



# The Depiction of Environmental Preservation by Indonesian Media: Study of Euphemism and Dysphemism

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**Abstract.** This study focuses on euphemism and dysphemism in news texts on environmental discourse in Indonesia. Three Indonesia mainstream medias which are CNN, Detikcom, and Kompas are chosen as the data. Using descriptive qualitative we discover that the use of euphemisms and dysphemism in a linguistic perspective is not only limited to softening and degrading meaning but also to manipulating audiences. For example, the use of euphemisms to describe the impact of environmental damage will soften the impact, “menghilangkan bentang alam” is used to describe a destroyed area due to the project, and “lahan yang terdampak” means the area areas that are potentially damaged by the project. Meanwhile, the use of dysphemism will add a bad impression to residents who try to protect their environment, such as “Penolakan Pembangunan” that seems disapproving of Indonesia’s progress and “aksi unjuk rasa” carried out for natural exploitation projects development. In conclusion, most of the use of euphemisms and dysphemism by the media does not support environmental conservation because words that should have been clarified in their meaning to give awareness to the environment crisis are instead being softened, on the contrary, people’s actions for the environment are described as bad behaviour.

**Keywords:** Euphemism · Dysphemism · Indonesian Media

## 1 Introduction

Environment damage has been gradually increased every year. Deforestation, mining exploitation, and industrial pollution are the current factors of this damage. A long with this damage, local government and international organization make an attempt to repair the damage. One of the attempts is through the participation of media in the form of providing information related to the environment [1].

The advanced of technology has provided simple and easy access to spread information by shifting printed to online media. This shifting affects the way media rapidly produce their news to be able to provide the most updated information. For this reason, media is the source of information of environmental damage. Since then, the role of media is not limited to inform audiences, but also influencing audiences’ awareness of

environmental damage towards its text. This role is measured by media ability to socially construct meanings and opinions related to environmental damage [14]. Language specialists can work with other fields such as sociology, geography, and psychology. This macro level research can encourage people to make better use of language, also known as the fundamental goal of ecolinguistics [15].

Ecolinguistic is linguistic research that examines how language is used to describe ecosystems, ecology, and ecological phenomena from ecological and sustainable perspectives [1, 16]. Thus, at first linguistic and ecology is appeared to be unconnected. Stibbe [2] stated that segregation only occurs when ecology (the study of relationships between organisms and their physical environment) does not include humans as organisms. Therefore, ecology was defined as the relationship of humans with other humans, organisms, and physical environment. Furthermore, language which affect human relation with other has influenced the act and mindset of human itself [2]. These influences can be in the form of destroying or preserving ecosystems that others life depend on. These effects are one of the result of media manipulation through the using of euphemism and dysphemism [3–5].

Euphemism is a journalist strategy with a shift in meaning that journalists carry out consciously with a goal to respect the actor [6]. This shifting is somehow also used to avoid taboo or abstinence. According to Indriyasari [17], taboo or abstinence are avoided words to be spoken because they may pose a danger or disrespectful and offensive to others. Whereas, euphemism functions is not limited to avoid and respect but also manipulate [3, 4]. Apart from euphemism, media also used dysphemism to present their news.

Dysphemism is a negative term or expression performed by media in their news. Different with euphemism, dysphemism does not protect the actor, instead it harms the actor heard by the speaker or third party [7]. Moreover, dysphemism is a term used to denote something taboo, rude, inappropriate, or derogatory [8]. Because of its negative connotations, dysphemism is mostly used based on propaganda and oppositional discourse [8].

However, Media as the source of information has not represented the reality. It is because euphemism and dysphemism that was used by media can manipulate the audiences from the reality [1]. In environmental discourse, this led to how audiences act towards the environment. It is either destroy or preserve. Thus, euphemism and dysphemism in media is used to protect the dominant actor. So that the purpose to increase society awareness of environmental crisis is put aside. Meanwhile, preservation is needed in order to cure the environment damage.

Several studies have been conducted in analyzing environmental discourse. One of them is the vocabulary used that maintaining peaceful society [3, 5, 9]. This study used printed newspaper and online newspaper from Indonesia media which are *Gatra*, *majalah Tempo*, *majalah Trust*, *harian Kompas*, *harian Kabar Indonesia*, *harian Media Indonesia*, *harian Suara Merdeka*, and *harian Surabaya Pagi*. Meanwhile, online newspaper was taken from *Antara*, *Vivanews*, *Detiknews*, *Metronews*, dan *Okezone* [10]. Those data were chosen because the researcher concern on mainstream media which is the popular reference for audiences. The analysis of euphemism, agency, passive voice and comparative study was used to discover vocabulary and its function in environmental

discourse. Moreover, there is also a hidden of impacted agent of environmental crisis that was discover with the macrosyntax analysis [11]. Nevertheless, Wunhong [12] found that media has a significant role to support the environmental preservation in a scope of firm. He stated that the more media put a concern on environmental discourse the more firms attempt to conduct preservation.

However, none of them further analyze on the way media deal with environmental preservation. The way media agree or disagree to deal with this case can be seen through the use of euphemism and dysphemism. Previous study has analyzed the euphemism in environmental discourse but not with the dysphemism. Furthermore, none of the previous study used the case of Dam Bener project which is new issue. This project has been a discussion since 2018. It was one of the main development projects of government. This project is taken place in Wadas Village, Central Java. The project demand andhesit rock mining near the project location. Residents reject this mining because it can damage the land and environment apart from the compensate for the area used. This is the brief conflict of the case.

The different object is likely produce different result [8, 13]. That is why this study conduct further analyze on this case by using Allan's and Burrige's (1991) theory to examine the form and functions of euphemism and dysphemism. Three mainstream media are chosen that are CNN, Kompas, and Detik because it has more influence to the audiences [4]. Hence, researcher aims to conduct this research to discover the form and function of euphemism and dysphemism that CNN, Kompas, and Detik.com expressed in the Dam Bener project news and show the fact that might be contained in the expression.

## 2 Method

This study uses descriptive qualitative approach. The quality of this study relates to research data on the quality of linguistic units of news texts in Indonesian media. The researchers used procedures from the theory of Allan and Burrige (1991) in analyzing the data, First, data was collected from CNN, Detik.com, and Kompas with two articles chosen from each media. The chosen news was about Dam Bener Project which has already been controversial discussion since 2018. CNN and Kompas was chosen because it is the mass media that brought up the issue at the same time. Then, the data was analyzed using Allan and Burrige (1991) theory.

## 3 Findings

In this part, the analysis begins with defining the form (word, phrase, clause, or sentence) of euphemism and dysphemism. The word is categorized again into noun, adjective, and verb. The research found three form of euphemism that is word, phrase, and sentence. Four functions of euphemism are discovered that are hiding fact, avoiding panic, satirizing, and avoiding taboo. Meanwhile, two forms of dysphemism are appeared that are word and phrase with three functions that are expressing anger, exaggerating, and satirizing. Further explanation is presented below.

**Table 1.** Euphemism

Context	Form & Function
“Warga Wadas mengadukan aksi <b>represivitas</b> aparat kepolisian kepada Komnas HAM. Komnas masih menyelidiki laporan itu hingga saat ini. Aparat kepolisian mulai intens melakukan patroli dengan <b>dalih</b> melakukan silaturahmi, membagikan masker, hingga membagikan sembako.” (CNN, 10 Feb 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Word</li> <li>• Hide Fact</li> </ul>
“Proyek bendungan ini memerlukan <b>pasokan batuan andesit</b> sebagai material pembangunan” (Kompas, 10 Feb 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phrase</li> <li>• Avoid Panic</li> </ul>
“Jika hal itu terjadi, maka akan <b>menghilangkan bentang alam</b> dan tidak ada bedanya dengan memaksa warga untuk hidup dengan kerusakan ekosistem.” (Kompas, 10 Feb 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phrase</li> <li>• Avoid Panic</li> </ul>
“Dan dari <b>lahan yang terdampak</b> di Desa Wadas, catatan sementara kami sebelum diukur kemarin, total lahan terdampaknya 617 bidang,” (Kompas 10 Feb 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phrase</li> <li>• Hide Fact</li> </ul>
“Sebagai informasi, Pembangunan Bendungan Bener adalah salah satu <b>proyek strategis nasional (PSN)</b> di bawah Pemerintahan Presiden Joko Widodo” (CNN, 11 Feb 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phrase</li> <li>• Satirizing</li> </ul>
“Warga Wadas menolak rencana pembangunan Bendungan Bener. Mereka pun <b>walk out</b> dari rapat tersebut” (CNN, 10 Feb 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phrase</li> <li>• Avoid Taboo</li> </ul>
“Namun, perwakilan BBWS-SO <b>meninggalkan pertemuan</b> saat warga mulai mengajukan pertanyaan.” (CNN, 10 Feb 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phrase</li> <li>• Hide Fact</li> </ul>
“Menurutnya <b>ancaman terbesar dari dibangunnya bendungan yaitu besarnya laju sedimentasi atau pendangkalan karena besarnya erosi di daerah tangkapan air.</b> ” (CNN, 11 Feb 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentence</li> <li>• Hide Fact</li> </ul>

### 3.1 Form and Function of Euphemism

See Table 1.

#### 3.1.1 Word

##### Noun

In a form of noun euphemism is found in the CNN news 10 February 2022 edition.

“Wadas residents complained about the repressive actions of the police to Komnas HAM. Komnas is still investigating the report until now. Police officers began to intensely patrol under the pretext of conducting gatherings, distributing masks, and distributing necessities” (CNN, 10 Feb 2022).

In this sentence, the euphemism appeared in form of noun. The word *Represivitas* (repressive) has a function to hide the fact. It means oppressive, restrain or suppressive action. Moreover, the word *dalih* (pretext) also has a function to hide the fact. It means a fake reason to justify an action. In this context, the police officer makes a reason to justify their repressiveness action towards local society who conduct reject the project. These words soften the true meaning that have to be *penindasan* (oppressive) and *alasan palsu* (excuse). It is because police officer is more dominance compared to local society so that based on culture value their action should be right. Meanwhile, this shifting meaning create different representative of police officer. The euphemism represents police officer's action as a positive action. While in the true meaning it represent that the police officer's action is bad.

### Phrase

“This dam project requires an andesite rock supply as construction material” (Kompas, 10 Feb 2022).

Euphemism can also appear in a form of phrase. In this sentence *pasokan batuan andesit* (an andesite rock supply) is the euphemism as noun phrase. *Pasokan* function as the pre-modifier, *batuan* as the *Head*, and *andesit* as the post-modifier. The phrase has a function to avoid panic. *Pasokan* (supply) means a stock of something, in this case *batuan andhesit* (andesit rock). A stock represents a few amounts since it was not specifically state the quantity. By softening the meaning audiences do not aware that the quantity needed, based on CNN 10 February 2022 edition, is 8.5 million m<sup>3</sup>. Compared to andhesit rock supply, 8.5 million m<sup>3</sup> represent great quantity which should put attention. Because it is being softened people does not easily panic and does not take this as a serious case.

“If that happens, it will remove the landscape and is no different from forcing people to live with ecosystem damage.” (Kompas, 10 Feb 2022).

The second phrase is *menghilangkan bentang alam* (remove the landscape). It appears in a form of verb phrase with *menghilangkan* (remove) as the Head and *bentang alam* (the landscape) as the direct object. This euphemism has a function to avoid panic. It is because *menghilangkan* (remove) softens the true meaning that is *merusak* (destroy). By using *menghilangkan* (remove) represent that the landscape can be rebuilt. While is the true meaning *merusak* (destroy) is presented, it represents that the *bentang alam* (landscape) cannot be rebuilt just like what it used to be. Using the euphemism *menghilangkan bentang alam* (remove the landscape) manipulate the audiences as if the landscape damage is not too severe to the point that it can easily be fixed.

“And from the affected land in Wadas Village, our temporary record before being measured yesterday, the total affected land was 617 fields,” (Kompas 10 Feb 2022).

In this sentence the euphemism appeared as noun phrase. The as the determiner, *lahan* (land) as the head, *terdampak* (affected) as the modifier. It has a function to hide a fact. The phrase does not clearly state which land is affected. The fact that, it is actually referred to the land that was used for the Dam Bener project. This phrase mostly used by the media that support government because it does not clearly state the affected land which get damage by the project.

“For information, the construction of the Bener Dam is one of the national strategic projects (PSN) under the Government of President Joko Widodo” (CNN, 11 Feb 2022).

Here, the euphemism is in the form of noun phrase. The head is *proyek* (project), pre-modifier is *strategis nasional* (national strategic). This euphemism has a satirical function. It satirizes the president as the head of government. It classifies as satirical because national strategic project means that this project has many beneficial and does not harm any side. In fact, this project has harmed the local society, by losing their main job as a farmer, and ecosystem, by making the area around the project drought. Instead of nationally strategic it is more government strategic because the project intended to be the main supply of YIA airport. Understand that Indonesia people mostly comes from lower-middle financial which very rare to use plane.

“Wadas residents reject the plan to build the Bener Dam. They also walked out of the meeting” (CNN, 10 Feb 2022).

The euphemism is in a form of verb phrase with the walk as the head and out as the particle. It is used to avoid taboo. The true meaning of it is leaving without respect. The borrowing phrase walk out is used to avoid taboo because in Indonesia leaving a meeting without the command from the authority is addressed as a disrespect action. In this case the authority that conduct the meeting is BBWS-SO.

“However, the BBWS-SO representative left the meeting when the residents started asking questions.” (CNN, February 10, 2022).

In this sentence the euphemism is in the form of verb phrase with *meninggalkan* (left) as the head and *pertemuan* (the meeting) as the direct object. The function of this phrase is to hide the fact. *Meninggalkan pertemuan* (left the meeting) in this context means avoiding. It is because BBWS-SO does this action when the residents want to rise queries. This is hiding the fact that BBWS-SO try to avoid the residents. The shifting meaning cause by euphemism depict as if BBWS-SO unintentionally avoid residents queries.

### 3.1.2 Sentence

“According to him, the biggest threat from the construction of the dam is the high rate of sedimentation or siltation due to the large amount of erosion in the water catchment area.” (CNN, 11 Feb 2022).

Here, the euphemism appeared in a form of sentence. The sentence is a nominal sentence with the biggest threat as subject and the high rate of sedimentation as the subjective complement. The function of this euphemism is to hide the fact. It is because the sentence softens the biggest threat by using the scientific reason which not all audiences know what the impact of sedimentation. The true meaning of this sentence is that the project can cause the reduction of clean water and cause of drought due to the reduction of the land for the project. This euphemism really manipulates audiences’ awareness of the danger of this project.

## 3.2 Form and Functions of Dysphemism

### 3.2.1 Word

#### Noun

“We will lose our livelihood. Our agricultural land will be destroyed,” the petition said. It

**Table 2.** Dysphemism

Context	Form & Function
“...“Desa Wadas seolah menjadi <b>tumbal</b> ,” lanjut petisi.” (Kompas, 10 Feb 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Word</li> <li>• Express anger</li> </ul>
“Sejumlah warga Wadas <b>berdemonstrasi</b> ke Kantor Pertanahan Purworejo”. (CNN, 10 Feb 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Word</li> <li>• Exaggerate</li> </ul>
“Pantauan detik Jateng, awalnya <b>aksi unjuk rasa</b> yang digelar di jalan Desa Guntur, Kecamatan Bener, berjalan damai, Kamis (4/8/2022) siang”. (Detik, 4 Aug 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phrase</li> <li>• Exaggerate</li> </ul>
“Menurut Kharisma, <b>penolakan pembangunan</b> Bendungan Bener juga terjadi di Desa Gundung, Kecamatan Bener, yang merupakan lok asi tapak bendungan”. (Detik, 4 Aug 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phrase</li> <li>• Satirize</li> </ul>

is feared that the mining will also make Wadas Village more prone to landslides. Moreover, based on the Regional Regulation on the Regional Spatial Planning of Purworejo Regency 2011–2031, Bener Subdistrict, including Wadas Village, is part of a landslide-prone area. “Wadas Village seems to be a victim,” continued the petition. (Kompas, 10 Feb 2022).

In this sentence the dysphemism is *tumbal* (victim) in a form of noun. In Indonesian language *tumbal* is the harsh synonym of *korban* (victim). It has a function to express anger. *Tumbal* (victim) is usually refer to something that is deliberately sacrificed to save something else. In this case the villagers are the one who is deliberately sacrificed by the government project. They are the one who feel the impact of environmental damage (Table 2).

### Verb

“A number of Wadas residents demonstrated at the Purworejo Land Office.” (CNN, 10 Feb 2022).

Dysphemism in this sentence appeared in a form of verb. It has a function to exaggerate the subject which is the residents. In Indonesia *demonstrasi* (demonstrate) is generally seen as acts of resistance, violent attacks or riots. It means the residents action to reject the project due to the potential impact that may damage the environmental and the residents’ life is seen as a bad action.

### 3.2.2 Phrase

“DetikJateng’s observation, initially the demonstration, which was held on the Guntur Village Street, Bener District, went peacefully, Thursday (4/8/2022) afternoon.” (Detik, 4 August 2022).

Here, the dysphemism is in the form of noun phrase with the *aksi* as the Head, *unjuk rasa* as the post modifier. The function of this phrase is to exaggerate the agent action. In Indonesia, *Aksi unjuk rasa* (*demonstration*) represents acts of resistance, violent attacks or riots which mean the media portray the action of rejecting the destruction of nature

carried out by residents is a bad action because it includes violence. In fact, there is no intended violence in the actions.

“According to Kharisma, the rejection of the development of the Bener Dam also occurred in Gundung Village, Bener District, which is the location of the dam.” (Second, August 4, 2022).

The phrase *penolakan pembangunan* (the development rejection) is dysphemism in a form of noun phrase with the *pembangunan* (development) as the post-modifier and *penolakan* (rejection) as the head. The function of this phrase is to satirize the disagreement coming from residents. This is satirized because in Indonesia *pembangunan* (development) represent a positive change process and beneficial to improve every aspect of life. With this dysphemism the media describe the rejection of residents as an action which does not support the improvement of life.

From the analysis above, there are three forms of euphemism found in the data. They are word that appeared in noun, phrase that appeared in noun phrase and verb phrase, and sentence appeared in a nominal sentence. The function found is hiding the fact, avoiding panic, satirizing, and avoiding taboo. The function analysis shows that euphemism that was used in the three Indonesia media (CNN, Kompas, Detik) in the context of Dam Bener Project create manipulation. In the function of hiding fact, media try depicting the that acts of violence and escape by state apparatus are not a big problem. This depiction is done by refining the expressions used so that the meaning becomes less clear.

The second function that is to avoid panic, appeared in the phrase *pasokan batuan andhesit* (an andhesit rock supply), soften the meaning that in fact really needs to be clear. The clear meaning is needed to make people aware of the impact of natural damage that will occur. In the function of avoiding taboo, media try to protect the actor who make the inappropriate action. In his case resident who leave the meeting and government who destroy the ecosystem. Then, the satirical function is used to satirize the government project.

In dysphemism, there is expressing anger function which represents the local resident who get the negative effect of environmental damage by the project. There is also exaggerating function that used to put a negative highlight on the resident action that trying to defend the environment from damage cause by the project. Lastly the satirical function is used to satirize the resident rejection on the project.

## 4 Discussion

After analyzing the data, several functions of the euphemism and dysphemism stated by Allan and Burrige were found. In euphemism only four functions are found that are hiding fact, avoiding panic, satirizing, and avoiding taboo. Hiding fact is the dominance functions used in these three media. This function often used when media discuss about the attempt of authority to continue running the Bener Dam project. Furthermore, it is also used when discussing about the environmental damage caused by the project. The intensity of euphemism used in these two contexts mean the media agrees and supports the construction of the dam.

In dysphemism only three functions were found that are, expressing anger, exaggerating, and satirizing. Exaggerating is mostly used in these three media. This functions



often used when talking about the resident attempt to defend their land. The media depicts the actions excessively to create the meaning that these actions are acts of violence that should not be carried out. This function is related to the euphemism function used by the media to support the project. The media uses dysphemism with exaggeration to support the project by portraying community actions that seek to protect the environment as excessive. The depiction can mean that the effects of the project do not cause severe damage. In other word, these media do not support the preservation attempt coming from the residents.

These finding has a significant different with the previous studies. In Elisa's research, she found 13 functions of euphemism and 12 functions of dysphemism in general news of environmental discourse [10]. In Elisa's research, there are 3 functions of euphemism found in the general news of environmental discourse [3]. Both Elisa and Elisa use the Allan and Burrige theory. While Yuniawan only discussed about the form of Eco lexicon which include euphemism and dysphemism in Indonesia's media on conservation news using Fill theory [18]. Nevertheless, this research used the same theory as Elisa and Elisa but found differences in the function and interpretation. Therefore, this study provides new result on the discussion about euphemism and dysphemism in the environmental discourse.

All in all, using the same theory can also affect the similarity of interpretations of researchers when examining each object. However, different objectivity leads to different results, but their shortcomings are related and complementary. Therefore, through this research the reason for the media using euphemisms and dysphemism can be understood.

## 5 Conclusion

In sum, the Indonesia mass media used euphemism and dysphemism in providing the information about Dam Bener project. The used of euphemism and dysphemism to portray this case is not purely to create awareness of audiences towards the possible environmental damage. Media used more euphemism to decrease the severity of environmental damage. While dysphemism more used to portray the resident rejection of the project as a bad action. This can be concluded that media does not truly support to the environment preservation due to the intended shifting meaning they used in writing the information. Thus, this result cannot be generalized since this study used qualitative method and the data is limited. That is why as a reader or audience we should be more careful to understand the information. We must be sensitive to the information we read to avoid any bias and manipulation. All in all, further research with variations in data is expected to obtain more comparative results.

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