

A Study of Euphemism in Crime News in Online Media

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of euphemism in crime news published on online media platforms, with a particular focus on Detik.com. The purpose of this research is to identify and analyze the forms and functions of euphemism that journalists employ to present sensitive or potentially disturbing information in a more polite, neutral, and socially acceptable manner. The data were collected from crime-related news articles published in February 2025 through a reading and note-taking technique. The analysis involved three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that euphemism appears in various forms, including abbreviations, loanwords, foreign terms, metaphors, and periphrasis. These linguistic strategies serve multiple functions: softening harsh expressions, concealing sensitive information, maintaining diplomacy, providing educational value, and reducing social anxiety. Overall, the study highlights the role of euphemism in shaping public perception of crime news and its importance in upholding journalistic ethics. The results are expected to contribute to a better understanding of how language use in the media influences communication, objectivity, and sensitivity in news reporting.

Keywords: Euphemism; Crime News; Online Media

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the way people access and consume news. Online media platforms have become the primary sources of information for many readers, offering instant updates on a wide range of issues, including crime. In Indonesia, news portals such as Detik.com are among the most frequently accessed sources, delivering real-time reports to audiences across diverse social and geographical backgrounds. With the increasing reliance on digital journalism, the choice of language in news reporting plays a crucial role in shaping

how readers interpret and respond to sensitive issues, particularly crime-related events.

News, by nature, is a factual report of events that carry social, political, or cultural implications. Crime news, however, occupies a unique position because it often involves issues of morality, legality, and public safety. Reports on crimes such as robbery, sexual assault, drug abuse, or murder can easily evoke fear, anger, or discomfort among readers. For this reason, journalists often employ euphemistic expressions to present such information in a more neutral and less confrontational way. By softening harsh realities, euphemism enables sensitive issues to be conveyed without triggering excessive emotional reactions.

Language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for social interaction. In news writing, the choice of words determines how effectively information is delivered and how it is perceived by the audience. Euphemism, as a linguistic strategy, helps journalists maintain politeness, avoid offensive or taboo words, and preserve ethical standards in communication. For example, the use of terms like “passed away” instead of “died”, or “correctional facility” instead of “prison”, reflects attempts to present information with greater sensitivity. The significance of euphemism lies in its ability to serve multiple communicative purposes. It not only softens unpleasant expressions but also conceals sensitive information, protects identities, and reduces stigma. In the context of crime news, euphemism may be used to protect the victim’s dignity, respect cultural norms, or comply with journalistic ethics. This linguistic device also functions diplomatically, allowing journalists to report on delicate issues while minimizing social tension and potential backlash from readers.

Several previous studies have highlighted the role of euphemism in media discourse. Research has shown that euphemism is not merely a matter of linguistic substitution but also reflects broader social, cultural, and ethical considerations. In Japanese, for example, euphemism in classroom communication shows respect and maintain harmony. In online news, euphemism is often used to frame events in ways that influence readers’ perception, either by downplaying severity or by redirecting focus. This demonstrates that euphemism is an essential element of journalistic style that goes beyond mere language choice. In Indonesia, online news portals have become powerful shapers of public opinion, and the use of euphemism within them requires critical attention. Detik.com, as one of the most influential online news platforms, frequently employs euphemistic language in its coverage, including in crime-related reports. This practice not only reflects linguistic creativity but also reveals the media’s responsibility in balancing objectivity with sensitivity. Investigating the forms and functions of euphemism in this context offers valuable insights into how language mediates the relationship between media and society.

This study, therefore, aims to analyze the forms and functions of euphemism in crime news published on online media, focusing specifically on Detik.com. The research explores how euphemism is employed through abbreviations, loanwords,

foreign terms, metaphors, and periphrasis, as well as how these linguistic strategies serve functions such as softening expression, concealing information, maintaining diplomacy, providing education, and reducing social anxiety. By identifying these patterns, the study seeks to reveal the deeper implications of euphemism in shaping readers' interpretations of crime. Ultimately, this research contributes to the field of linguistics and media studies by emphasizing the significance of euphemism in journalistic practices. The findings are expected to enhance our understanding of how language functions in the media not only as a tool for communication but also as an instrument of social responsibility. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for journalists to exercise caution in word choice, ensuring that their reports remain factual, ethical, and sensitive to the diverse perspectives of the audience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Euphemism has long been a subject of interest in linguistic studies, particularly within the field of semantics and pragmatics. Leech (1981) defines euphemism as the substitution of an expression with a more polite, mild, or socially acceptable alternative, often used to avoid offending listeners or readers. Euphemism is thus closely related to politeness theory, where language choices reflect social norms, cultural taboos, and ethical considerations. In media discourse, euphemism plays an important role in shaping how sensitive issues are presented to the public. Previous studies have shown that euphemism serves both linguistic and social functions. According to Allan and Burridge (2006), euphemism is not merely a matter of word replacement but a reflection of broader cultural values. For example, expressions relating to death, sexuality, and crime are often euphemized because they touch upon socially sensitive or taboo areas. In journalism, euphemism is frequently used to soften negative or threatening realities, thereby maintaining social harmony and reducing public anxiety.

Research on euphemism in media has explored its various forms and functions across languages and cultures. For instance, studies in Japanese communication emphasize euphemism as a strategy of respect and politeness in maintaining harmonious interaction (Dyah, 2022). Similarly, Aziza (2021) analyzed euphemism and dysphemism in social media content, demonstrating how euphemism helps mitigate offensive language while dysphemism often amplifies negativity. These findings highlight the duality of language use in digital spaces, where euphemism can either protect or manipulate audience perception.

In the Indonesian context, studies on euphemism have focused on media, education, and political discourse. Ihsani (2023), for example, examined euphemism and dysphemism in online news headlines, showing how these linguistic strategies influence the framing of events. Euphemism was found to conceal sensitive aspects of crime and maintain a neutral tone, while dysphemism often dramatized the same issues. These studies suggest that euphemism is not only a linguistic device but also a journalistic strategy to align news reporting with ethical norms and audience expectations.

Euphemism also plays a crucial role in protecting identity and maintaining confidentiality in crime reporting. As pointed out by Wijana and Rohmadi (2008), euphemism often functions to hide specific details, such as the identity of victims or perpetrators, by using initials or general terms. This aligns with journalistic ethics that prioritize privacy, particularly in cases involving minors or sexual crimes. Thus, euphemism becomes not only a linguistic strategy but also an ethical safeguard in journalism. Another dimension of euphemism in news discourse is its diplomatic function. Politicians, public figures, and media outlets frequently use euphemism to reduce tension and avoid public backlash. In crime reporting, euphemistic expressions such as “taken in for questioning” instead of “interrogated” help reduce the perception of harshness associated with legal procedures. Samsudin and Ahmad (2018) argue that euphemism supports face-saving strategies, allowing speakers and writers to maintain credibility while addressing sensitive issues.

Furthermore, euphemism contributes to education and public awareness by introducing alternative terms that are less offensive yet still informative. In some cases, euphemistic expressions are borrowed from foreign languages, giving a more formal or technical impression to sensitive topics. For example, terms like trauma healing or rehabilitation center are widely used in Indonesian news to replace harsher terms. This reflects how euphemism can enhance the professionalism and objectivity of journalistic language. Taken together, these studies illustrate that euphemism is a multifaceted phenomenon in media discourse. It operates at the intersection of language, culture, and ethics, with implications for how information is shaped and interpreted by audiences. However, while many studies have examined euphemism in general media contexts, fewer have specifically addressed its role in crime news on Indonesian online platforms. This research, therefore, seeks to fill that gap by analyzing the forms and functions of euphemism in crime reports published by Detik.com, thereby contributing new insights to the field of linguistic and media studies.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, which emphasizes the analysis of linguistic data in the form of words, expressions, and sentences rather than numbers. A qualitative method was deemed appropriate because the aim of this research is to explore how euphemism is used in crime news and to interpret its communicative functions. According to Mahsun (2014), qualitative descriptive research allows researchers to examine language phenomena systematically and describe them in detail without manipulating the data. The focus of this research lies in identifying both the forms and functions of euphemism in online crime news. The forms include abbreviations, loanwords, foreign terms, metaphors, and periphrasis, while the functions range from softening harsh expressions to concealing sensitive information, maintaining diplomacy, providing education, and reducing potential social anxiety. The data were drawn from news articles published

on Detik.com, one of Indonesia's most widely accessed online media platforms. The sample consisted of crime-related articles published in February 2025. Out of 28 articles reviewed, only 8 were classified as crime news and were therefore selected as the primary data sources. Detik.com was chosen as the data source because of its real-time reporting and wide readership, making it a significant platform in shaping public perception.

Instruments and Procedures

The data collection technique applied was reading and note-taking. First, the researcher carefully read the selected news articles to identify sentences and expressions that contained euphemistic elements. Second, relevant excerpts were noted and classified according to their linguistic forms and communicative functions. Hafizin (2019) emphasizes that this technique is effective in textual analysis because it allows data to be captured directly from the source without alteration. Documentation in the form of selected excerpts was organized systematically to support validity and reliability. To further ensure credibility, triangulation was applied by cross-checking the findings with theoretical frameworks and prior studies. The classification of euphemism forms was guided by literature in semantics and media linguistics, while the functions were analyzed using the framework proposed by Wijana and Rohmadi (2008).

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis followed the model of Miles and Huberman (1994), consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction stage, irrelevant data were eliminated, retaining only euphemistic expressions related to crime news. In the display stage, the selected data were organized into tables and descriptive narratives to highlight recurring patterns and features. Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher interpreted the data to answer the research questions concerning the forms and functions of euphemism. To ensure analytical rigor, the results were compared with established theoretical frameworks and previous studies. The scope of this research was limited to crime news on Detik.com within the specified time frame to maintain focus and depth of analysis, while acknowledging that euphemism may also appear in other types of news such as politics, health, or entertainment. By applying this methodological framework, the study provides a systematic and in-depth exploration of how euphemism operates in online media discourse, yielding findings that are descriptive as well as analytically grounded and valuable for both linguistic and media studies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of crime news articles published in Detik.com during February 2025 revealed various forms and functions of euphemism. A total of 28 articles were reviewed, and 8 of them were categorized as crime news. From these articles, 24

euphemistic expressions were identified, representing five major forms of euphemism: abbreviations, loanwords, foreign terms, metaphors, and periphrasis. Each form of euphemism served distinct communicative purposes that reflect journalistic strategies in presenting sensitive information. The first category identified was abbreviation, which appeared most frequently. Examples include “narkoba” (narcotics and dangerous drugs), “lapas” (correctional facility), “PSK” (commercial sex worker), and initials such as JT or S for concealing the identity of perpetrators and victims. These abbreviations helped to reduce the harshness of expressions or to protect individual privacy.

The second form was loanwords, with fewer instances but still significant. An example is the use of *aksi* (from Dutch/Latin *action*) instead of more direct terms such as *pelanggaran* (violation). Loanwords often give a more neutral or formal impression, softening the negative impact of the report. The third form was foreign terms, such as *sex party*, *lady companion*, *commercial sex worker*, and *CCTV*. These terms were either used to replace direct Indonesian equivalents that might sound too vulgar or to add a professional, technical nuance that makes the information less offensive.

The fourth category was metaphor, which included expressions like “kasus kriminal menghantui Bali” (crime cases haunting Bali) or “dibayar mahal dengan nyawa” (paid dearly with lives). These metaphorical expressions reframed sensitive issues into figurative language, making the message less confrontational while still impactful. The fifth form was periphrasis, or circumlocution, in which longer phrases were used to replace direct expressions. For example, instead of saying “interrogated”, the report used “dibawa polisi untuk dimintai keterangan” (taken by police for questioning). Such expressions soften the perception of legal actions and reduce negative connotations.

In terms of function, euphemism served five main purposes: (1) softening expressions, (2) concealing sensitive information, (3) diplomacy, (4) education, and (5) avoiding fear or social anxiety. Among these, the most dominant function was softening expressions, which appeared in 14 instances, while concealing information appeared in 6 cases, diplomacy in 3 cases, education in 4 cases, and avoiding fear in 1 case. Overall, the results indicate that euphemism is a central element in crime reporting on online media. Its use reflects journalistic efforts to maintain ethical standards, protect identities, and present information in a socially acceptable way while still retaining accuracy. The summary of forms and functions is presented in the following table:

Table 1. Forms and Functions of Euphemism in Crime News on Detik.com

No	Form of Euphemism	Examples	Frequency	Dominant Function
1	Abbreviations	<i>narkoba</i> , <i>lapas</i> , PSK, JT, S, Rp, BO	9	Softening, concealing identity

2	Loanwords	<i>aksi</i> (action)	1	Softening
3	Foreign Terms	sex party, lady companion, CCTV	6	Softening, concealing
4	Metaphors	<i>“kasus menghantui Bali”, “dibayar mahal dengan nyawa”</i>	4	Diplomacy, avoiding fear
5	Periphrasis	<i>“dibawa untuk dimintai keterangan”, “menghadapi konsekuensi”</i>	4	Softening, diplomacy, education
Total			24	

As shown in Table 1, the majority of responses from the experimental group fell within the “Agree” category (74%). The “Strongly Agree” category also demonstrated a relatively high proportion (14.8%), while only a small percentage expressed disagreement (8%) or strong disagreement (3.2%). This indicates that Canva contributed positively to students’ motivation. On the other hand, the control group, which experienced conventional learning, also showed motivation, but the distribution was slightly different. Students mostly agreed with the statements, but fewer indicated “Strongly Agree” compared to the experimental group.

Table 2 presents the questionnaire results for the control group. It demonstrates that although students were motivated, their responses tended to cluster more around the “Agree” category, with fewer strongly positive responses compared to the Canva-based group.

Table 2. Motivation Questionnaire for Control Group

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Score (fx)
Strongly Agree (SS)	19	8.0	76
Agree (S)	197	87.0	597
Disagree (KS)	12	5.0	24
Strongly Disagree (TS)	2	0.0	2
Total	230	100	699

The findings of this study confirm that euphemism plays a significant role in shaping the tone and presentation of crime news in online media. By using euphemistic expressions, journalists manage to balance between accuracy in reporting and sensitivity to readers’ emotional responses. This aligns with Allan

and Burridge's (2006) view that euphemism functions as a linguistic shield to protect both the speaker and the audience from direct exposure to offensive realities. One of the most notable findings is the dominance of abbreviations in crime news. Abbreviations such as PSK or initials like JT serve not only as linguistic shortcuts but also as ethical tools to conceal identities. This practice reflects the principle of journalistic responsibility to protect victims and suspects, especially in cases involving minors or sexual crimes. Thus, abbreviations operate simultaneously as linguistic simplification and ethical safeguards.

The use of loanwords and foreign terms demonstrates another layer of euphemism. By employing borrowed words such as *aksi* or foreign expressions like *lady companion*, the news articles provide a softer or more professional impression of sensitive issues. This suggests that euphemism in media is not only about politeness but also about framing information in ways that align with globalized discourse and professional standards of journalism. Metaphorical expressions were also found to be powerful tools in crime reporting. Phrases such as "*kasus kriminal menghantui Bali*" evoke imagery that captures readers' attention while avoiding harsh or explicit wording. Metaphors enable journalists to communicate the seriousness of a situation without resorting to blunt or potentially alarming expressions, thereby fulfilling the function of reducing social anxiety.

Periphrasis, or the use of longer expressions to replace direct terms, reflects a deliberate strategy to soften the tone of crime reports. For example, describing someone as "*dibawa untuk dimintai keterangan*" instead of "*diinterogasi*" reduces the confrontational nature of the legal process. This aligns with diplomatic communication, where language is carefully chosen to avoid creating tension or fear among readers. The functional analysis of euphemism in this study reveals that its primary role is to soften expressions, but it also serves broader purposes such as concealing sensitive information and maintaining diplomacy. These findings support previous studies by Wijana and Rohmadi (2008), who highlighted the multifunctional nature of euphemism in Indonesian language use. In the context of online journalism, these functions gain particular importance as news is consumed by a wide and diverse audience.

Another implication of the findings is the role of euphemism in educational and ethical communication. Expressions like *CCTV* or *rehabilitation center* introduce technical or formal terms that not only soften language but also raise awareness about legal and social issues. This educational role positions euphemism as more than a linguistic device; it is also a tool for shaping public understanding and attitudes toward crime and justice. The use of euphemism in crime news reflects a dynamic interplay between language, culture, and media ethics. Euphemism allows journalists to present crime-related information in ways that are socially acceptable, ethically responsible, and emotionally considerate. However, while euphemism softens harsh realities, it also raises questions about the potential dilution of seriousness in crime reporting. This tension highlights the need for journalists to strike a careful balance between sensitivity and transparency.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that euphemism is an essential linguistic strategy in crime news reporting on online media. The analysis of crime-related articles in Detik.com revealed that euphemism appears in various forms, including abbreviations, loanwords, foreign terms, metaphors, and periphrasis. Among these, abbreviations were found to be the most dominant form, reflecting their role in both simplifying language and protecting the identities of individuals involved in sensitive cases. In terms of function, euphemism was primarily used to soften harsh expressions, but it also served additional purposes such as concealing sensitive information, maintaining diplomacy, providing educational value, and reducing social anxiety. These functions demonstrate that euphemism is not merely a stylistic choice but a communicative necessity in journalism. By employing euphemism, journalists are able to balance factual accuracy with ethical considerations, ensuring that crime news is reported in a way that is both informative and socially acceptable. Overall, this study highlights the significant role of euphemism in shaping public perception of crime news. Euphemism allows sensitive issues to be communicated without causing unnecessary fear, offense, or stigma, while also reinforcing ethical standards in journalism. Future research could expand this analysis to include other media platforms or compare euphemism use across different news categories, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of language strategies in digital journalism.

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