



A EUPHEMISM ANALYSIS IN THE 2024 INDONESIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION DEBATE

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Abstract: This study analyzes the use of euphemisms in the debate of the 2024 Indonesian presidential candidates. Candidates used euphemisms to discuss sensitive issues such as corruption, human rights, and social inequality without causing conflict or harming certain parties. Using a qualitative approach, data were taken from the transcript of the debate broadcast on the official YouTube channel of the Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU RI). The euphemisms presented were based on Warren's theory (1992), including derivation, compounding, and blending. The results showed that 15 euphemisms were identified from the debate; 8 derivations, 5 compoundings, and 2 blends, of which derivation was the most dominant euphemism. Euphemisms helped candidates convey criticism and sensitive issues more subtly, maintain their public image, and create a more friendly and non-confrontational debate atmosphere. Euphemisms are essential in political communication, especially in Indonesian culture, which prioritizes gentle and indirect communication. This study contributes to understanding how language can be used to influence public perception and voter decision-making in important political events.

Key Terms: *Euphemism, Indonesian presidential debate, Political communication, Public perception, Word formation*

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INTRODUCTION

In the 2024 Indonesian presidential debates, euphemisms are likely to be used by candidates to discuss sensitive and potentially divisive topics. These topics may include governance, law, human rights (HAM), eradication of corruption, strengthening democracy, improving public services, and community harmony. Additionally, issues related to religious or ethnic tensions are often highly sensitive in Indonesia, a country known for its cultural and religious diversity.

Indonesian presidential candidates, which are Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo employ euphemisms to express criticism or viewpoints without offending specific groups, creating a more positive atmosphere, and reducing the risk of controversy. This softer language also helps candidates build a sympathetic image, attract voter attention, and maintain their public image during the high-pressure election period.

Crespo-Fernández (2014) states that politics has taken much interest in language and to politicians who consider language as an important means to deliver their ideas and influence, control and manipulate others. As a result, politicians have found euphemisms to be quite useful in their speeches. Politicians utilize euphemisms to address contentious issues and attack competitors without negatively impacting their audiences. When politicians interact with the public, they resemble actors. They strive to appear to care about others, but they do not. They serve their own functions as well, because politics is the study of conceivable and intended ends.

Political communication is using language rules to convey messages to the public. The government follows the rule of euphemism. Euphemism is the avoiding of language that readers or listeners may deem objectionable. Indecent or otherwise disturbing, and the themes being euphemized are commonly taboo. Using euphemisms can reduce the severity of harmful language. Politicians may utilize euphemistic language to effectively communicate disapproval in public (Jaganegara & Wijana, 2023).

According to Poole (1999), euphemism is the word used to characterize expressions that are genuinely less severe than the original ones. According to Bussmann (2006), p. 388, euphemism is also described as “a pleasant replacement for an objectionable word that has pejorative connotations,” such as “pass a way” for “to die” and “the black death” for “the plague.” Similarly, euphemism is defined as “an expression that refers to something that people hesitate to mention lest it cause offence, but which lessens the offensiveness by referring indirectly in some way” by Cruse (2006, p. 57). More on the advantages of euphemism is provided by Enright (1985, p. 23), who says that “a language without euphemisms would be a defective instrument of communication.” As per Wardaugh (2010), euphemism pertains to certain subjects that are not stated directly, but rather are discussed in a roundabout manner.

The 2024 Indonesian presidential debates were chosen for their significance as a high-stakes event in which candidates are judged on their policies, rhetoric, and leadership under pressure. Furthermore, discussions significantly impact voter decision-making, making them essential for evaluating voter attitudes. Finally, this topic provides a relevant examination of political communication in Indonesia, benefiting both academic research and practical electoral insights.

Warren (1992) presented the idea of types of euphemism, stating that the purpose of euphemism is to safeguard the speaker/writer, reader/hearer from the potential of losing face while discussing ‘touchy’ or taboo matters as a strategy to preserve pleasant contact. Warren’s idea supports certain word forms. First, compounding. Compounding is combining two or more words to make a single term that sounds nice to others. Examples include butterflies and greenhouses. The next step is derivation. The etymology in euphemism is found in a borrowed term from another language and includes extra words like suffixes or prefixes. According to Yule (2010), derivation involves the construction of words using various affixes. One example of this occurrence is freedom, which is derived from the words free (root) and dom (suffix).

The third type of word creation is acronym. The acronym for this phrase is a mixture of first-letter words that have been reduced to form a single word. The acronym can be found in a variety of domains, including medical terminology, euphemisms, and so on. This abbreviation uses euphemisms, such as GIF (graphic interchange format). Fourth, Blends. Blends, According to Crystal (2008), refer to the process in linguistic analysis where two elements that do not typically co-occur according to the rules of the language are combined into a single unit. For instance, the term “naturist” is a euphemistic alternative for “nudist,” as noted by Rawson (1981). The final word construction is onomatopoeia. In euphemisms, onomatopoeia refers to a word's pleasing sound. Meaning example, the sound “this and that” is similar to the sound “piss” meaning urinating.

Rosental (1976) and Riabova & Kobenko (2015) define onomatopoeia as a term that imitates natural or animal sounds. As an example, knock-knock, meow, and woof-woof. Onomatopoeia also develops verbs that imitate sounds, such as barking.

Previous research has examined the use of euphemisms in various situations and contexts. One significant study is “Use of Euphemisms in Youth Language” by Funda Uzdu Yıldız, which discusses the use of euphemisms by university students in Turkey in everyday conversations. This study analyzes how students use euphemisms in different contexts, such as going to the toilet, giving death news, and discussing weight gain. Yıldız found that metonyms are commonly used in toilet contexts, metaphors are frequent in death announcements, and implications are often used when discussing weight gain.

Another relevant study is “Euphemism Used in Online CNN Indonesia News” by Falizca Syaharani and Refnaldi, which discusses the forms of euphemisms in CNN Indonesia's online news articles. This research analyzed 20 articles from 2021, identifying 69 forms of euphemism categorized into 12 types, with loanwords being the most frequently used. The main function observed in these euphemisms was their protective nature.

In “Analysis of Pragmatic Functions of English Euphemism from the Perspective of Pragmatic Principles”, Yujuan Cao (2020) investigates how euphemisms facilitate communication by reducing offense and adhering to Grice's Cooperative Principle and Leech's Politeness Principle. This study demonstrates the roles of euphemisms in promoting smooth social interactions and maintaining politeness in sensitive conversations

Fei Deng's (2016) “An Analysis of Phonetic Formation in English Euphemism” examines how the pronunciation of certain euphemisms is altered to soften the impact of harsh expressions. Deng explores tone adjustments and stress modifications as strategies to make conversations more acceptable and polite, highlighting the linguistic flexibility of euphemisms.

Lastly, Eliecer Crespo-Fernández's (2018) “Euphemism as a Discursive Strategy in US Local and State Politics” explores the strategic use of euphemism in political discourse, where politicians rely on metaphor and understatement to address sensitive topics and maintain a positive public image. This study emphasizes how euphemisms are used as tools of self-protection and image management in political communication.

Although numerous studies have explored the use of euphemisms in various contexts, such as everyday conversations (Yıldız, 2021) and online news articles (Syaharani & Refnaldi, 2022), there remains a gap in research focusing on the specific use of euphemisms in political debates in Indonesia, particularly during the 2024 presidential election debates. Previous

studies tend to focus on social or media contexts, leaving the high-stakes political arena, where public perception and voter decision-making are crucial, underexplored.

This article fills that gap by providing a novel analysis of euphemisms used in the 2024 Indonesian presidential debates. Using Warren's (1992) theory to categorize word formation types and euphemism functions, the study offers unique insights into how political candidates use subtle language to maintain their public image, reduce tension, and influence voter decisions. This exploration is especially relevant within the complex cultural and religious diversity of Indonesia, making it a valuable contribution to both academic research and practical understanding of political communication strategies.

METHOD

Qualitative approach was chosen to explore the underlying meanings behind the use of refined language, particularly in the context of political communication. The research focused on identifying and categorizing the euphemisms used by the candidates and understanding their communicative purposes. Data were collected by watching the 2024 Indonesian presidential debate on the official YouTube channel of KPU RI. While watching, the researcher noted euphemisms in the candidates' statements. This technique helps researchers identify patterns of euphemism used directly from sources, especially in discussions of sensitive issues such as corruption, human rights, and social equality. The main data source was the debate transcripts, which were analyzed to identify euphemisms. These euphemisms were categorized based on their word formation types and functions according to Warren's (1992) theory, which includes compounding (the combination of two words that individually do not have negative meanings to create a new, more polite term), derivation (modifying a term derived from Latin to produce a more acceptable modern word), acronym (abbreviations formed from the first letters of several words and pronounced as one whole word), blends (combine the beginning and end of another word to form a new word), and onomatopoeia (the use of words that imitate sounds to describe an activity or action).

The data analysis followed the stages outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994): data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction phase, the researcher filtered and focused on the relevant euphemisms. The data were then presented in tables, organizing euphemisms by type and function based on Warren's theory. Finally, conclusions were drawn from the analysis, providing insights into how euphemisms help political candidates address sensitive issues, maintain their public image, and avoid controversy.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

In the 2024 Indonesian presidential candidate debate, euphemisms are an important strategy for conveying sensitive messages more subtly and diplomatically. Candidates use euphemisms to discuss crucial issues such as corruption, human rights (HAM), social inequality, and other problems that have the potential to cause controversy if conveyed directly.

Here is the euphemism sentences used in the 2024 Indonesian presidential candidate first, third and fifth debate:

The First Debate of Indonesian Presidential Candidates 2024:

1. "Prioritaskan pada pelayanan mereka yang rentan; pertama penyandang disabilitas, kedua

- perempuan terutama ibu hamil, ketiga anak-anak dan lansia, itu prioritas.” -Anies Baswedan, [1:21:35-1:21:44]
2. “Menghadirkan dalam setiap PUSRENTAN, kelompok perempuan, penyandang disabilitas, anak-anak, kelompok rentan yang lain termasuk orang tua.” -Ganjar Pranowo, [1:20:09-1:20:18]
 3. “Semua ini bisa berjalan kalau kemudian pemerintahnya bersih, pemerintahannya bisa akomodatif, dan kita sikat korupsi itu” -Ganjar Pranowo, [1:00:43-1:00:54]
 4. “Fenomena ordal (orang dalam) ini menyebarkan. Di seluruh Indonesia kita menghadapi fenomena ordal.” -Anies Baswedan, [2:14:11-2:14:17]
 5. “Adanya kelompok-kelompok minoritas yang ingin membuat tempat ibadah tapi sangat sulit karena faktor-faktor yang dipersulit oleh birokrasi dan sebagainya.” -Prabowo Subianto, [1:29:03-1:29:15]
 6. “Mereka yang termarginalkan ketika mengungkapkan pendapat.” -Anies Baswedan, [50:08-50:15]

The Third Debate of Indonesian Presidential Candidates 2024:

1. “Banyak aturan yang ditekuk sesuai dengan kepentingan yang sedang memegang kekuasaan.” -Anies Baswedan, [48:37-48:43]
2. “Maka kalau kemudian ini kita konsentrasikan penuh betapa kekuatan ekonomi akan besar, ini menciptakan lapangan kerja dan kita menyiapkan jempot bola; SDM yang unggul untuk bisa meraih itu dan kekuatan itu akan berimbas kepada rakyat kecil.” -Ganjar Pranowo, [1:06:17-1:06:35]
3. “Kalau kita bicara pada industri pertahanan kita, musti kita kuatkan industri dalam negeri jadi mohon maaf kaitan dengan hutang. No utang no usang sehingga alutsista kita betul-betul kita lakukan transfer of teknologi dalam negeri.” -Ganjar Pranowo, [1:29:53-1:30:10]
4. “Dalam beberapa tahun terakhir ini, lebih dari 160.000 orang meninggal bukan karena serangan militer, tapi karena serangan virus.” -Anies Baswedan, [39:12-39:19]
5. “Kenapa banyak persoalan tidak selesai di situlah kemudian ketika amanah yang diberikan kepada saya: revitalisasi ASEAN agar kemudian pengambilan keputusannya tidak bulat.” -Ganjar Pranowo, [1:39:15-1:39:27]

The Fifth Debate of Indonesian Presidential Candidates 2024:

1. “Membantu istana-istana sultan-sultan kita yang banyak sudah mau roboh.” -Prabowo Subianto, [1:21:03-1:21:08]
2. “Beasiswa untuk anak guru dan anak dosen serta anak tenaga kependidikan. jangan sampai mereka mendidik puluhan ratusan anak, tapi anaknya tidak pernah bisa menyelesaikan pendidikan sampai tuntas.” -Anies Baswedan, [1:32:57-1:33:08]
3. “Maka Ketika praktik baik ini bisa kita lakukan, maka guru akan bisa bekerja dengan baik dan dia mesti dibebaskan dari persoalan administrasi yang menjerat.” -Ganjar Pranowo, [1:35:57-1:36:08]
4. “Pemerintah harus lebih proaktif investasi di sekolah sekolah khusus untuk mereka dan mencoba teknologi-teknologi khusus. sekarang sudah banyak terobosan dalam bidang teknologi untuk membantu kaum disabilitas, mereka yang penglihatan kurang, mereka yang pendengaran kurang dan sebagainya.” -Ganjar Pranowo, [1:43:42 - 1:43:58]

The following are types of euphemism for these words:

Table 1 - Types of Word Formation

No.	Euphemism Words	Types of word formation	Meaning
1.	Disabilitas	Derivation	This word is derived from the English word “disability” and adapted into Indonesian with minimal morphological change. The word “disability” replaces harsher or more direct terms like “cacat,” which can carry negative connotations or be perceived as stigmatizing.
2.	Kelompok Rentan	Compounding	It consists of two words: “kelompok” (group) and “rentan” (vulnerable), which together create a compound phrase. “Kelompok rentan” serves as a more general and neutral way to refer to groups of people who are at greater risk in society.
3.	Pemerintahnya bersih	Compounding	This phrase combines “pemerintahnya” (the government) and “bersih” (clean) to form a new meaning, representing a government free of corruption.
4.	Ordal (Orang dalam)	Blends	This is a blend of “orang” (person) and “dalam” (inside), creating “ordal” (an abbreviation of the phrase). “Ordal” is a softer, shortened form that avoids directly confronting the more negative connotations associated with nepotism or favoritism.
5.	Kelompok Minoritas	Compounding	It combines “kelompok” (group) and “minoritas” (minority), forming a compound phrase. The word “kelompok minoritas” is a softer and more neutral way to refer to groups of people who may face challenges or discrimination due to their smaller numbers in society, whether in terms of ethnicity, religion, or other social factors.
6.	Termarginalkan	Derivation	This word is derived by adding the prefix “ter-“ and the suffix “-kan” to the root “marginal,” creating a new verb in Indonesian. “Termarginalkan” refers to people or groups pushed to the edges of society and excluded from participating fully in social, economic, or political life.

7.	Ditekuk	Derivation	“Ditekuk” falls under the category of derivation. This is because its root word is “tekuk” (to bend), and the prefix “di-“ is added to create the passive verb “ditekuk” (to be bent). This word is often used as a substitute for more direct and potentially harsher terms, such as “violated” or “distorted.”
8.	Rakyat Kecil	Derivation	This phrase is used to refer to disadvantaged or low-income groups of people in a more subtle and positive way, so as not to sound harsh or condescending. In this context, “rakyat kecil” replaces a term that might be more direct and considered negative, such as “orang miskin” (poor people).
9.	No utang No usang	Blends	Blending (a combination of “no utang” and “no using”). Two phrases are combined into one new phrase that is more concise and easier to remember. This phrase simplifies the relationship between debt and problems, ignoring the complexity of financial problems.
10.	Meninggal	Derivation	“Meninggal” falls under the category of derivation. The root word “tinggal” (to stay) is given the prefix “me-“ to form the new verb “meninggal” (to pass away). This derivational process creates a more formal and polite word, which is more suitable in sensitive contexts such as discussing death. It is used as a substitute for the more direct and blunt term “mati” (to die).
11.	Revitalisasi	Derivation	The term “revitalisasi” here serves to replace a more direct or critical term regarding the potential ineffectiveness or obstacles in decision-making. By using the word “revitalisasi,” the emphasis is on improvement and renewal, thus softening the meaning that might be sharper regarding dissatisfaction with the decision-making process in ASEAN.
12.	Sudah mau roboh	Derivation	The root word “roboh” (collapse) is softened by adding “mau” (about to), which implies a less direct or final state. This euphemism conveys a serious

			state of disrepair in a more gentle way, rather than using harsher terms like “completely destroyed.”
13.	Anaknya tidak dapat menyelesaikan pendidikan sampai tuntas	Compounding	The words “tidak dapat menyelesaikan” (could not finish) and “sampai tuntas” (completely) together replace more direct and negative phrases like “drop out” or “failed to finish.” This creates a softer, more respectful way of saying the child did not complete their education.
14.	Dibebaskan dari persoalan administrasi yang menjeratkan	Derivation	The root word “jerat” (trap) is given the affixes “me-“ and “-kan” to create a verb, which euphemistically describes bureaucratic difficulties. The word “dibebaskan” (freed) adds a positive spin, implying someone was freed from complex administrative issues, without directly stating how difficult or corrupt the system was.
15.	Mereka yang penglihatannya kurang, pendengarannya kurang	Compounding	The combination of words like “penglihatannya kurang” (vision is lacking) and “pendengarannya kurang” (hearing is lacking) provides a softer way to refer to blindness or deafness. It avoids direct terms like “buta” (blind) or “tuli” (deaf), which might sound harsher or offensive, offering a more polite alternative.

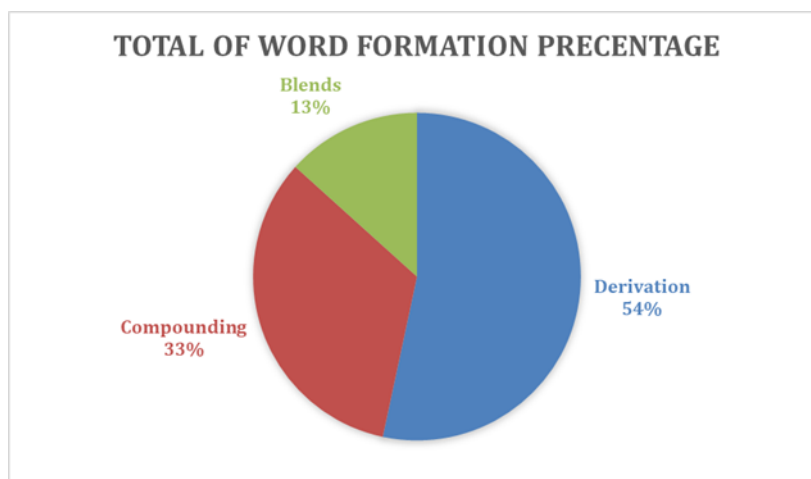


Figure 1 - Percentage of Word Formation

Discussions

Based on this study's findings, 15 euphemism words are divided into three forms of word formation: derivation, compounding, and blends. Of the 15 words, 8 are derivations, 5 are compounding, and 2 are blends. The derivation is the most dominant form in this debate. The results show that derivation has a percentage of 54%, followed by compounding at 33%, and blends are the least used at 13%.

Indonesians tend to communicate subtly and indirectly to maintain peace and social harmony. Values such as cooperation and customs teach the importance of putting the joint good first. Politeness and indirect communication help avoid conflict or tension. This habit also maintains dignity by avoiding direct criticism or confrontation that can embarrass others. In this culture, euphemisms are used to discuss sensitive topics without causing conflict.

In politics, candidates usually avoid potentially controversial statements to be accepted by various groups. This is important considering the diversity of ethnicities and religions in Indonesia. Sensitive topics such as corruption, human rights, and minority rights are conveyed carefully to prevent adverse reactions that could divide voters. Using euphemisms, politicians can convey criticism of policy programs more subtly so as not to offend certain groups. This is even more relevant because political debates are often broadcast nationally and closely watched by the media. Euphemisms allow political messages to be delivered without the risk of being misinterpreted or attacked by political opponents.

In addition, euphemisms help politicians build a positive and empathetic image. They choose softer terms, such as “Termarginalkan,” to refer to disadvantaged groups or “Pemerintahnya bersih” to show their commitment to good governance. These word choices help build public trust and make politicians appear more friendly and down-to-earth, making their messages more readily accepted by the public.

Moreover, using euphemisms in politics helps keep the campaign atmosphere conducive and free from conflict. In a diverse society like Indonesia, wise word choice allows politicians to discuss complex issues without offending certain parties. This approach reflects an attention to culture and the need to communicate effectively in politics while maintaining unity amidst differences.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this study on euphemism usage in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election debate, the findings illustrate how euphemisms serve as crucial linguistic tools for candidates to address sensitive issues, such as corruption and human rights, without inciting conflict. This strategic use of language allows candidates to maintain a positive public image while communicating complex or potentially controversial topics in a manner aligned with Indonesian cultural norms, which emphasize indirect and polite communication.

The dominance of derivation as the primary form of euphemism in the debates suggests a preference for nuanced language, aligning with Indonesia's cultural and religious diversity, where subtle communication is valued. This also demonstrates how political candidates shape public perception by softening the impact of their critiques, thereby influencing voter decisions.

Future research could explore the impact of euphemisms in other high-stakes political arenas and evaluate how different cultures perceive and respond to such communication strategies. It is also suggested that further studies focus on real-time voter response to euphemistic language in political discourse to deepen the understanding of its effectiveness in political persuasion.

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