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EUPHEMISM IN THE 2024 INDONESIAN VICE-PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

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Abstract

This research investigates the use of euphemisms in the vice-presidential debates during the 2024 general election in Indonesia. Through a qualitative case study approach, the study analyzes how vice-presidential candidates, including Gibran Rakabuming, Muhaimin Iskandar, and Mahfud MD, utilize various forms of euphemisms to influence public perception, avoid controversy, and effectively communicate their policies. The findings reveal that candidates frequently employ politeness euphemisms, understatement euphemisms, softening euphemisms, evasive euphemisms, and formality euphemisms. These linguistic strategies help candidates navigate sensitive topics, present their policies in a more favorable light, and maintain their credibility with the electorate. The strategic use of euphemisms highlights the importance of language in political communication and its impact on shaping public opinion.

Keywords: *Euphemism, Vice-Presidential Debate*

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Introduction

Communication is a method of conveying information, ideas, emotions, and considerations between people or groups.



“Communication is usually interpreted as a conversation, namely sending and receiving messages” (Putri, 2021). When the message is not understood, communication is not working properly. In carrying out proper communication, someone will consider using good language so that the interactions carried out sound pleasant for both parties (Candra, 2022). This process includes various forms and channels, both verbal and nonverbal, that allow humans to interact and understand each other. Communication is at the core of human interaction and plays a vital role in various aspects of life, including politics. In the political context, communication is not just about conveying messages, but also involves strategies on how the messages are delivered so that they can be well received by the audience. “Language has an important role in human life because it is the main communication tool” (Suhadi et al., 2021). (Charteris-Black, 2011) argues that political language is fundamentally persuasive because politicians deliberately employ rhetorical strategies to influence public opinion, establish credibility, and construct ideological meanings. Lexical choices are therefore never neutral; instead, they function as persuasive devices that shape how audiences interpret political realities. Within this framework, euphemism can be understood as a rhetorical strategy that enables politicians to present controversial policies and sensitive issues in a more acceptable and persuasive manner. Communication is becoming more and more crucial in many facets of life, including political, social, and cultural ones, in a world that is becoming more interconnected and complex. According to (Fiske, 2011), communication is “the process by which meaning is produced and transmitted” which emphasizes the importance of contextualization in understanding the messages conveyed. The implementation of language can give positive and negative connotations (Putri, 2021). One aspect of communication that is interesting to study is the use of language, especially in the political context. In politics, language has enormous power, not only to convey messages but also to shape public opinion and influence voter behavior. (van Dijk, 2006), Political discourse is a form of ideological discourse in which language is strategically employed to influence public cognition, construct political identities, and legitimize particular viewpoints. Political actors do not merely communicate information; rather, they use linguistic choices to shape how social realities are interpreted by the public. In this context, euphemism becomes an important discourse strategy because it enables politicians to present controversial issues in ways that are more acceptable and persuasive. Previous studies in sociolinguistics also show that linguistic phenomena, such as overlapping in conversations, can significantly affect the

flow of topics and the turn-taking process between speakers (Aufa, 2017). (van Dijk, 1998) argues that ideology is fundamentally expressed and reproduced through discourse. Political actors employ language strategically to communicate not only information but also beliefs, values, and perspectives that shape public understanding of social reality. Consequently, lexical choices such as euphemistic expressions become ideological tools that enable politicians to construct favorable representations of themselves while minimizing potentially negative interpretations of political issues. This indicates that language strategies play an essential role in maintaining interaction and influencing how messages are received by the audience. Similarly, euphemism is another linguistic strategy that allows politicians to manage sensitive issues, avoid direct confrontation, and present their policies in a more acceptable way to the public.

One of the linguistic tools often used by politicians is euphemism. Euphemisms are the use of more subtle or indirect words or phrases to replace terms that might be considered too harsh, offensive, or unpleasant. Euphemisms are a way of conveying ideas or concepts that may be considered sensitive or controversial with more subtle or indirect words. Euphemism is the use of polite or vague words or phrases used to replace other words or phrases that are considered too direct or harsh (Nilwati, 2012). (Allan, 1991) argue that euphemism is a linguistic strategy through which speakers replace expressions that are considered unpleasant, offensive, or socially inappropriate with more acceptable alternatives. They emphasize that euphemism functions as a "shield" that protects speakers and hearers from discomfort while simultaneously serving as a communicative resource for maintaining social harmony. In political communication, this strategy enables candidates to discuss controversial issues without provoking unnecessary conflict or threatening their public image. (Allan, 2006) explain that euphemism emerges as a response to linguistic taboo and social constraints on communication. Speakers frequently avoid expressions that are considered offensive, emotionally disturbing, or socially inappropriate by replacing them with more acceptable alternatives. This process of linguistic substitution reflects the influence of social norms on language use. In political discourse, euphemism enables politicians to discuss controversial policies and sensitive social issues while minimizing public discomfort and preserving political legitimacy. Research on the use of euphemisms in political communication shows that politicians often use euphemisms to reduce the negative impact of their messages, to frame

certain issues in a more positive light, or to avoid controversy. Euphemisms can manipulate public perception, hide unpleasant truths, or make unpopular policies sound more acceptable. Euphemism is related to the smoothing of meaning, while dysphemism is related to the roughening of meaning (Rois, 2021). In the context of political debates, the use of euphemisms is an important communication strategy to gain public support and manage self-image. According to Brown and Levinson (Brown, 1987) speakers generally employ politeness strategies to minimize face-threatening acts and to maintain harmonious social relationships. Euphemistic expressions represent one of these linguistic strategies because they allow speakers to communicate potentially sensitive or controversial issues in ways that reduce offense and preserve both the speaker's and the hearer's positive social image. This perspective explains why euphemism is frequently employed in political communication, where maintaining credibility and public acceptance is essential.

Political communication is the art and practice of speaking, listening and responding to the public and political opponents in an effective and convincing manner. In this context, word choice and rhetorical strategies become very important. (Edelman, 1988) argues that politics is fundamentally constructed through language and symbolic representation. Political actors use carefully selected linguistic expressions to shape public perceptions, define political realities, and influence citizens' interpretations of social issues. Rather than merely conveying factual information, political discourse functions as a symbolic resource that constructs persuasive narratives. Within this perspective, euphemism becomes an effective rhetorical strategy for presenting sensitive political issues in ways that encourage public acceptance while minimizing negative reactions. Every word spoken by a politician has the power to shape public opinion, influence voters, and direct the political narrative. Therefore, the way the message is delivered is no less important than the content of the message itself. (Gee, 2014) argues that discourse is not merely a collection of linguistic forms but a way of using language to enact social identities, relationships, and political activities. Language is therefore viewed as social action through which speakers construct particular meanings and influence how audiences interpret reality. In political debates, euphemistic expressions become discourse resources that enable candidates to communicate sensitive issues while simultaneously projecting desirable political identities and maintaining public credibility. In a presidential debate, communication is crucial because it is an opportunity for candidates to convey their vision, mission and policies

to the public. In addition, the debate is also a venue for candidates to showcase their rhetorical skills and how they handle controversial issues. This is where euphemisms play an important role. Language is used to organize interpersonal speakers in social interactions so that two-way communication does not cause misunderstanding (Umami, 2023). The presidential candidate debate is an event where political communication occurs intensely. Candidates not only try to convince voters of their competence and vision, but also answer various controversial issues that arise. In these debates, the use of euphemisms is often an important tool to frame difficult issues in a more positive or neutral way. Euphemisms allow candidates to convey messages that may be difficult to accept directly, such as budget cuts or legal system reform.

Video research of the three vice presidential candidate debates provides a unique opportunity to examine the use of euphemisms in political communication. The debate was an arena where candidates had to effectively convey their messages to the public, answer difficult questions, and defend their positions. The use of euphemisms in these debates can provide insight into how candidates attempt to shape public opinion, avoid controversy, and influence voters. As a concrete example, in the 2024 presidential candidate debates, the use of euphemisms can be seen across a range of issues. When discussing immigration policy, for example, a candidate might use the term “immigration system reform” rather than “expulsion of illegal immigrants” to avoid appearing too harsh or inhumane. On economic issues, the term “budget adjustment” may be used instead of “budget cuts” to avoid negative reactions from groups that may be affected. Words and expressions are called euphemisms when they are used to replace or cover up other words and expressions that are considered taboo, rude, and inappropriate. According to (Leech, 2014) politeness is a pragmatic principle that enables speakers to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships through appropriate linguistic choices. Speakers tend to select expressions that minimize offense, reduce conflict, and increase the acceptability of their messages. In political communication, euphemistic expressions represent one of the pragmatic strategies through which politicians communicate sensitive issues while maintaining respect, credibility, and public trust.

Therefore, the challenge for presidential candidates is how to use euphemisms effectively without losing credibility with voters. This requires a deep understanding of the audience and the issues being discussed, as well as the ability to communicate honestly and authentically. In the 2024

presidential debates, we can see how candidates face this challenge and use euphemisms as part of their communication strategy. This case study will focus on the use of euphemisms in the 2024 presidential debates. Through a qualitative approach, we will explore how candidates use euphemisms to influence voters' perceptions, avoid controversy, and convey their policy messages in a more acceptable way. This approach will also include an analysis of how the use of euphemisms is received by the public, as well as evaluations from current political communication experts. Therefore, this is important to do in order to know more or less the meaning of speech or language conveyed when speaking in the political realm (Dwi, 2023). The presidential debate is an event where political communication occurs intensely. Candidates not only try to convince voters of their competence and vision, but also answer various controversial issues that arise. In these debates, the use of euphemisms is often an important tool to frame difficult issues in a more positive or neutral way. The use of euphemisms is also an effort to improve language politeness by the public (Fitriani & Rahmawati, 2021). Euphemisms allow candidates to convey messages that may be difficult to accept directly, such as budget cuts or legal system reform.

Research Methods

Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design to investigate the use of euphemisms in the 2024 Indonesian vice-presidential debate. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the objective of the research was to explore and interpret linguistic phenomena in depth rather than to test hypotheses or measure variables statistically. Specifically, the study focused on how euphemistic expressions were used by the vice-presidential candidates to soften sensitive issues, maintain politeness, and shape public opinion.

The case study approach was selected because the research examined a particular communicative event, namely the official vice-presidential debates held during the 2024 Indonesian General Election. This event provided a rich and authentic source of political discourse in which candidates strategically used language to present their ideas and respond to controversial topics. By concentrating on this single case, the researchers were able to conduct a detailed contextual analysis of the candidates' speech.

The research analyzed the utterances of Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Muhaimin Iskandar, and Mahfud MD. The data consisted of debate transcripts

containing euphemistic expressions, which were identified and categorized using the framework proposed by Keith Allan and Kate Burridge in *Euphemism and Dysphemism: Language Used as Shield and Weapon*.

The study used thematic analysis to classify and interpret the data. Through this design, the researchers were able to describe the forms and functions of euphemisms and explain how these linguistic strategies were employed in political communication to influence voter perceptions and maintain a positive public image. Overall, the qualitative descriptive case study design provided a systematic and comprehensive framework for understanding the sociolinguistic role of euphemism in contemporary Indonesian political discourse.

Participants

The participants of this study were the three vice-presidential candidates in the 2024 Indonesian General Election: Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Muhaimin Iskandar, and Mahfud MD. These participants were selected purposely because they were the principal speakers in the official vice-presidential debates and produced the linguistic data analyzed in this study. Their utterances were considered highly relevant because they reflected authentic political communication strategies used in a formal national debate context. The study focused exclusively on the candidates' spoken expressions, particularly utterances containing euphemistic language. As stated in the research methods section, the candidates were chosen because they were directly involved in the debate and represented different political backgrounds and rhetorical styles, making them appropriate participants for examining the use of euphemism in political discourse.

Instrument

The primary research instrument was a document analysis checklist developed based on Keith Allan and Kate Burridge's theory presented in the book *Euphemism and Dysphemism: Language Used as Shield and Weapon*. The checklist was used to identify and classify euphemistic expressions found in the debate transcripts into several categories, including politeness euphemism, understatement euphemism, softening euphemism, evasive euphemism, and formality euphemism. In addition, the researchers employed transcription documents and coding sheets to record the identified expressions, their contextual meanings, the original terms they replaced, and

the speakers who used them. These instruments enabled systematic and consistent analysis of the linguistic data.

Data Collection

The data were collected using a documentation method. The researchers obtained video recordings and transcripts of the official 2024 Indonesian vice-presidential debates involving Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Muhaimin Iskandar, and Mahfud MD. The data collection process consisted of several steps. First, the researchers downloaded or accessed the debate videos from official broadcast sources. Second, the videos were transcribed into written text. Third, the transcripts were read repeatedly to identify utterances containing euphemistic expressions. Fourth, all relevant expressions were highlighted and recorded in a data sheet along with their contexts and speakers. This method was chosen because document analysis allows researchers to examine naturally occurring language in an authentic political setting without interfering with the participants. The study also drew on multimodal perspectives proposed by scholars such as Carey Jewitt and Christian Heath, although the main focus remained on the verbal transcripts.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. After identifying all euphemistic expressions, the researchers classified each item according to the categories of euphemism proposed by Keith Allan and Kate Burridge. The analysis involved four stages. First, data reduction was conducted by selecting only utterances containing euphemistic expressions. Second, the expressions were coded based on their types, such as politeness, understatement, softening, evasive, and formality euphemisms. Third, each expression was interpreted to determine its contextual meaning and the direct term it replaced. Fourth, the findings were presented descriptively in tables and narrative explanations to reveal patterns in the candidates' language use. This analytical procedure enabled the researchers to understand how euphemisms were strategically employed to soften controversial issues, maintain politeness, and influence public perception in political debates.

Results and Discussion

Results

Distribution of Euphemism Types

The analysis of the vice-presidential debate transcripts revealed that the three candidates employed five types of euphemism: politeness euphemism, understatement euphemism, softening euphemism, evasive euphemism, and formality euphemism. However, each candidate demonstrated a distinct pattern in the selection and frequency of these euphemistic expressions, reflecting different rhetorical strategies during the debate.

Among the three candidates, Gibran Rakabuming Raka produced the greatest variety of euphemistic expressions. His speech contained two instances of politeness euphemism, three instances of understatement euphemism, and one instance of formality euphemism. The predominance of understatement euphemism indicates that Gibran frequently framed sensitive social issues using less direct and less emotionally charged language. At the same time, his use of politeness euphemism suggests an effort to discuss poverty, sanitation, and public welfare while maintaining respect and avoiding expressions that might stigmatize particular communities. The presence of formality euphemism further demonstrates his tendency to present government policies in an official and institutional manner.

In contrast, Muhaimin Iskandar employed fewer euphemistic expressions. His speech consisted of one softening euphemism and two formality euphemisms. This pattern suggests that Muhaimin relied primarily on formal and institutional language when explaining policy proposals, while occasionally using softening expressions to make government programs appear more accessible and acceptable to the public. Rather than emphasizing indirectness, his rhetorical style projected professionalism and inclusiveness through carefully selected lexical choices.

Meanwhile, Mahfud MD demonstrated a different linguistic profile. His speech included one understatement euphemism, one softening euphemism, and one evasive euphemism, while no examples of politeness or formality euphemism were identified. The appearance of evasive euphemism is particularly noteworthy because it occurred only in Mahfud MD's speech. This finding suggests that he occasionally employed more indirect language when addressing legally or politically sensitive issues, allowing him to

maintain authority while avoiding explicit or potentially controversial statements. The combination of understatement and softening euphemisms also indicates an effort to reduce the perceived severity of policy issues without diminishing their importance.

Overall, the findings indicate that although all three candidates employed euphemistic language, their preferences differed according to their communicative objectives. Gibran Rakabuming Raka tended to employ euphemisms more extensively, particularly understatement euphemisms, to discuss social welfare issues in a constructive manner. Muhaimin Iskandar emphasized formal expressions that reinforced institutional credibility, whereas Mahfud MD preferred euphemistic forms that framed legal and political issues through indirect and carefully controlled language. These variations demonstrate that euphemism functions not only as a linguistic device for replacing sensitive expressions but also as a rhetorical strategy that reflects each candidate's communication style and political positioning.

The analysis of the vice-presidential debate transcript identified thirteen euphemistic expressions distributed across five categories of euphemism: politeness euphemism, understatement euphemism, softening euphemism, evasive euphemism, and formality euphemism. These expressions were employed strategically by the speakers to communicate sensitive political issues in ways that minimized negative reactions while maintaining credibility and professionalism.

Politeness Euphemism

Politeness euphemism appeared primarily in Gibran Rakabuming Raka's speech. One example is the expression *kawasan kumuh* ("slum area"), which was used when discussing sanitation and clean water infrastructure. Rather than employing more stigmatizing terminology, the speaker selected a socially acceptable expression that reduced the negative connotation associated with impoverished residential areas. Similarly, the expression *perumahan padat penduduk* ("densely populated residential area") was preferred over the more pejorative term *ghetto*. These lexical choices demonstrate an effort to maintain politeness while discussing social inequality and urban poverty.

Understatement Euphemism

Understatement euphemism was the second most frequently identified category. Gibran employed expressions such as *pemenuhan gizi*

("nutritional fulfillment"), *masalah sanitasi* ("sanitation issues"), and *pengadaan air bersih* ("clean water provision"). These expressions softened the seriousness of malnutrition, inadequate sanitation, and limited access to clean water by framing them as manageable policy concerns rather than severe social crises. Likewise, Mahfud MD used *redistribusi tanah* ("land redistribution") instead of the more politically sensitive expression *land reform*. Even the moderator's use of *politik kerakyatan* ("grassroots politics") reflected an attempt to present political discourse in a more inclusive and neutral manner. These examples indicate that understatement euphemisms were employed to reduce the emotional intensity of controversial issues while directing public attention toward proposed solutions.

Softening Euphemism

Softening euphemisms were identified in the speeches of both Muhaimin Iskandar and Mahfud MD. Muhaimin used the expression *sertifikasi secara murah* ("cheap certification") instead of directly referring to subsidized certification, emphasizing affordability rather than government financial assistance. Mahfud MD similarly employed *kemampuan mengambil skala prioritas* ("ability to prioritize") as a less direct alternative to discussing decision-making capability. These expressions reduced the harshness of policy-related statements and created a more positive impression of government programs and leadership capacity.

Evasive Euphemism

Only one example of evasive euphemism was identified during the analysis. Mahfud MD used the expression *instrumen hukum yang memadai* ("adequate legal instruments") when discussing legal reform. Instead of explicitly specifying legal mechanisms or controversial policies, the speaker adopted a more general and less confrontational expression. This linguistic strategy enabled him to discuss sensitive legal matters while avoiding direct references that might provoke disagreement or criticism.

Formality Euphemism

Formality euphemism emerged as the most dominant category across the debate. Gibran employed the expression *kesejahteraan masyarakat* ("public welfare") to emphasize government responsibility using official institutional language. Muhaimin referred to *infrastruktur kerakyatan*

("people-oriented infrastructure"), presenting development policies in a formal yet inclusive manner. Mahfud MD used expressions such as *food estate* and *penegakan hukum* ("law enforcement"), both of which reflect bureaucratic and policy-oriented terminology commonly found in official political discourse. These expressions enhanced the speakers' professional image while framing political agendas as legitimate public policies rather than controversial proposals.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that euphemistic expressions were deliberately employed by all debate participants as rhetorical strategies. Rather than merely replacing unpleasant words, the euphemisms functioned to maintain politeness, soften criticism, avoid direct confrontation, and present political ideas in a more acceptable and persuasive manner. The distribution of euphemism types also suggests differences in rhetorical style among the candidates. Gibran tended to employ politeness and understatement euphemisms when discussing social welfare issues, Muhaimin emphasized softening and formality euphemisms to highlight inclusive development, whereas Mahfud MD relied more heavily on formal and legal terminology to reinforce authority and institutional credibility. These findings confirm that euphemism constitutes an important linguistic resource in contemporary Indonesian political communication.

The use of euphemisms in the 2024 presidential debates serves several functions. Essentially, euphemisms help speakers navigate controversial topics without alienating voters. For example, Gibran Rakabuming's use of the term "clean water supply" rather than "clean water supply" softens the impact of the issue, making it easier for audiences to digest. Similarly, Mahfud MD's use of "redistribution of land ownership" frames land reform in a less aggressive way, which can help reduce resistance from stakeholders. The strategic use of euphemisms also reflects candidates' awareness of their audience and the importance of maintaining a positive image. Euphemisms can mask the harshness of certain policies or decisions, thereby reducing the potential for public backlash. This is in line with the findings of (Allan, 2022) who emphasize the role of euphemisms in managing public perception and avoiding controversy. In conclusion, the use of euphemisms used by vice presidential candidates during the debate shows their importance in political communication. By carefully choosing words, candidates aim to present their policies in the most favorable way, thus influencing voters' perceptions and maintaining their credibility.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that euphemism plays a significant role in the political communication strategies employed by the vice-presidential candidates in the 2024 Indonesian General Election. The analysis revealed five major types of euphemism used throughout the debate: politeness euphemism, understatement euphemism, softening euphemism, evasive euphemism, and formality euphemism. These findings support the argument of Keith Allan and Kate Burridge that euphemism functions as both a shield and a strategic linguistic weapon to mitigate potentially offensive meanings and to shape audience perception.

The findings are also consistent with previous studies conducted in the Indonesian context. (Candra, 2022) found that euphemistic expressions function not only to avoid offensive meanings but also to construct more socially acceptable messages in literary discourse. Similarly, (Fitriani & Rahmawati, 2021) demonstrated that euphemism in social media communication serves to maintain politeness and minimize potential conflicts among participants. Although those studies examined different discourse settings, the present study extends their findings by showing that euphemistic strategies are equally prominent in political debates, where speakers carefully select lexical items to influence public perception while maintaining interpersonal politeness.

The most frequently occurring category in this study was formality euphemism, followed by understatement euphemism. This pattern indicates that the candidates tended to use language that projected professionalism, institutional legitimacy, and policy-oriented seriousness. Political debates are highly formal and public events; therefore, candidates are expected to communicate in a manner that is respectful, measured, and statesmanlike. Expressions such as “public welfare,” “food estate,” and “law enforcement” exemplify how formal terminology can frame complex policies in a more authoritative and acceptable way. This finding is consistent with the view that formal euphemistic language helps politicians maintain credibility while discussing sensitive political and economic issues.

Gibran Rakabuming Raka employed the widest variety of euphemistic expressions, particularly politeness euphemism, understatement euphemism, and formality euphemism. Terms such as “kawasan kumuh” (slum area), “pemenuhan gizi” (nutritional fulfillment), and “kesejahteraan masyarakat” (public welfare) suggest an effort to present social problems in a constructive and solution-oriented manner. Rather than emphasizing deficiencies directly,

these expressions redirected attention to government interventions and policy commitments. This strategy allowed the speaker to discuss poverty, malnutrition, and infrastructure challenges without creating negative emotional reactions among the audience. The findings support previous research indicating that euphemism is frequently used to enhance politeness and maintain positive interpersonal relations in public discourse.

These findings also support (Rois, 2021) who argues that euphemism functions as an effective linguistic strategy for reducing negative emotional responses while preserving communicative intentions. Likewise, (Nilwati, 2012) emphasize that euphemism reflects speakers' sociocultural awareness and sensitivity toward the audience. In political communication, such linguistic choices become increasingly important because candidates must balance persuasive goals with the need to maintain a positive public image.

Muhaimin Iskandar used fewer euphemisms, but his lexical choices were highly strategic. The expression “sertifikasi secara murah” (cheap certification) softened the economic burden associated with halal certification by emphasizing affordability rather than subsidy dependence. Likewise, “infrastruktur kerakyatan” (people-oriented infrastructure) framed development as inclusive and beneficial to ordinary citizens. These choices suggest that Muhaimin emphasized accessibility and populist values while avoiding technical or potentially controversial policy terminology. The use of softening and formality euphemisms in his speech reflects an attempt to build rapport with voters while maintaining an official and professional tone.

The use of softening and formality euphemisms by Muhaimin Iskandar is comparable to the findings reported by (Yulia et al., 2021) who concluded that euphemistic expressions frequently function to reduce the perceived harshness of public issues while encouraging audience acceptance. Their study further suggests that euphemism is an effective communicative strategy because it allows sensitive issues to be discussed without provoking unnecessary resistance.

Mahfud MD demonstrated a distinctive rhetorical approach characterized by legal and institutional terminology. Expressions such as “redistribusi tanah” (land redistribution), “instrumen hukum yang memadai” (adequate legal instruments), and “penegakan hukum” (law enforcement) reveal his tendency to frame sensitive issues through formal and technical language. The use of evasive euphemism in “adequate legal instruments” is particularly noteworthy because it reduced direct confrontation and obscured specific legal actions while still conveying seriousness and authority. This finding aligns with studies suggesting that politicians often

employ euphemisms to avoid assigning blame and to reduce controversy in public communication.

Furthermore, (Umami, 2023) found that euphemism is commonly employed as a politeness strategy in public communication, particularly when speakers discuss controversial or legally sensitive issues. This observation corresponds closely with Mahfud MD's preference for institutional and legal terminology, which enables him to maintain authority while avoiding direct confrontation. Such findings reinforce the argument that euphemism serves not merely as lexical substitution but also as a pragmatic strategy for preserving credibility and mitigating face-threatening acts.

The presence of understatement euphemism across candidates indicates a shared tendency to minimize the severity of social and economic problems. Terms such as “masalah sanitasi” (sanitation issues) and “pengadaan air bersih” (clean water provision) present serious public concerns in neutral and manageable terms. By reducing the emotional intensity of these issues, candidates were able to focus on policy solutions rather than on crisis narratives. This supports Deborah Tannen’s view that linguistic choices shape interpersonal meanings and influence how audiences interpret social realities.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the findings illustrate how language reflects relationships between speakers, audiences, and broader sociopolitical contexts. The candidates were not merely exchanging information; they were constructing identities as competent, empathetic, and trustworthy leaders. Euphemism served as a mechanism to negotiate politeness, protect face, and align messages with public expectations. This confirms the sociolinguistic principle that linguistic forms are closely connected to social purposes and ideological positioning.

The findings also reinforce the broader literature on political discourse, which emphasizes that language is central to persuasion and opinion formation. Euphemistic expressions allow politicians to present controversial policies in ways that are less threatening and more acceptable to voters. In the context of the 2024 vice-presidential debate, the strategic use of euphemism helped candidates communicate effectively while preserving their public image and minimizing potential backlash. The debate thus illustrates how rhetorical choices can influence not only message interpretation but also voter attitudes and political legitimacy.

The present findings also contribute to the growing body of research on euphemism in Indonesian discourse by demonstrating that political debates exhibit similar pragmatic characteristics to literary, educational, and digital communication contexts. Previous studies have documented euphemism in literary texts (Candra, 2022) social media interactions (Fitriani & Rahmawati, 2021) online public comments (Dwi, 2023) and YouTube discourse (Umami, 2023). This study expands the existing literature by providing empirical evidence that euphemism is systematically employed during high-stakes political debates as a persuasive rhetorical strategy for shaping public opinion and maintaining candidates' political legitimacy.

Overall, this study demonstrates that euphemism is an essential component of contemporary Indonesian political communication. The five types of euphemism identified in the data reveal different but complementary strategies for managing sensitive issues, maintaining politeness, and strengthening persuasive appeal. By applying Allan and Burridge's theoretical framework, the study provides empirical evidence that euphemistic language is a deliberate and meaningful rhetorical tool rather than a purely stylistic choice. These findings contribute to sociolinguistic research by showing how political actors use language strategically to shape public discourse and influence democratic processes.

Conclusion

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the results confirm that language is not merely a tool for conveying information but also a strategic resource for constructing political identity, managing face, and shaping public opinion. Euphemism enabled the candidates to communicate controversial policies without provoking resistance and to project themselves as competent and trustworthy leaders. The study therefore demonstrates that euphemistic language plays an important role in political discourse and contributes significantly to persuasive communication during electoral debates.

In conclusion, the use of euphemism in the 2024 Indonesian vice-presidential debate reflects deliberate linguistic choices aimed at influencing voter perceptions and maintaining positive public images. This study contributes to the field of Sociolinguistics by providing empirical evidence of how euphemistic expressions function as effective rhetorical strategies in contemporary political communication. Future research may expand this analysis by examining how euphemisms affect audience interpretation and voting behavior across different demographic groups.

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