

Euphemism in the Reporting of Immoral Acts in Online Media (A Linguistic Review)

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ABSTRAK

Dalam jurnalisme, peran bahasa sangat penting karena pengaruhnya yang sangat besar terhadap pembaca. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi satuan kebahasaan dalam pemberitaan media online yang berfungsi sebagai eufemisme. Penelitian ini penting karena dalam era digital kemudahan mengakses berita harus dibarengi dengan akseptabilitas dan keamanannya bagi pembaca. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan sosiolinguistik. Bentuk-bentuk eufemisme yang muncul dalam pemberitaan perbuatan asusila di media online antara lain eufemisme kata asing, eufemisme kata serapan, periphrasis, eufemisme metaforis, eufemisme figuratif, eufemisme yang digunakan untuk menggantikan istilah lain, eufemisme akronim, dan eufemisme singkatan. Selain mengikuti kode etik, jurnalis juga harus memahami bagaimana menggunakan eufemisme untuk menghasilkan tulisan yang dapat diterima tanpa menimbulkan konflik baru dalam masyarakat.

ABSTRACT

In journalism, the role of language is paramount due to its crucial influence on readers. This study aims to identify linguistic units in online media reporting that serve as euphemisms. This research is important because, in the digital age, the ease of accessing news must align with its acceptability and safety for readers. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a sociolinguistic approach. The forms of euphemism that appear in reporting on immoral acts in online media include foreign word euphemisms, loan word euphemisms, periphrasis, metaphorical euphemisms, figurative euphemisms, euphemisms used to replace another term, acronym euphemisms, and abbreviation euphemisms. In addition to following the code of ethics, journalists must also understand how to use euphemisms to produce acceptable writing without causing new societal conflicts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In journalism, the role of language is paramount due to its crucial influence on readers. Consequently, one of the functions of the mass media is to serve as a social control mechanism for society. Therefore, journalists are free to convey and disseminate information to the public, provided that all information can be accounted for. Over time, mass media has evolved into print media, electronic media, and online media[1]. All three types of media employ strategies to capture public attention, particularly in the context of online media. Online media represents a technological advancement that allows individuals to access and obtain information anywhere and anytime easily. Given the ease with which the public can access information, online media writers must pay close attention to linguistic aspects to ensure that all audiences receive the content well. One linguistic aspect frequently used in online media reporting is the use of euphemism. The use of euphemisms in news writing helps readers reduce misperceptions, harsh impressions, and content that needs to be concealed or censored. Thus, media not only serves as an information provider but also as a language-learning resource[2].

Euphemism is defined as a mild or indirect expression used to avoid harsh or impolite words, maintaining politeness[3]. For instance, euphemism is used to preserve the feelings of the conversational partner, preventing them from feeling offended, belittled, or uncomfortable due to the use of certain words deemed harsh. Euphemism is not only about replacing coarse words with milder ones but also relates to taboo or forbidden words[4]. Based on the definition, the use of euphemism is essentially positive. However, on the other hand, euphemisms can also carry a negative connotation. In some situations, euphemism is considered dangerous because it can be understood as a deliberately softened style of language[5]. In other words, the intended meaning may become obscured. Therefore, some researchers argue that euphemism is akin to a form of language manipulation used to conceal the truth. Despite the controversial connotations of euphemism, its use in news writing in online media serves several purposes, such as maintaining politeness, obscuring meaning, avoiding offense, preventing conflict, reducing embarrassment, and concealing information. For example, instead of using the term *prostitute*, journalists might use *commercial sex workers* or *streetwalkers* as a euphemism.

Many news topics in online media often employ euphemisms, one of which is the topic of immoral acts. According to data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (2024), there were 10,231 cases of violence against women and children, with 4,732 of these cases being sexual violence or immoral acts. Immoral acts refer to behaviors that deviate from societal norms or propriety, which are increasingly prevalent in society[6]. Euphemism is frequently found in reports of immoral acts because such incidents often involve vulgar, erotic, and inappropriate content toward victims[7]. Euphemisms can be classified into various forms based on its use: (1) abbreviations, (2) loanwords, (3) foreign terms, (4) metaphors, and (5) periphrasis[8]. Additionally, some experts add forms such as (6) acronyms, (7) figurative expressions, and (8) term substitution[2]. Over time, the use of euphemisms has evolved. Initially, euphemism was commonly used in verbal communication. However, it is now also prevalent in written language, such as in online news writing.

This study aims to identify linguistic units in online media reporting that serve as euphemisms. This research is important because, in the digital age, the ease of accessing news must align with its acceptability and safety for readers. Furthermore, Article 5 of the Journalistic Code of Ethics stipulates that Indonesian journalists must not disclose or broadcast the identities of victims of sexual crimes or the identities of child perpetrators. Therefore, all data and information that could lead to the identification of individuals must not be publicized. This underscores the importance of using euphemisms in news writing, especially in online media.

Research on the use of euphemisms in mass media has been conducted several times. The first study in 2022[9] titled "The Use of Euphemism in Writing News Headlines in the 'Law Section' of the Online Newspaper RadarBanten.co.id from September to November 2022" was motivated by the use of euphemisms by journalists in writing news headlines. From the literature review conducted by the

authors, it was found that this study focused only on news headlines, while the current research will focus on the news content. Secondly, previous research analyzed euphemism in the law section, while the current study will analyze euphemism in reports of immoral acts. Another study in 2023[10] titled “Euphemism in Electronic News TribunJabar.id Edition of May 2021” was motivated by the use of euphemisms by journalists in writing news content. From the literature review conducted by the author, it was found that this study did not specify the news topic. In other words, all news published in May 2021 was used as data sources. This differs from the current research, which focuses on the specific topic of immoral acts reporting.

In addition to the two studies mentioned above, another study also examined euphemisms in news texts about sexual harassment[7]. However, the news texts used in that study came from only one online media source, whereas the news texts in the current study will come from various online media sources, providing more varied data. Based on the literature review, several novelties are present in this research, such as 1) more varied data sources, 2) a specific news topic, and 3) a comprehensive analysis of euphemism (not just in headlines or small sections). Therefore, the author is interested in further exploring the use of euphemisms in the reporting of immoral acts in online media.

2. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a sociolinguistic approach. Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that views language as a social phenomenon, influenced by social factors as it is used to express thoughts and feelings[11]. The study utilizes content analysis, a technique that provides in-depth explanations of the content of written or printed information in mass media[12].

To gather data, the researcher used the observation method with basic extracting techniques and advanced note-taking techniques. Additionally, to obtain comprehensive and in-depth data, purposive sampling was used. The data in this study comprise linguistic units in online media reports on immoral acts. Consequently, the sources of data for this study are from several online media sites such as *Detiknews, Tribun, Kompas, Antara, BBC, Tita Story, Tempo, and others*, which published news about immoral acts from January to June 2024.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The forms of euphemism found in online media reports are highly diverse. The use of euphemism is intentional, aiming to soften or obscure the meaning of words in news content that might cause conflict, misunderstanding, or offend others. The following data were obtained, illustrating the forms of euphemism in online media reports:

3.1 Forms of Euphemism in Reporting Immoral Acts in Online Media

3.1.1 Euphemism in the Form of Foreign Terms

Euphemisms using foreign languages can occur at the level of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, or discourse in Indonesian towards other foreign languages. The use of foreign terms in certain euphemisms is prevalent because, in the modern era, foreign languages appear more popular among the public than their original terms in Indonesian. The use of foreign terms in euphemisms is considered more refined and can obscure the context of speech. Additionally, the use of foreign terms is influenced by the speaker's educational and occupational background. The following data were obtained as research results:

(1a) “*Ya sangat penting (mendalami masalah relasi kuasa), karena ini kan core perkaranya, karena ada kesempatan, ada hubungan atasan-bawahan dan hubungan atasan bawahan itu dieksploitasi. Ya dieksploitasi untuk kepentingan pribadi, hasrat pribadinya ketua KPU,*” ujarnya. (DN/6/6/2024)

(1a) “Yes, it is very important (to delve into power relations issues), because this is the **core** issue, as there is opportunity, there is a superior-subordinate relationship, and that relationship is exploited. Yes, exploited for personal interests, the personal desires of the KPU chairman,” he said. (DN/6/6/2024)

The word *core* in datum (1a) is an English term meaning *the central part*. This word is used to explain that in an immoral act, there is a core issue causing the act. The speaker is a legal counsel, whose educational background makes the use of English terms in his speech likely.

(1b) *Walaupun saya alumni, saya ada di luar dari kampus, dan boleh di **cross-check**, saya tidak punya kepentingan di situ untuk melakukan nuansa politik.* (TM/16/06/2024)

(1b) *Although I am an alumnus, I am outside the campus, and it can be **cross-checked**, I have no interest there to create a political nuance.* (TM/16/06/2024)

The term *cross-check* in datum (1b) is an English term meaning *recheck* or *in-depth check*. This word is used to explain that the speaker has no personal interest, even though he comes from the same alma mater as the victim and the suspect. The speaker is the victim’s legal counsel accused of having political interests.

3.1.2 Euphemism in the Form of Abbreviations

According to Sutarman (2013: 67), an abbreviation is a shortened form consisting of one or more letters. In euphemism, abbreviations serve to conceal something and obscure meaning. Additionally, some abbreviations are commonly used in specific domains instead of their full forms. The following data were obtained as research results:

(2a) *Peningkatan literasi digital dengan perspektif gender serta bimbingan orang tua sejak dini juga disebut penting untuk melindungi anak dari paparan konten pornografi di media sosial dan menjaga agar mereka tidak menjadi korban **KBGO**.* (BBC/18/6/2024)

(2a) *Increasing digital literacy with a gender perspective and parental guidance from an early age is also said to be important to protect children from exposure to pornographic content on social media and ensure they do not become victims of **GBV**.* (BBC/18/6/2024)

In datum (2a), the abbreviation GBV stands for Gender-Based Violence Online. In the realm of immoral acts, GBV is commonly used to indicate that the case has relevance to digital media, such as the location of its dissemination.

(2b) *Korban pertama **DF** melaporkan kasusnya ke Bareskrim Polri pada 29 Januari 2024 dan korban kedua **RZ** melaporkan ke Polda Metro Jaya pada 12 Januari 2024.* (BBC/27/2/2024)

(2b) *The first victim **DF** reported her case to the National Police’s Criminal Investigation Department on January 29, 2024, and the second victim **RZ** reported it to the Metro Jaya Police Department on January 12, 2024.* (BBC/27/2/2024)

In datum (2b), the abbreviations DF and RZ represent the names of two victims of sexual harassment. The victims’ names must be abbreviated in cases of immoral acts, by the journalistic code of ethics, Article 5 of the Indonesian Journalists’ Code of Ethics, which states that journalists must not mention or broadcast the identity of victims of immoral crimes or the identity of children who are perpetrators of crimes (under 16 years old and unmarried).

3.1.3 Euphemism in the Form of Acronyms

An acronym is a shortened form that can be a combination of letters, a combination of letters and syllables, or a combination of syllables written and pronounced as a usual word[10]. In other words, an acronym is a shortening of several words into one that is commonly used so that the public can understand its meaning in the context of speech. The following data were obtained as research results.

(3a) *Perbuatan tiga siswa yang masih duduk di bangku pendidikan SMP ini dilakukan saat dua korban dalam keadaan mabuk berat setelah dicekoki **miras** tradisional jenis sopi.* (TT/15/06/2024)

(3a) *The actions of three students still in junior high school were carried out while the two victims were heavily intoxicated after being forced to drink traditional **alcoholic beverages** known as sopi.* (TT/15/06/2024)

In datum (3a), the term *miras* is an acronym for *minuman keras* (alcoholic beverages). Alcoholic beverages are intoxicating and can cause the drinker to lose consciousness.

(3b) *Dia mengatakan AK kembali menagih pembayaran uang untuk video persetubuhan yang telah dilakukan bersama putranya. Namun, akun Facebook Icha Shakila kembali meminta AK membuat video asusila dengan pria **lansia** alias kakek-kakek.* (DN/7/6/2024)

(3b) *He said AK again demanded payment for the sexual video made with his son. However, the Facebook account Icha Shakila again asked AK to make an immoral video with an **elderly man**, alias an old man.* (DN/7/6/2024)

In datum (3b), the term *lansia* is an acronym for *lanjut usia* (elderly). In this report, *lansia* refers to an elderly man, specifically an old man.

3.1.4 Euphemism in Terms of Expression

The euphemism form of figurative expression is a form of euphemism that refines words by symbolizing, likening, or giving something another form [5]. This type of euphemism can also be used as a strategy for the government and other institutions to avoid fear and panic in society[4]. The following is the data obtained as a result of the research.

(4a) *Kasus pelecehan dan kekerasan seksual pada anak di Kabupaten Pangandaran seperti **gunung es**.* (DN/25/05/2024)

(4a) *Cases of sexual abuse and violence against children in Pangandaran Regency are **like an iceberg**.* (DN/25/05/2024)

In datum (4a), the phrase *like an iceberg* is found, which are euphemisms for figurative expressions. This is because this phrase is used to replace a condition of sexual harassment which from the outside does not appear to have caused many victims even though many cases have not been revealed.

(4b) *Saat itu, pelaku JR akhirnya mengaku telah mencabuli anaknya. Sang ibu **naik pitam** yang akhirnya membuat geger warga sekitar. Warga akhirnya melapor polisi.* (KP/8/5/2024)

(4b) *At that time, the perpetrator JR finally admitted that he had molested his child. The mother became **furious** which ultimately caused a commotion among residents. Residents finally reported the police.* (KP/8/5/2024)

In datum (4b) we found the phrase *naik pitam* (furious) which is a euphemistic form of figurative expression. *Pitam* lexically means dizziness. However, in this context, *naik pitam* is not interpreted as a condition of dizziness due to blood rising to the brain, but is interpreted figuratively, meaning very angry or emotional.

3.1.5 Euphemism Used to Replace Another Term

This form of euphemism is an expression that replaces a term with another term that is considered more appropriate or more polite. Generally, the terms used have the same meaning (synonyms) with better connotations. The following is the data obtained as a result of the research.

(5a) *Kedua pelaku kini **meringkuk** di sel tahanan markas Polres Brebes dan terancam 15 tahun penjara.* (KP/8/5/2024)

(5a) *The two perpetrators are now **huddled** in a holding cell at the Brebes Police Headquarters and face up to 15 years in prison.* (KP/8/5/2024)

In datum (5a), the word *huddled* is found, which is a euphemism for a term used to replace another term. The word *huddled* is considered more appropriate than *being thrown* or *sleeping* in prison.

(5b) *Pria tersebut ditangkap usai kedatangan menyentuh alat vital anak-anak tersebut saat mereka sedang bermain.* (AN/10/5/2024)

(5b) *The man was arrested after he was caught touching the children's vital organs while they were playing.* (AN/10/5/2024)

In datum (5b), the phrase *vital organs* was found which is a form of euphemism for a term used to replace another term. The phrase *vital organs* is considered more appropriate and less taboo than using the term *genitals* or directly referring to the names of sensitive body organs owned by men or women.

3.1.6 Euphemism in the Form of Loan Words

Loan words are the absorption of foreign language words into Indonesian. In line with this, loan words are words originating from a foreign language that have been integrated into a language and are generally accepted for use[13]. The following is the data obtained as a result of the research:

(6a) *Selain mendampingi psikologi korban, juga menemani hingga berhasil dan menjadi anak yang membanggakan. Ia akan menyiapkan sekolah Bibit Unggul untuk para korban pelecehan dan kekerasan.* (DN/24/1/2024)

(6a) *Apart from assisting the victim's psychology, he also accompanies him until he succeeds and becomes a proud child. He will prepare a Superior Seeds school for victims of harassment and violence.* (DN/24/1/2024)

In datum (6a), the word *psikologi* is found which is a loan word from English, namely psychology. The word psychology in the Indonesian Dictionary is defined as science related to the mental, both regarding symptoms and mental activities. In the context of this report, victims of sexual harassment will receive psychiatric treatment.

(6b) *Aktivis perempuan, Tunggal Pawestri, mengatakan modus yang dilakukan pelaku pelecehan maupun kekerasan seksual dengan mengirimkan pesan menjurus pada hubungan seksual atau rayuan hampir pasti dialami sejumlah mahasiswa di semua kampus yang ditemuinya.* (BBC/16/5/2024)

(6b) *Women's activist, Tunggal Pawestri, said that the method used by perpetrators of sexual harassment and violence by sending messages that lead to sexual relations or seduction was almost certainly experienced by several students on all the campuses she met.* (BBC/16/5/2024)

In datum (6b), the word *aktivis* is found which is a loan word from English, namely *activist*. The word *activist* in the Indonesian Dictionary is defined as a person who works actively to encourage the implementation of something or various activities in their organization. In the context of this news, activists moved to defend victims of sexual harassment.

3.1.7 Euphemism in the Form of A Metaphor

Metaphor is the use of words or expressions for objects or contexts that are adapted to their similarities. Metaphors are identical to forms of language with figurative meanings of similarity or comparison[14]. Metaphors are generally understood to have metaphorical meaning, namely meanings that tend to be non-literal, connotative, figurative, not the real meaning, and similes. The following is the data obtained as a result of the research:

(7a) *Terhitung sejak dugaan pelecehan dilaporkan pada Januari 2024, kasus ini belum juga memperoleh titik terang meski sudah empat bulan berlalu.* (TR/7/5/2024)

(7a) *Since the alleged harassment was reported in January 2024, this case has not yet come to light even though four months have passed.* (TR/7/5/2024)

In datum (7a) the phrase *titik terang* is found, which is a form of metaphorical euphemism. The phrase *titik terang* means a condition that shows clarity. So, the word *titik* is a conceptualization of condition and *terang* is a conceptualization of clarity. The metaphor used in this context is an ontological

metaphor. Ontological metaphors are metaphors that conceptualize thoughts, experiences, and other abstract processes into something that has physical properties.

(7b) *Adegan panas ini akhirnya viral di media sosial karena salah satu dari pelaku sengaja merekam peristiwa tersebut.*

(7b) *This hot scene finally went viral on social media because one of the perpetrators deliberately recorded the incident.*

In datum (7b) we found the phrase *hot scene* which is a form of metaphorical euphemism. The phrase *hot scene* means a scene that arouses sexual stimulation. The word *scene* has the meaning of *act*, while the word *hot* is a conceptualization of *arousing lust*. The metaphor used in this context is a structural metaphor. Structural metaphors see more abstract concepts structured within more concrete concepts. One domain can be mapped to more than one other domain.

3.1.8 Euphemism in the Form of Periphrasis

Periphrasis is restating the meaning of a text in writing or orally using words or sentences that are longer than the original text. In other words, periphrasis breaks down a word into a series of words that contain the same meaning as the word it replaces. The following is the data obtained as a result of the research:

(8a) *Lambat laun, genggamannya tangan bocah itu melemah. Tubuhnya **terbujur kaku**.* (BBC/14/5/2024)

(8a) *Gradually, the boy's grip weakened. His body **lay stiff**.* (BBC/14/5/2024)

In datum (8a), the phrase *lay stiff* is found which is a form of periphrasis. The phrase *lay stiff* is used because it is felt to be more subtle and acceptable to the public than using the words *dead*, *died*, or *perished* to describe the victim's condition as a result of sexual harassment.

(8b) *Sepanjang pengalamannya menjadi fasilitator nasional untuk membangun kapasitas Satgas PPKS di perguruan tinggi di seluruh Indonesia, dia menemukan bahwa karyawan universitas memiliki **posisi tawar paling lemah**.* (BBC/27/2/2024)

(8b) *Throughout his experience as a national facilitator to build the capacity of the PPKS Task Force in universities throughout Indonesia, he found that university employees had **the weakest bargaining position**.* (BBC/27/2/2024)

In datum (8b), the phrase *the weakest bargaining position* is found which is a form of periphrasis. The phrase *the weakest bargaining position* is used because it is felt to be more subtle and acceptable to the public than using the words *worst position* or *lowest position*.

3.2 The Purpose of Using Euphemisms in Reporting Immoral Acts in Online Media

Based on the results of data analysis of the form of euphemisms in reporting on immoral acts in online media, several functions of euphemisms can be found as follows:

3.2.1 Euphemism as a form of politeness

Politeness and comfort are one of the functions of using euphemisms. This is done as an effort so that the news can be assessed positively by readers through the language written. For example, to say the word *death*, journalists prefer to use the word *passed away* or the phrase *breathing one's last breath*.

3.2.2 Euphemism as a form of disguising meaning

When writing news in online media, certain words need to be disguised with other forms of expression so that their meaning cannot be known directly. For example, to say the word *controlled*, journalists prefer to use the word *dictated*.

3.2.3 Euphemism as a form of avoiding conflict

Euphemism aims to maintain healthy social relations and balance by replacing harsh or explicit language with language that is softer and less likely to offend or cause pain to the reader, listener, or speech partner.

3.2.4 Euphemism as a form of reducing embarrassment

Euphemisms are used as an effort to reduce the effects of shame that occur on victims of violence or sexual harassment. Therefore, when writing news such as in online media, the names of victims must be written using initials so that their identities are not known.

3.2.5 Euphemism as a form of keeping something secret

Usually, this function is often used in the medical field to convey the illnesses suffered by patients. However, in the field of journalism, euphemisms as a form of keeping something secret are also commonly used, such as withholding the full names of victims of sexual violence and not describing the perpetrators in detail for investigative purposes. Thus, journalists will only write things like *middle-aged men, adults, close people, etc.* to describe the perpetrator.

4. CONCLUSION

Forms of euphemism that appear in reporting on immoral acts in online media include foreign word euphemisms, loan word euphemisms, periphrasis, metaphorical euphemisms, figurative euphemisms, euphemisms used to replace another term, acronym euphemisms, and abbreviation euphemisms. Journalists use these forms of euphemism to keep something secret, reducing embarrassment for the parties involved, avoiding conflict, disguising meaning, and as a form of politeness so that the audience can accept it as readers.

Therefore, journalists must adhere to the journalistic code of ethics when writing news, especially about immoral acts. Mass media, especially electronic media, have a significant role in influencing society through writing (language). In other words, in addition to following the code of ethics, journalists must also understand how to use euphemisms to produce acceptable writing without causing new societal conflicts.

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