, who struggles with feelings of neglect in her family, as her twin sister, Stephanie Anggita, or Fani, receives all the attention and gets away with making trouble. Seeking solace outside her home, Fina met Elang Skarsgard, a mysterious boy rumored to be an ex-convict. However, Elang is more than what people say; he possesses super-hearing, allowing him to perceive people's emotions

through their heartbeats. Strangely, Fina is the only person whose heartbeat he cannot interpret. In the end, they both grew close. As Fina navigates her teenage years, suppressed memories resurface, revealing a disturbing past where she hurt her family and allegedly killed someone. Her life takes a darker turn when she becomes the target of a killer, forcing her to confront her selective amnesia and uncover the truth about her past. With the support of her friends, Vee and Rally, she embarks on a journey of self-discovery, grappling with identity, love, and the complexities of familial bonds. The novel unfolds with unexpected twists, ultimately challenging Fina's perception of herself and those around her, making *Heartbeat* a compelling story of perseverance and self-realization.

METHOD

Research Design and Data Source

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, which is well-suited for obtaining straightforward descriptions of phenomena. Its goal is to offer a detailed account of events using plain, everyday language, remaining closely aligned with the data and the literal meaning of words and occurrences (Sandelowski, 2000). The primary data source for this research is the novel *Heartbeat* by Jealousy (2016). This literary work was selected due to its rich use of language, including instances of swearing in both Indonesian and English, which are pertinent to the study's focus on linguistic expressions of emotion and social interaction. The novel provides a contextual backdrop that reflects contemporary language use among Indonesian youth, making it a valuable resource for sociolinguistic analysis.

Research Instrument

A pair of analytical data sheets (Tables 1 & 2) was developed as the primary research instrument to systematically record and categorize instances of swearing found in the novel. This data sheet included columns for the excerpted swear word or phrase, page number, type of swearing based on Ljung's (2011) classification, and the inferred motivation behind the swearing, guided by Andersson and Trudgill's (1992) framework. The use of such structured data sheets is common in qualitative research to facilitate organized data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through close reading and note-taking techniques. These approaches involve careful examination of texts, recording observations, and engaging deeply with the material (Lentricchia & DuBois, 2003). Note-taking was employed to document these instances systematically, capturing not only the swear words but also the surrounding dialogue and narrative context.

Effective note-taking in qualitative research is crucial for capturing relevant data and facilitating subsequent analysis (Saunders et al., 2003).

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework (familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, producing the report). The themes in this study refer to the type of swearing based on Ljung's (2011) classification, and the inferred motivation behind the swearing based on Andersson and Trudgill's (1992) framework. For example, an utterance such as "Damn it!" uttered by a frustrated character was coded as an expletive interjection (Ljung) and categorized under the motivation of expressing anger (Andersson & Trudgill). Similarly, "What the hell are you doing?" was coded as an offensive question and classified under the motivation of showing surprise and disapproval. This process allowed the researcher to systematically match each instance of swearing in the novel with both its linguistic type and its social-psychological motivation.

RESULTS

Types of Swearing

This study identified two main swearing functions as outlined by Ljung (2011): stand-alone and slot-filler functions. From the data collected, three types of stand-alone functions and only two types of slot-filler functions were found. Not all types of swearing defined by Ljung (2011) appeared in the data.

Table 1. Types of swearing found in the novel *Heartbeat*

No.	Function Type	Sub-Type	Frequency
1	Stand-alone function	Expletive interjections	25
		Unpleasant suggestion	1
		Curse	5
2	Slot-filler function	Anaphoric use of epithet	5
		Adjectives of dislike	8
		Emphasis	0
		Adverbial or adjectival intensifier	0
		Total	44

Table 1 shows the types of swearing found in the novel *Heartbeat*. The most frequent type was expletive interjections, accounting for more than half of the total (25 out of 31). The least frequent was an unpleasant suggestion, with only one instance. No examples of emphasis, adverbial intensifier, or adjectival intensifier were found in the data. The complete table, including examples and their corresponding page numbers in the novel, is provided in Appendix 1.

Stand-Alone Function

The stand-alone swearing functions identified in the novel are as follows.

a. Expletive Interjections

Expletive interjections were frequently used to convey strong emotions such as anger, frustration, or surprise. This type occurred 25 times, making it the most common among all swearing types in the dataset.

(1) “Ah, sial!” [“Ah, damn it!”] (p. 19)

This utterance was spoken by Seraphine Alana, the main character, when she was just about to reach her classroom, but was suddenly called back by her twin, Stephanie. Her irritation was reflected through the use of “sial”, which, according to *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI), denotes bad luck or misfortune that suggests her efforts were in vain.

(2) “What the hell.” (p. 55)

Here, Seraphine was shocked that Elang could hear her conversation with her father, even though he had already driven far from her house. The situation felt unreal, and her surprise was expressed through the phrase “What the hell”.

(3) “Shit!” (p. 42)

In this example, Seraphine reacted to an uncomfortable situation involving Rudi. Her frustration stemmed from being understood too well by him, which led to a fear of unintended consequences, particularly from someone nicknamed “the Hulk”. The expletive intensified the emotional gravity of the situation and exposed her distress.

b. Unpleasant Suggestion

Only one utterance in the novel *Heartbeat* can be categorized as an unpleasant suggestion. This type of swearing reflects verbal aggression directed at another person, but is not meant as sincere advice. It is often metaphorical, using harsh language to express strong emotions like fear or anger.

(4) “U-turn to the hell! Oh my God. I’m gonna die.” (p. 50)

In this instance, Seraphine expresses extreme fear and panic due to the speed at which Elang is driving and an upcoming sharp turn. Her exclamation

"U-turn to the hell!" is not a literal instruction but a metaphorical expression of the danger she perceives. The phrase conveys her anxiety and functions as an exaggerated warning to Elang, urging him to slow down or be more cautious without directly saying so. The term "hell" intensifies the emotional weight of the utterance and marks it as an unpleasant suggestion.

c. Curse

A total of five utterances were classified as curses in the novel. In these instances, the characters directed strong language at others with the intent to insult, threaten, or express deep anger. Curses typically involve personal attacks or wishes for misfortune.

- (5) *"Sumpah yah, kalo lo tetap manggil gue begitu, gue bakal pastiin lo tahu rasanya neraka dunia," ancamnya.* ["I swear, if you keep calling me that, I'll make sure you know what hell on earth feels like," he threatened.] (p. 365)

In this example, Pratama expresses his anger toward Seraphine for continuing to call him "*Tamaki-kun*". The term "*sumpah*" (I swear) signals the seriousness of his threat, while "*neraka dunia*" (hell on earth) amplifies the intensity. The phrase is meant to cause psychological fear and functions as a verbal curse, expressing Pratama's intent to retaliate emotionally or psychologically if his boundaries are crossed.

- (6) *"Baka!" bentaknya dengan berteriak berlebihan.* ["Baka!" he shouted in an exaggerated manner.] (p. 254)

The Japanese term "*baka*" (fool/idiot) can range from teasing to insult. In this context, it was shouted with exaggerated force, indicating contempt or frustration. Bang Jake's delivery of this word suggests verbal aggression and scorn, thus categorizing it as a curse rather than playful teasing. This novel's point of view is presented through the eyes of Seraphine, the protagonist, who has a deep affection for Japanese culture. There are numerous instances in the novel that demonstrate her interest in it, such as on page 365 when she addresses her friend *Tamaki-kun*, on page 461 when she describes her obsession with Japanese drama, and on page 519 when she complains about not being able to converse in Japanese despite having lived in Japan for several months.

- (7) *"Hey, berengsek! Kalau ternyata semuanya berakhir buruk, gue hajar lo!"* ["Hey, you bastard! If it all ends badly, I'll beat you up!"] (p. 242)

This statement combines a verbal insult and a threat of physical violence. The use of “*berengsek*” (bastard) is a harsh, derogatory term, and the follow-up threat “*gue hajar lo*” (I’ll beat you up) reflects the speaker’s aggressive intent. The utterance exemplifies a curse because it expresses both emotional hostility and a desire to cause harm.

Slot-Fillers

The researcher identified three categories of swearing that function as slot-fillers in the *Heartbeat* novel. Notably, no swearing was found in the form of adverbial or adjectival intensifiers. The categories identified are: (a) adjectives of dislike, and (b) anaphoric use of epithet, detailed as follows.

a. Adjectives of Dislike

Adjectives of dislike are used to express the speaker’s negative attitude toward the referent of a noun. This function can sometimes be challenging to distinguish due to its overlap with other pragmatic uses. In *Heartbeat*, eight utterances fall into this category. The following are representative examples.

- (8) “*Yang namanya menunjukkan jalan itu nggak lari duluan layaknya pencuri, dasar idiot!*” [“When someone is showing the way, they don’t run off like a thief, idiot!”] (p.148)

Cindy expresses her frustration at Marko for running ahead after claiming he knew the way. The term “idiot” functions as a direct insult to Marko’s irresponsible behavior. Her use of this word emphasizes her irritation and disappointment, as Marko acted in a way that contradicted his earlier promise to guide them.

- (9) “*You little witch!*” *dia meraba bekas pukulanku.* [“You little witch!” he said as he felt my punch marks.] (p.431)

This utterance shows Jake’s anger and frustration after being hit by Seraphine. The phrase “little witch” serves as a derogatory label directed at Seraphine, expressing his displeasure not only at the physical pain but also at the perceived betrayal. The adjective “little” adds a condescending tone to the insult.

- (10) “*Idiot. Idiot. Idiot,*” *gumamku tanpa henti seraya membentur-benturkan dahiku ke pintu lemari yang terbuka.* [“Idiot. Idiot. Idiot,” I muttered incessantly as I banged my forehead against the open closet door.] (p.175)

In this example, Seraphine directs the insult toward herself. The repetition of “idiot” in combination with the physical gesture of banging her head conveys intense self-directed frustration and regret, classifying it as a self-inflicted adjective of dislike.

b. Anaphoric Use of Epithet

This category includes five utterances that employ epithets functioning as anaphoric swearing. These epithets, typically nouns or noun phrases, refer back to previously introduced characters or actions, often carrying strong emotional or evaluative connotations such as insults or negative judgments.

(11) “*Sini lo, dasar cewek jalang!*” [“Come here, you little bitch!”] (p.42)

This utterance comes from Hulk, a drag racer, who is offended by Seraphine’s sign language. The word “*jalang*” (translated here as “bitch”) serves as a gendered and derogatory epithet aimed at degrading Seraphine. It reflects Hulk’s hostile reaction and is used to diminish her character based on perceived disrespect.

(12) “*Dasar sepupu berengsek!*” [“You bastard cousin!”] (p.7)

Seraphine uses the term “*berengsek*” to express anger and resentment toward her cousin Arga, who left her behind on a school day. This epithet reflects her disapproval of Arga’s behavior and functions as a verbal outlet for her sense of abandonment and betrayal. The emotional charge embedded in “*berengsek*” reinforces the anaphoric reference to Arga’s previous actions.

(13) “*Sono pulang, istirahat. Dasar dedemit berengsek.*” [“Go home and rest. You damn evil creature.”] (p.241)

In this example, Bang Jake addresses Elang using the epithets “*dedemit*” (a supernatural or evil creature) and “*berengsek*” (damned or jerk). These terms, though metaphorical, refer back to Elang’s earlier behavior in the narrative. Bang Jake’s swearing is emotionally charged and reflects his dissatisfaction or disapproval of Elang’s conduct. The anaphoric nature of the epithet is evident as it relies on the shared knowledge of past actions.

Motivations for Swearing

The novel *Heartbeat* features characters who frequently use swearing as a means of expressing emotions such as frustration, anger, or disappointment,

particularly within close relationships or among peers. The swearing behavior is primarily influenced by the characters' emotional immaturity, including that of the main character, Seraphine. The motivations for swearing in the novel were analyzed using Andersson and Trudgill's (1992) framework, which categorizes swearing into psychological, social, and linguistic motivations.

Table 2. Motivations for swearing in *Heartbeat*

Reason	Occurrences
Psychological	44 Times
Social	2 Times
Linguistic	1 Time

As shown in Table 2, psychological motivation was the predominant reason for swearing in the novel, accounting for 41 of the 44 total instances. This suggests that strong emotional reactions, such as anger, pain, or frustration drove most swearing acts. Social reasons, such as swearing for bonding or to assert group identity, appeared only twice, while linguistic swearing, used for stylistic or rhetorical effect, was found only once.

Psychological

Psychological motivation refers to swearing that arises as a spontaneous emotional response to stress, fear, pain, frustration, or anger. In *Heartbeat*, this type of swearing is the most frequently observed, with 41 occurrences recorded in the dataset. The characters, particularly Seraphine and Bang Jake, often use swearing as an outlet to release internal psychological tension. Below are selected examples illustrating the use of psychologically motivated swearing.

(14) "Shit!" (p.42)

Seraphine exclaims "Shit!" in response to a situation that evokes intense fear or frustration. This single-word outburst is typical of psychologically driven swearing, serving as a quick release of internal emotional pressure.

(15) "Idiot. Idiot. Idiot," *gumamku tanpa henti seraya membentur-benturkan dahiku ke pintu lemari yang terbuka*. ["Idiot. Idiot. Idiot," I muttered incessantly as I banged my forehead against the open closet door.] (p.175)

This repeated self-directed insult shows Seraphine's intense frustration and self-blame. The compulsive repetition of "idiot" alongside physical self-

harm underscores her emotional distress and inner turmoil, revealing how swearing becomes a psychological coping mechanism.

(16) "*Nggak ada yang lucu, bego!*" ("Nothing is funny, stupid!") (p.150)

Jake uses the term "*bego*" (stupid) in a moment of anger, likely provoked by Seraphine laughing at something he considers inappropriate or hurtful. His word choice reflects his psychological state, which is annoyance and irritation, rather than any intent to socially bond or insult for stylistic effect.

These examples clearly illustrate how psychological motivations dominate the use of swearing in *Heartbeat*. The characters' emotional immaturity and inability to regulate their feelings result in impulsive expressions of anger, shame, and frustration through profanity.

Social

Swearing for social motivation occurs when individuals use profanity to achieve interpersonal goals, such as asserting credibility, influencing others, gaining attention, or reinforcing group identity. In *Heartbeat*, social swearing appears less frequently than psychological swearing, with only 2 occurrences recorded. However, when it does occur, it serves strategic communicative purposes within social interactions. Below is an example that illustrates socially motivated swearing.

(17) "*Sumpah! Gue bahkan nggak tahu kalau tempat 'main' kalian itu di gudang belakang,*" *aku membela diri.* ["I swear! I didn't even know your 'play' place was in the back warehouse," I defended myself.] (p.372)

In this excerpt, Seraphine uses the word "*Sumpah!*" ((1) swear!) at the beginning of her sentence to intensify her denial and to emphasize her sincerity. Although not a profane word in the traditional sense, "*sumpah*" functions similarly to a swear word in this context because it expresses strong emotion and attempts to persuade the listener of her honesty. This expression serves a social function, as it is used to defend herself, gain trust, and influence the perception of others in a tense interaction. The swearing here is not rooted in raw emotion but is strategically used within a social context.

Linguistics

Swearing driven by linguistic motivation refers to the use of profanity as a stylistic device to intensify expression or add emphasis to speech. It is not necessarily used out of anger or frustration but rather to enhance the communicative impact of an utterance. In *Heartbeat*, only one instance of this

type of swearing was found, making it the least frequent among the three categories. Below is an example that reflects this linguistic function.

(18) “What the hell did you do with your car?” (p.287)

In this utterance, the phrase “what the hell” is used as a linguistic intensifier. It does not add new information to the question but amplifies the speaker’s emotional engagement, suggesting surprise or disbelief. The swearing here is not primarily psychological or social; it is linguistically motivated, serving as a rhetorical tool to sharpen the force of the question. This usage illustrates how swearing can become embedded in everyday language patterns for emphasis, rather than to express raw emotion or achieve social goals.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the types and motivations of swearing in the novel *Heartbeat* by Jealousy (2016), revealing how profanity functions not only as a linguistic expression but also as a tool for emotional release and identity construction. The analysis found that expletive interjections were the most frequently occurring type of swearing, especially in moments of anger, frustration, and psychological distress. In fictional narratives, expletive interjections are identified as the dominant form of swearing due to their role in expressing spontaneous emotional reactions (Goei, 2021). By contrast, unpleasant suggestions appeared only once, and emphatic swearing, including adverbial and adjectival intensifiers, was notably absent. While intensifiers are common in everyday speech, they are often underrepresented in literary texts, especially in young adult fiction, where profanity tends to be more emotionally driven than stylistically varied (Goei, 2021).

With regard to motivations, the study found that psychological factors were the most prevalent, reflecting characters’ attempts to cope with internal turmoil, emotional stress, and interpersonal conflicts. This corresponds with Hasanah et al. (2023), who observed that fictional characters frequently swear in response to intense emotions such as fear, anger, or frustration. In *Heartbeat*, the characters’ use of profanity is less about enhancing language and more about revealing their inner emotional states. This supports Andersson and Trudgill’s (1992) assertion that swearing is primarily a psychological response rather than a purely communicative strategy.

The protagonist, Seraphine, often swears in moments of self-blame, fear, and anxiety, which emphasizes how profanity serves as a form of catharsis, helping her manage emotional overload. Stephens et al. (2018) argue that swearing provides psychological relief by reducing stress and emotional pain, a perspective that is vividly illustrated in Seraphine’s reactions to

personal and familial pressures. Her repeated use of interjections such as "Idiot!" or "Shit!" functions as a spontaneous coping mechanism and reinforces the realism of her character. In addition to psychological triggers, social motivations for swearing were also identified, albeit less frequently. These instances reflect the characters' efforts to assert identity, gain peer acceptance, or convince others in emotionally charged social exchanges. Ljung (2011) notes that swearing can play a social role in building solidarity or asserting dominance. In *Heartbeat*, Seraphine's use of "*Sumpah!*" ((I) swear!) is not just an expression of frustration but also an attempt to strengthen her credibility and influence her listener to demonstrate how social motivations intersect with emotional expression.

This novel portrays contemporary Indonesian young people who frequently use swear words and exclamations in their daily lives. Expletives interjections such as "*sialan*", "*dasar bego*" and "*sial*" are powerful ways to express their feelings and show their identity with these words capturing everything from anger and frustration to surprise and disappointment that are common in how youth talk to each other (Mulyani & Mulyadi, 2022; Nugroho et al., 2023). These expressions are often used as a way to rebel against traditional rules or to show their independence and connect with their friend groups (Karlina, 2025; Nugroho et al., 2023).

Swearing in the novel is also shaped by adolescent identity development. Pfeifer and Berkman (2018) highlight that teenagers often use language, including profanity, as a means of asserting independence, negotiating social roles, and interacting within peer groups. This is evident in Seraphine's interactions with her brother and peers, where swearing becomes a marker of intimacy and informality. In contrast, she suppresses such language around adults, instead expressing frustration through body language. The influence of cultural norms on swearing is also worth noting. Tsaqiila and Yusra (2022) emphasize that profanity is not universal in its acceptability or function but is shaped by sociocultural factors, particularly in conservative societies like Indonesia. In such contexts, literary authors may strategically limit the use of profanity to maintain cultural acceptability, while still portraying authentic emotional and social dynamics. This aligns with Rahman's (2017) discussion on the impact of modernization and globalization on language use, including the cautious incorporation of swearing in Indonesian literature.

Furthermore, swearing in *Heartbeat* serves important literary functions beyond simple vulgarity. Rashid (2022) argues that profanity can enrich character development, enhance realism, and intensify emotional engagement in narratives. The selective use of swearing in the novel underscores these points by highlighting characters' emotional vulnerabilities to deepen their psychological portrayal and enhancing the dramatic tension

of key scenes. As Hussein Ali and Mewada (2024) explain, profanity, when used meaningfully, can sharpen narrative impact and raise the emotional tone of the text. Taken together, the findings of this study reinforce the theoretical frameworks of Ljung (2011) and Andersson and Trudgill (1992) to show that swearing in literature is a meaningful linguistic and psychological tool. In *Heartbeat*, swearing is carefully employed to reflect the characters' internal states, their social environments, and their developmental stages. It becomes a narrative strategy that enhances realism, emotional depth, and reader engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the characters in *Heartbeat* by Jealousy employ five out of seven types of swearing, with expletive interjections such as "*sialan*," "*sumpah*," "*what the hell*," and "*shit*" being the most dominant. A total of 44 instances of swearing were identified, predominantly occurring in moments of anger or stress, which suggests that swearing is often used to express intense emotions. Notably, unpleasant suggestion swearing appeared only once, while emphasis-type and adverbial/adjectival intensifiers were absent. This suggests that profanity in this novel serves as a deliberate narrative tool to convey emotional states rather than enhance dialogue realism. Additionally, the findings indicate that psychological reasons were the primary motivation for swearing.

However, this study has certain limitations. The use of close reading and manual note-taking may have led to overlooked data or subjective interpretations of the characters' emotional states. Additionally, the contextual ambiguity surrounding some instances of profanity made it challenging to categorize the exact motivation behind them. Future research could expand this investigation by comparing the use of swearing across different genres, age groups, or cultural backgrounds, particularly between Indonesian and international literary works, to explore how cultural and linguistic norms influence the depiction of profanity in fiction.

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Appendix 1. Types of swearing in *Heartbeat*

No.	Function Type	Sub-Type	Frequency	Swearing instance	Page (s)
1	Stand-alone function	Expletive interjections	25	"Hell no." "Ah, sial!" "Shit!" "Dasar sialan!" "What the hell." "Sial!" "Sialan!" "Damn it!" "Damn." "Why the hell would you think that?" "Are you fucking kidding me?!" "What the hell ...?" "Sumpah! ..."	p.8 p.19 p.42 p.48 p.55 p.73, p.161, p.253, p.301, p.305, p.136, p.264, p.276, p.234, p.278, p.381, p.397, p.488, p.511 p.281 p.283 p.287, p.464 p.372, p.486
		Unpleasant suggestion	1	"U-turn to the hell! Oh my God. I'm gonna die."	p.50
		Curse	5	"Sumpah, ..." "Hey, berengsek! ..." "Baka!" "TURN YOUR DAMN PHONE ON!"	p. 211, p.365 p. 242 p. 254 p. 334

2	Slot-filler function	Anaphoric use of epithet	5	"Dasar sepupu berengsek!" p.7 "Elang berengsek!" p.18, p.208 "... dasar cewek jalang!" p.42 "...dedemit berengsek." p.241	
		Adjectives of dislike	8	"...idiot!" p.148, p.175 "...bego!" p.150, p.240, p.297 "...jantung sialan! ...si pendengar super sialan!" p.198 "...Dasar berengsek." p.208 "You little witch!" p.431	
		Emphasis	0		
		Adverbial or adjectival intensifier	0		
		Total	44		

Appendix 2. Motivations for swearing in *Heartbeat*

Reason	Occurrences	Instances	Character	Context
Psychological	44 Times	" <i>Dasar sepupu berengsek!</i> " p.7	Seraphine	Angry at Arga for leaving her on the road.
		"Hell no." p.8	Seraphine	Felt threatened by Elang.
		" <i>Elang berengsek!</i> " p.18	Seraphine	Jealous of Elang and Stephanie.
		"Ah, sial!" p.19	Seraphine	Annoyed by a call from her twin.
		"Shit!" p.42	Seraphine	Upset and scared when Rudi provokes Hulk.
		" <i>Dasar sialan!</i> " p.48	Seraphine	Angry at a rival and Elang's mockery.
		"U-turn to the hell! Oh my God. I'm gonna die." p.50	Seraphine	Terrified after realizing she was stabbed.
		"What the hell." p.55	Seraphine	Surprised Elang overheard her talk.
		"Sial!" p.73	Seraphine	Afraid of being stalked.
		"Sialan!" p.136	Seraphine	Upset and embarrassed by losing a bet.
		"Sial! Siapa yang memberitahunya?" p.161	Seraphine	Worried father might find out about street racing.
		"Idiot. Idiot. Idiot," p.175	Seraphine	Frustrated at herself.

"Ugh! Dasar jantung sialan! Dasar Elang..." p.198	Seraphine	Uncomfortable in an awkward moment.
"Elang.... Hm...Dasar berengsek." p.208	Seraphine	Dreaming about Elang negatively.
"Sial! Sakit...sakit..." p.253	Seraphine	In pain after biting her tongue.
"Ah sialan." p.264	Seraphine	Annoyed by coffee spill.
"Sialan. Siapa yang menendang papan skateku?" p.276..."	Seraphine	Angry at Elang for kicking her skateboard.
"Bang Agil bego!" p.297	Seraphine	Upset at Bang Agil.
"Sial! Aku sampai lupa..." p.301	Seraphine	Worried Jake would find out about suicide attempt.
"Sial, aku tergagap." p.305	Seraphine	Could not explain herself to Jake.
"Sumpah! Gue bahkan nggak tahu..." p.372	Seraphine	Defending herself when accused.
"Damn it!" p.381	Seraphine	Frustrated as her hands shook opening a gift.
"Damn it." p.397	Seraphine	Surprised Elang stopped calling her Lara Croft.
"Sumpah, aku nggak melakukan..." p.486	Seraphine	Scared when Fani threatened her.
"Damn it." p.488	Seraphine	Terrified while losing consciousness.

"Damn." p.511	Seraphine	Excited Jake let her live with him in Japan.
"Damn it!" p.234	Elang	Upset after kicking a toolbox.
"Damn it," p.278	Elang	Flirting playfully with Seraphine.
"Why the hell..." p.281	Elang	Amused by Seraphine's comment.
"Are you fucking kidding me?!" p.283	Elang	Angry with a caller.
"What the hell..." p.464	Elang	Demanding explanation from Seraphine.
"Nggak ada yang lucu, bego!" p.150	Bang Jake	Annoyed that Seraphine laughed at him.
"Sumpah, kalau lo nggak bales..." p.211	Bang Jake	Threatened to report Seraphine to their uncle.
"Yah, bego!" p.240	Bang Jake	Annoyed at Elang in the bathroom.
"Sono pulang, istirahat..." p.241	Bang Jake	Told Elang to leave, viewed him as nuisance.
"Baka!" p.254	Bang Jake	Called Seraphine "idiot" in Japanese.
"TURN YOUR DAMN PHONE ON!" p.334	Bang Jake	Urgently ordered Seraphine to answer.

		"You little witch!" p.431	Bang Jake	Angry Seraphine for punching him.
		"Sini lo, dasar cewek jalang!" p.42	Hulk	Hulk insulted Seraphine back.
		"Dasar idiot!" p.148	Cindy	Cindy angry at Marko for leaving Seraphine and her.
		"Sumpah yah, kalo lo tetap..." p.365	Pratama	Pratama threatened Seraphine for calling him "Tamaki-kun."
Social	2 Times	"Sumpah! Bahkan gue nggak tahu..." p.372	Seraphine	Defending herself strongly.
		"Hey, berengsek! Kalau ternyata semuanya berakhir buruk, gue hajar lo!" p.242	Elang	Threatened Bang Jake if things went wrong.
Linguistic	1 Time	"What the hell did you do with your car?" p.287	Anonim	Expressed surprise strongly.