

THE USED OF EUPHEMISM IN ONLINE MEDIA: ANALYSIS OF THE NEWS HEADLINE REGARDING SENSITIVE ISSUE GAZA ISSUE IN THE JAKARTA POST

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the strategic use of euphemisms in news headlines regarding the Gaza conflict published by The Jakarta Post. Euphemism functions as a linguistic tool that mitigates the impact of sensitive or politically charged topics, shaping public perception and discourse. Using Allan and Burridge theory (1991) framework, the research categorizes euphemistic expressions found in 39 headlines and identifies prevalent strategies such as one-for-one substitution, technical jargon, understatement, and circumlocution.

Keywords: Euphemism, The Jakarta Post, News headline.

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of media communication, language plays a major role in shaping public perception and constructing social realities. Perceptions and social norms are shaped by how language is used (Kuang & Bucheri, 2022). Mass media, especially online mass media, has become a powerful platform that influences how the public perceives sensitive, controversial, or politically charged issues. Mass media expands access to information while influencing people's perception of values (Rahman, Sutjipto & Putri, 2024). Among the linguistic strategies used by journalists, euphemism stands out as a common tool as a censorship in news headlines to reduce the impact of harsh, direct, or potentially offensive topics (Aswan, Santoso & Syahri, 2024). News headlines, in particular, are designed to grab attention while subtly framing the narrative, often through euphemistic language.

Euphemism, as defined by Allan and Burridge (1991, 2006), is the replacement of a word or expression that is considered impolite or rude with a more acceptable and less harsh alternative. Euphemisms serve many types: figurative expression, metaphor, flippancy, remodelling, circumlocution, clipping, abbreviations, acronyms, omission, one-for-one substitution, general for specific, part for whole (synecdoche), hyperbole, understatement, technical jargon, and colloquialism.

This research focuses on how euphemisms are used in the coverage of the Gaza conflict, a sensitive issue that is highly discussed around the world. This topic was chosen because it is a sensitive issue that involves politics, violence, rights violations, and involves many countries in its case. As described by Allan and Burridge (Allan & Burridge, 1991) that euphemisms are utilized when discussing sensitive matters such as death, war, sex, and violence.

Regardless, the Jakarta Post is a national news website that not only presents domestic news, but also international English-language news. As a wide-ranging news site, it seems that the Jakarta Post frames the topic of the Gaza conflict with positive language, perhaps using more subtle language to maintain a neutral or optimistic tone.

By examining headlines published in The Jakarta Post, this study aims to identify and classify euphemistic expressions based on Allan and Burridge's framework. Through this analysis, this research will explore how language is used strategically to frame certain issues in online mass media sites, especially the Jakarta Post.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Euphemisms have become a frequently studied topic in research, especially their use in digital and mass media. First, the research conducted by (Akhir & Zamin, 2021) focused on public perceptions of the use of euphemisms in political articles. The results revealed that the public has a variety of different views on euphemism. Some people consider euphemisms to be used to maintain politeness, but some argue that sometimes euphemisms make the message unclear because they maintain politeness rather than meaning.

Second, a study focused on the use of euphemisms in online news sites by (Nusri & Mubarak, 2022). The study reveals the functions of euphemisms in media communication such as to soften harsh language, avoid negative connotations, and harmonize with sociocultural sensibilities, which ultimately affect public perception and social harmony.

Not only in the scope of mass media, the study of euphemism is also studied in social media such as Instagram. This study was conducted by Wibowo & Ramadhani (2024), Not only in the scope of mass media, the study of euphemism is also studied in social media such as Instagram. This study focused on how euphemism strategies are used by young people on social media. The study reveals that euphemisms help serve functions such as informing, evaluation, and politeness, especially in digital communication among young users.

Furthermore, in a different context, (Mudau, 2024) conducted research on the use of euphemisms by politicians in everyday communication. The findings of this study reveal that the main functions of euphemisms in the political communication landscape are to conceal and persuade.

In contrast to previous studies, this study aims to explore the use of euphemisms in the Indonesian online mass media, the Jakarta Post. This study offers a different context and time from previous studies, as it is specific to Indonesian mass media covering both national and international news. Also, this study offers an analysis on a specific topic that is more specific and currently being discussed, namely the Gaza conflict.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, because this approach is considered the most appropriate to reveal the meaning and language strategies used in news headlines, especially in the context of the use of euphemisms (polite language) in the mass media.

According to Creswell (2014), a qualitative approach aims to understand the meaning contained in social phenomena in depth through the analysis of non-numerical data such as text, while a descriptive approach is used to describe systematically, factually, and accurately the facts and characteristics of the objects being studied. In this study, the objects are news headlines published by the online media The Jakarta Post, especially those discussing the conflict in Gaza.

The Jakarta Post was chosen as the data source because it is a national English-language newspaper that presents national and international issues and has an important role in shaping public opinion, both domestically and globally. Data was collected through the documentation method, namely by archiving news related to the topic of the Gaza conflict from January 1 to April 31, 2025. The news titles were then analyzed qualitatively using Allan and Burridge's (1991, 2006) theory of euphemism.

This research not only describes the forms of euphemisms found, but also evaluates how these linguistic strategies are used to frame sensitive public issues. Through this approach, it is hoped that this research can provide a deeper picture of how the media uses language towards important issues in society.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1. The use of euphemism

NO.	TYPES	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
1.	One-for-one substitution	11	25,58%
2.	Technical jargon	7	16,28%
3.	Understatement	7	16,28%
4.	Circumlocution	5	11,63%
5.	Metaphor	4	9,30%
6.	General for specific	3	6,98%
7.	Colloquial	3	6,98%
8.	Flippancy	1	2,33%
9.	Hyperbole	1	2,33%
10.	Figurative expression	1	2,33%
	Total	43	100%

Types such as clipping, remodelling, abbreviations, acronyms, omission, and part for whole (synecdoche) were not found at all in the analyzed data.

From the results of the analysis, a total of 43 data were found which are euphemisms, both in the form of words and phrases. The most widely used euphemism is one-for-one substitution (11), followed by technical jargon (7), then understatement (7), circumlocution

(5), metaphor (4), general for specific (3), colloquial (3), flippancy (1), hyperbole (1), and figurative expression (1). Some types such as clipping, remodelling, abbreviations, acronyms, omission, and part for whole (synecdoche) were not found to be used in news headlines.

Table 2. One-for-one substitution



No	News Headline	Description of function
1.		The phrase “ truce deal ” is best categorized as a one-for-one substitution euphemism, a more neutral term that offers a softer, more diplomatic framing of what is essentially a suspension of armed conflict. This phrase replaces some phrase like “halt in bombing” or “pause in military attack” that could sound more direct.
2.		The phrase “ hostage prisoner- swap ” is indirect for less controversial political expression. This in the substitution for another potential expression that might be sound controversial, refers to an exchange where hostages held by one side are traded for prisoners held by the other side.

Table 3. Technical Jargon



No	News Headline	Description of function
1.		The phrase “ Hypothermia deaths ” is best categorized as a technical jargon euphemism. “ Hypothermia deaths ” is the formal medical language to refer to deaths caused by exposure to cold temperatures, making the situation sound more clinical and less emotionally provoking.
2.		“ Ground offensive ” is military terminology that avoids emotive descriptions like “invasion” or “attack”. This phrase is used to replace more emotion-laden terms such as “land invasion” or “troop attack” which refer to military attacks carried out on land. This journalistic and military term used to reduce emotional impact and maintain neutrality.

Table 4. Understatement

No	News Headline	Description of function
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1.	<p>WORLD • MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA</p> <p>Indonesia welcomes Gaza ceasefire deal, urges reconstruction</p>	<p>“reconstruction” is used to neutralize and make the sentence more procedural and optic. However, it originally referred to the rebuilding of areas devastated by conflict, buildings, infrastructure, and sometimes even social systems that can be identified to downplay the intensity of the destruction.</p>
2.	<p>WORLD • MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA</p> <p>Flood of Palestinians return to north Gaza after hostage breakthrough</p>	<p>The word “breakthrough” is an understatement in bureaucratic tone, implying a positive diplomatic development, but can mask the sad and traumatic reality of hostage-taking and release under duress.</p>

Table 5. Circumlocution

No	News Headline	Description of function
1.	<p>WORLD • MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA</p> <p>MUI urges Prabowo to evaluate Gaza evacuation plan</p>	<p>"Evaluate evacuation plan" subtly replaces the urgency or gravity of "decide how to save civilians", softening the potential crisis context.</p>
2.	<p>WORLD • MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA</p> <p>US and Israel look to Africa for resettling Palestinians from Gaza</p>	<p>The phrase “resettling Palestinians” is a classic euphemism. Rather than using direct terms like “deportation”, “forced relocation”, or “ethnic cleansing”, the word “resettling” implies a peaceful, humanitarian process. It abstracts the trauma, political force, and human rights implications of the action.</p>

Table 6. Metaphor

No	News Headline	Description of function
1.	<p>WORLD • MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA</p> <p>Flood of Palestinians return to north Gaza after hostage breakthrough</p>	<p>The word “flood” is a metaphor, refers to the huge number of Palentinians to northern Gaza. It replaces literal description to soften the expression.</p>

Table 7. General- for specific

No	News Headline	Description of function
1.	<p>WORLD • MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA</p> <p>West Bank violence imperils Gaza ceasefire, UN rights office warns</p>	<p>The term “violence” is vague and general and can occur anywhere and in any form. It is used to avoid confrontation with graphic or specific details of taboo or sensitive events about Gaza.</p>

Table 8. Colloquial


No	News Headline	Description of function
1.	 <p>WORLD • MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA</p> <p>US appears to backtrack as Trump Gaza plan sparks global outcry</p>	The word "backtrack" is an informal way to say "reconsider," commonly used in everyday speech rather than formal political terminology. It makes the action sound more like a wavering.

Table 9. Flippancy


No	News Headline	Description of function
1.	 <p>WORLD • MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA</p> <p>Behind the Gaza deal: a US odd couple and last-minute snags</p>	"Odd couple" is a lighthearted, humorous and less serious expression. Its function is to mask possible tensions or disagreements by turning them into something funny and seemingly casual.

Table 10. Hyperbole



No	News Headline	Description of function
1.	 <p>WORLD • EUROPE</p> <p>Netanyahu says Israel will end Gaza ceasefire if hostages not returned</p>	The phrase "end Gaza ceasefire" suggests a definitive and absolute termination of the ceasefire, which may be an exaggeration. In reality, ceasefires often involve negotiations, partial agreements, or extensions rather than abrupt endings. The wording heightens the urgency and stakes of the situation, making it sound more dramatic and final than the complex diplomatic process likely entails

Table 11. Figurative expression

No	News Headline	Description of function
1.	 <p>WORLD • MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA</p> <p>Pushback on Prabowo's Gaza plan continues after Mideast tour</p>	"Pushback" is a figurative and bureaucratic euphemism for criticism, rejection, or opposition, often used in diplomatic or political contexts to soften the negative impact of the reaction.

The dominance of the use of one-for-one substitution and technical jargon indicates an attempt to neutralize the issue of violence and aggression in the conflict. For example, the use of the phrase "truce deal" instead of "halt in bombing" or "pause in military attack", and "ground offensive" replacing the terms "military attack" or "invasion". This shows that

the media is not absolutely neutral, but rather plays an active role in linguistic framing, by adjusting the narrative to be more acceptable to the global audience and not cause diplomatic friction.

Furthermore, understatement euphemisms such as “reconstruction” and “breakthrough” serve the function of euphemisms in softening harsh realities. As such, euphemisms help manage public perceptions, especially among global audiences who may be politically insensitive by reframing tragic or violent events into more acceptable, bureaucratic or diplomatic terms.

On the other hand, the use of circumlocution in some titles such as "evaluate Gaza evacuation plan" and "resettling Palestinians" shows a tendency to disguise the harsh reality of actions such as forced evictions or emergency evacuations. This shows how language can be used as a tool of normalization, where systemic violence or human rights violations are wrapped up in bureaucratic or diplomatic-sounding terms.

The absence of cuts, beheadings, abbreviations, acronyms, and omissions in The Jakarta Post's headlines indicates that the Jakarta Post uses euphemisms strategically by prioritizing formality, professionalism, and diplomatic frames on sensitive and global issues. This reflects how journalistic language still tries to maintain credibility while softening emotional intensity and maintaining neutrality, especially in reporting conflicts, humanitarian issues, and sensitive global issues.

In terms of function, Euphemism in the news title from The Jakarta Post can be seen as a tool to:

1. Maintain political neutrality and maintain a moderate media position
2. Avoid criticism or tension from international readers
3. Manage and maintain public emotions so that they remain rational in responding to sensitive issues

Indirectly, this strategy can influence readers in understanding and responding to the Gaza issue. Soft, diplomatic, or even abstract premises prevent readers from immediately accepting news with the bitter reality of war and human rights violations. And from this form of blood-control it is intelligent, but it can also open up ethical discussions regarding transparency of information and the absence of media bias.

CONCLUSION

The results of the analysis of 43 data on the use of euphemisms in The Jakarta Post's headlines, show that one-for-one substitution and technical jargon are the most dominant types of euphemisms. This means that the media tends to neutralize sensitive issues such as violence and aggression in a conflict with substitutes that are considered more neutral and diplomatic. For example, the use of the word “truce deal” instead of “halt in bombing”, or “ground offensive” instead of “military attack”, shows the active role of the media in framing issues with language that is more globally acceptable.

Meanwhile, euphemism types such as circumlocution, understatement, and colloquialism are used to show that euphemism does not only function as a meaning reducer, but as a rhetorical strategy that disguises harsh realities such as forced evictions or emergency evacuations with light-sounding bureaucratic or informal terms. However, the absence of types such as clipping, remodelling, acronyms, and omission shows that the media is more focused on maintaining the clarity of the information conveyed by using soft sentence structures rather than by shortening words.

Overall, it can be concluded that The Jakarta Post does not simply convey facts related to sensitive issues, but also actively frames events through strategic word choices. Euphemisms are used as a tool to maintain a neutral and moderate political position, avoid criticism or tension from international readers and control public emotions to remain rational in dealing with sensitive issues.

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