



## LANGUAGE CENSORSHIP IN INDONESIAN NEWS HEADLINES: EUPHEMISM AND LITERACY LEARNING

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of euphemisms in news headlines of mass media in Indonesia. The urgency of this study is the very important role of headlines in shaping readers' perception and understanding. The method used is qualitative with a semantic study approach to track changes in meaning. The data studied are 25 news headlines from various online mass media in Indonesia. The results of the study found five forms of euphemism that are often used as language censorship, namely yaitu *lakalantas*, *tunarungu*, *gratifikasi*, *pramuria*, and *pekerja migran Indonesia* in news headlines. The five vocabularies are used as euphemisms for language censorship and help reduce the possibility of content that is too harsh or sensitive to be conveyed to the public. By replacing harsh words or phrases with more subtle expressions, the mass media attempt to create a sense of civility in the delivery of information. The results of the study relate to literacy learning in this digital era through three learning targets, namely literacy learning in Indonesia, literacy learning for BIPA, literacy learning for Indonesian schools in Malaysia. This study provides an overview of the phenomenon of euphemism in news headlines, it is hoped that this study can provide valuable insights for mass media practitioners, academics, and the general public in understanding the important role of news headlines in Indonesian information culture.

**Keywords:** euphemism, language censorship, news headlines, literacy learning

### INTRODUCTION

The digital age is rapidly expanding and mass media has become increasingly vital as a primary source of information (Tu et al., 2020). Consequently, the language utilized in news reports and headlines has garnered significant attention. In Indonesia, a culturally and socially diverse country, the mass media has a crucial influence on public opinion and people's perceptions (Junsheng et al., 2019).

Headlines in Indonesia, as in many other countries, have the significant power to deliver information to the public. Nonetheless, mass media in Indonesia occasionally encounters challenges when presenting sensitive or controversial news. To avoid the possibility of exacerbating conflict or controversy, media frequently used euphemisms or other ways to censor the language in their headlines (Jayanti, 2019).

Numerous studies have examined language censorship in the mass media. Firstly, Kuang (2018) conducted an investigation into the news most frequently censored in China. Secondly, Gläsel and Paula (2020) found evidence of censorship, news falsification, and denial in East Germany. Thirdly, Murat (2018) analyzed news media consolidation and censorship in Turkey. Fourthly, Waisbord (2020) reported on mass censorship of online harassment of US journalists during times of digital hate and populism. Fifth, a study exploring the effects of government censorship within the circumstances of RCTV's closure (Knight & Tribin, 2022). Sixth, an analysis of

media censorship (Cheng & Yang, 2019). Seventh, censorship in reporting on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Sirhan, 2021).

The distinction between prior and current studies lies in their respective focuses. A prior study explored general media censorship practices, while this study focuses more specifically on language censorship in news headlines in Indonesia using the euphemism approach and its implications for literacy learning in Indonesia. This study offers a detailed analysis of the use of euphemisms in news headlines and their influence on literacy learning in Indonesia. This study provides an overview of headline-based literacy learning in the digital era and identifies potential language censorship in news headlines.

Language censorship in news headlines is a relevant topic for increasing discussion, especially in the context of media literacy and education. How does the censorship of language in headlines impact people's understanding and literacy, especially readers who may not understand the true implications of the language used in the news? Furthermore, with the growth of the Internet and easy access to news from multiple sources, media competence is increasingly becoming an important skill for every citizen. Thus, examining the impact of language censorship within news headlines on literacy learning is extremely relevant.

This study aims to investigate the phenomenon of language censorship in news headlines in Indonesia, particularly in relation to the use of euphemisms, and how it relates to people's understanding and media literacy. Understanding this topic allows Indonesian society to become more critical and discern when consuming news and to have a better ability to read between the lines hidden in the language used in the news.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative method with a semantic approach. Semantic studies have been conducted to reveal the use of euphemisms in news headlines in Indonesian mass media. This approach was used to reveal the practice of language censorship using euphemisms. The findings of this study relate to literacy learning in the digital era. The study data are news headlines containing a form of euphemism from various Indonesian mass media. The data were collected randomly. This study was limited to analyzing frequently used vocabulary in Indonesian news headlines. This limitation allows the author to identify euphemisms as language censorship in certain contexts. Of course, the urgency of the topic is in line with the theory of euphemism, which aims to soften vocabulary that is considered rude or harsh in various sensitive discourse contexts (Allan & Burridge, 1991). Data analysis used the interactive analysis model of Miles et al. (2014), which consists of data conditioning, data presentation, and conclusion forming. The following is a breakdown of the data analysis process.

- 1) Data aggregation began with the collection of news headlines containing euphemisms from various Indonesian mass media. This process involves a large collection of initial data, which must be processed to make it easier to analyze. The random data-collection process may involve drawing samples from different types of mass media and limited news topics (crime, politics, religion, sex, and sports). This data compression may involve deleting data that does not fit within the study boundaries.



- 2) The data analysis process using this model involved several stages. The first stage, data compression, may involve data reduction by identifying patterns of euphemism in the news headlines. This could include the identification of words or phrases used as euphemisms in sensitive contexts. The second stage, data presentation, may involve presenting findings in an understandable and interpretable form. This could mean presenting examples of news headlines that contain euphemisms and explaining their context. These findings are linked to literacy learning in the digital age.
- 3) The conclusion reveals the use of euphemisms in news headlines in Indonesian mass media as language censorship to cover harsh vocabulary in various news contexts and its relationship with literacy learning. Based on this conclusion, the author presents the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research. Thus, the above points illustrate how the data were condensed and analyzed, and how conclusions can be drawn from the study, which was conducted using qualitative methods with a semantic study approach and an interactive analysis model (Miles et al., 2014).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Several forms of euphemism have been found in news headlines based on searches in various online mass media sources. These forms of euphemism appear in several news contexts. The form of euphemism is used as a language sensor that aims to soften the vocabulary that is considered harsh or may offend readers. Below is an analysis of the various forms of euphemism.

### Term *Lakalantas* as Language Censor in News Headlines

According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI V), the word *lakalantas* belongs to the noun class, an acronym for *kecelakaan lalu lintas* or traffic accidents. The term *lakalantas* is widely used in news headlines in Indonesia in traffic news context. In particular, *lakalantas* often appear in news headlines because traffic is often a topic that attracts the attention of Indonesian people. Below are some examples of how the term *lakalantas* is used in Indonesian news headlines.

**Table 1. Term *Lakalantas* in News Headlines**

Data	Headlines	Source
(1)	<i>Operasi Zebra Candi 2023: 618 <b>Lakalantas</b>, 17 Korban Tewas di Jateng Selama 2 Pekan</i>	SINDO News
(2)	<i>Pelajar yang Tewas dalam <b>Lakalantas</b> di Tomohon Ditetapkan Sebagai Tersangka, Polisi Ungkap Alasannya</i>	Kompas
(3)	<i>Jenazah Korban <b>Lakalantas</b> di Kupang Tiba di Waingapu, Korban Baru 1 Bulan Tinggal di Kupang</i>	Tribun News
(4)	<i>22 Orang Tewas Akibat <b>Lakalantas</b> di Karangasem, Polres Ungkap Jalur Rawan</i>	Detik News
(5)	<i><b>Lakalantas</b> di Malangbong Garut, Seorang Pemotor Meninggal Dunia</i>	Inews.id

From the five (5) data above, the term *lakalantas* describes the condition of a traffic accident that resulted in several casualties. The use of *lakalantas* is to replace the

*kecelakaan, kemalangan, or tabrakan*. Therefore, the use of the word *lakalantas* as a language sensor can openly describe accidents. Thus, the term *lakalantas* is an acronym-like euphemism that abbreviates phrases or words to simplify them. Euphemism is a form of using words or phrases that are softer or more neutral than words or phrases that may sound harsh or rude. In this context, the term *lakalantas* is a euphemism used to refer to a traffic accident that could result in injury or even death. Euphemisms are used in headlines to avoid and censor language that is considered too harsh or emotional, thus making information more generally acceptable.

### Term *Tunarungu* as Language Censor in News Headlines

Term *tunarungu* (deafness) is a term used to describe the condition of someone who cannot hear. The term deaf is also known as *tuli*, which describes the medical condition of someone with hearing loss. In KBBI V, the term *tunarungu* is included in the adjective word class, which means that it is unable to hear or deaf. The term *tunarungu* is widely used in Indonesian news headlines.

**Table 2. Term *Tunarungu* in News Headlines**

Data	Headlines	Source
(6)	Perkenalkan Ayu, <i>Tunarungu</i> yang Melatih Anak Muda Membuat Wayang Sodo	Antaranews
(7)	Ini Fai, Penari <i>Tunarungu</i> Lulusan AKN Seni dan Budaya Yogyakarta	Detik
(8)	Kisah Istri <i>Tunarungu</i> Jalan Kaki 61 KM Cari Suaminya ke Rumah Mertua, Tak Kembali Usai Pamit Ngopi	Tribunnews
(9)	Viral Momen Haru Pemuda Jadi Translator Maba Penyandang <i>Tunarungu</i>	VIVA
(10)	Fasilkom UI Ciptakan Aplikasi Mendukung Komunitas <i>Tunarungu</i>	Kompas

The context of using the term *tunarungu* (deafness) in news headlines describes people with hearing disabilities. This term is a polite pronoun related to a person's condition. The word *tunarungu* is implemented in news headlines to replace vocabulary that can be offensive and rude, namely, *tuli*, *pekak*, atau *cacat* (deaf, hard of hearing, or handicapped). Thus, the use of *tunarugu* as a euphemism strategy to censor forms of language can offend the related object. In other words, the use of *tunarungu* can be considered a euphemism strategy that helps protect the sensitivity and dignity of the individual concerned, as well as convey relevant information to society.

### Term *Gratifikasi* as Language Censor in News Headlines

The word *gratifikasi* (gratification) is often used in Indonesian news headlines to describe the gift of services received. In KBBI V, the term *gratifikasi* is included in the noun class, which refers to a gift given because of the services or benefits obtained. This concept is generally used in the context of political or government reporting. Below are some of the news titles found:

**Table 3. Term *Gratifikasi* in News Headlines**

Data	Headlines	Source
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(11)	<i>Lukas Enembe Minta Dibebaskan dari Tuntutan Kasus Suap dan <b>Gratifikasi</b></i>	CNN Indonesia
(12)	<i>Desak KPK Tuntaskan Suap-<b>Gratifikasi</b> ke KPU Pusat</i>	Detik News
(13)	<i>Yana Mulyana Dipecat Tidak Hormat, Kasus <b>Gratifikasi</b> Jadi Pertimbangan Utama</i>	Pikiran Rakyat
(14)	<i>DJKN Kemenkeu Ungkap Ada 65 Laporan <b>Gratifikasi</b> di Internal</i>	Kumparan
(15)	<i>Rafael Alun Didakwa Terima <b>Gratifikasi</b> Rp16,6 M Selama 11 Tahun</i>	Tirto

Based on the five news headlines above, the word *gratifikasi* is used in the context of giving gifts or money to someone with the aim of influencing or gaining certain benefits, such as in the business, government, or public sector. The term often refers to the act of giving something to someone, usually closely related to an official or person who has authority as a form of reward or appreciation for certain services or decisions expected of them. Term *gratifikasi* is used to replace or censor other vocabulary such as *sogok*, *menyogok*, *disogok* (bribes, bribes, and so on), which may sound harsher. Therefore, the used of the word *gratifikasi* is a euphemism strategy for censoring language that is considered sensitive to society.

#### Term *Pramuria* as Language Censor in News Headlines

The term *pramuria* is used to describe women's professions in Indonesia. Based on KBBI V, the term *pramuria* means a nightclub employee whose job is to serve and accompany guests or hostesses. This term is often used in Indonesian news headlines. Below are some of the news titles found:

**Table 4. Term *Pramuria* in News Headlines**

Data	Headlines	Source
(16)	<i>Cerita Remaja Dipekerjakan Jadi <b>Pramuria</b>, Identitas Nama Diubah, Dipaksa Layani Pria Hidung Belang</i>	Kompas
(17)	<i>Pekerja Bengkel Tega Jual Istri Jadi <b>Pramuria</b> di Hotel Solo, Ini Motifnya</i>	INews
(18)	<i>Selama Sepekan, 200 Lebih <b>Pramuria</b> di Ambon Ikut Tes HIV/AIDS</i>	Tribun
(19)	<i>Kronologi Kepala Inspektorat Kabupaten SBB Maluku Aniaya 2 <b>Pramuria</b> di Lokalisasi karena Cemburu</i>	Kompas
(20)	<i>Oknum Tentara Vs Wartawan Duel Demi <b>Pramuria</b> di Lokalisasi Samabusa, Nabire, Papua</i>	Tribun

Of the five examples of news headlines above, the term *pramuria* is used to describe women's work as waiters in entertainment venues. The use of the word *pramuria* is a euphemist strategy to censor workers who can be offensive or sensitive to Indonesian society. The term *pramuria* is used to replace several variations of words that are considered negative, namely *pekerja malam*, *pelayan*, or *wanita penghibur* (night workers, waiters, or entertainers). Thus term, such as night workers or comfort women, often carries negative connotations or stereotypes that can demean individuals working in the industry. In addition, the term *pramuria* is used to avoid the social stigma attached to working as a waiter in entertainment venues or the

nightlife industry. By using euphemisms, such as public servants, the media and public conversations try to reduce this stigma.

#### **Term *Pekerja Migran Indonesia* as Language Censor in News Headlines**

The term *pekerja migran Indonesia* (Indonesian migrant worker) refers to any Indonesian citizen who has been or will be engaged in paid employment outside the territory of the Republic of Indonesia. This term is relatively new and has not been included in KBBI V. Nevertheless, several mass media outlets use the term 'Indonesian migrant workers' as follows:

Tabel 5. *Pekerja Migran Indonesia* dalam Judul Berita

Data	Headlines	Source
(21)	Menaker Sebut Desa Migran Produktif Upaya Perlindungan <b>Pekerja Migran Indonesia</b>	Antara News
(22)	Makin Banyak <b>Pekerja Migran Indonesia</b> di Singapura Lanjutkan Kuliah	Medcom
(23)	Mandiri Sahabatku Lahirkan Wirausaha Potensial dari <b>Pekerja Migran Indonesia</b>	Kumparan
(24)	Imigrasi Gratiskan Biaya Paspor untuk <b>Pekerja Migran Indonesia</b>	Kumparan
(25)	Menaker: Pemerintah Miliki Komitmen Serius Lindungi <b>Pekerja Migran Indonesia</b>	Viva

Based five headlines mentioned above, the term *pekerja migran Indonesia* is employed to describe labor (Indonesian migrant worker). This term has been introduced as a replacement for several sensitive terms, including *tenaga kerja Indonesia* (TKI), *tenaga kerja wanita* (TKW), or *buruh Indonesia*. The utilization of the term *pekerja migran Indonesia* is considered more polite compared to some of its alternatives since it upholds the dignity and human rights of these migrant laborers. In news headlines, this term is employed to censor variations in vocabulary that could potentially lead to stigma or negative perceptions. There are at least two primary reasons for adopting this new terminology. *First*, it demonstrates respect for the originating country's identity, which is Indonesia. *Second*, the use of respectful terminology can aid in mitigating negative stereotypes and prejudices against migrant workers. Derogatory terms can reinforce adverse opinions and contribute to unfair treatment of this group.

#### **Euphemisms as Censorship of Language**

Based on the analysis results, five word or terms were identified as euphemisms frequently employed in Indonesian mass media news headlines. These euphemisms serve as a means of linguistic censorship, where sensitive or harsh language and vocabulary are substituted with subtler, more polite alternatives. The identified euphemisms encompass *lakalantas*, *tunarungu*, *gratifikasi*, *pramuria*, and *pekerja migran Indonesia*. The following section provides an overview of the linguistic censorship practices applied.

**Tabel 6. Euphemisms as Censorship of Language**

<b>Censorship</b>	<b>Euphemism</b>
kemalangan, kecelakaan, tabrakan	lakalantas
tuli, pekak, tidak bisa mendengar	tunarungu
suap, sogok, disogok, menyosok	gratifikasi
pekerja malam, wanita penghibur	pramuria
tenaga kerja Indonesia (TKI), tenaga kerja wanita (TKW), buruh Indonesia	pekerja migran Indonesia

In the context of news reporting, euphemisms serve as a tool for censorship, particularly in news headlines, which are among the most crucial components of news articles. Euphemisms act as linguistic filters that help mitigate the risk of conveying content that is too harsh or sensitive to the audience. By substituting more direct or sharp words and phrases with milder expressions, mass media endeavors to infuse a sense of politeness into information delivery without compromising message clarity. This approach also aims to honor and safeguard the sentiments of readers or viewers while promoting a more considerate and refined language in public discourse. Therefore, understanding the role of euphemisms as linguistic filters is essential for understanding the dynamics of language and mass media within society.

This finding aligns with the theory that euphemisms are employed across various facets of social, political, religious, and cultural life. The use of euphemisms implies that when a word cannot be explicitly articulated, language users will opt for alternative expressions (Wardhaugh, 2006). In general, the function of euphemisms is to transform harsh or taboo meanings into subtler or more protective ones (Burridge 2012). Euphemisms constitute a means of linguistic expression to soften words perceived as harsh or unsuitable for utterance or reception. During communication, euphemisms serve to preserve the emotions of both the speaker and listener, preventing any party from feeling offended, insulted, or uncomfortable due to the use of specific words (Sutarman, 2013; Yuliyanto & Abrian, 2023).

The findings of this study offer fresh insights into the fields of linguistics and journalism by highlighting the practice of language censorship within news headlines in the Indonesian mass media. These results substantiate the principles of effective news titles that encompass several aspects, including the previously unmentioned aspect of language censorship. Some key criteria for a successful title include (1) thought-provoking, (2) brevity and conciseness, (3) relevance, (4) functionality, (5) formality, (6) representativeness, (7) conformity to standard language, and (8) specificity. These eight criteria serve as guidelines for assessing whether the titles utilized by online media adhere to the norms of proper and accurate Indonesian language usage (Sumadiria, 2011). Based on these considerations, the author presents the findings of this study as a valuable contribution to the formulation of effective titles utilizing language censorship for concepts that could potentially offend certain parties.

### **Euphemism and Literacy Learning**

The findings from the study, which elucidates the practice of language censorship in news headlines within Indonesian mass media, can be harnessed for literacy

education in the digital era. Literacy learning can find application in three distinct domains: literacy learning for schools in Indonesia, literacy education for BIPA (Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers), and literacy learning for Indonesian schools in Malaysia.

1) Literacy Learning in Indonesia

The outcomes of this study can serve as a vital foundation for curriculum development and the creation of literacy learning materials at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in Indonesia. Employing an approach aligned with technological advancements and trends in social media, educators can incorporate literacy lessons that encompass language comprehension, an introduction to language censorship, and the cultivation of critical skills necessary for discerning accurate and pertinent information from a plethora of online news sources.

2) Literacy Learning for BIPA (Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers)

This study also carries significant implications for the teaching of Indonesian to non-native speakers. In this context, literacy education can be tailored to focus on understanding language censorship within the framework of Indonesian language news and information. This approach aids foreign students in comprehending the cultural and political context of Indonesian news, as well as refining their abilities to critically assess and evaluate information.

3) Literacy Learning for Indonesian Schools in Malaysia

Indonesian schools located in Malaysia can similarly leverage these findings to enhance student literacy. Operating within an environment with access to news from both countries, literacy education can facilitate students' comprehension of disparities in language usage and language censorship within news reporting from the two nations. This, in turn, will empower them to become astute and critical consumers of information.

The interconnection among euphemism studies within these three fields can foster comprehensive literacy development, equip the younger generation to confront the challenges of the digital era, and empower them to become capable of comprehending, evaluating, and contributing to an increasingly intricate world of information. Euphemism-based literacy education in this digital age can be applied with the following sense of urgency.

- 1) Enhanced Polite Communication: Euphemism entails the use of milder or more positive languages to replace harsh or impolite expressions. Euphemism-centered literacy education assists students in cultivating effective and courteous communication skills. In Indonesia, where the culture of politeness holds great significance, a grasp of euphemism can enable individuals to convey their thoughts with tactfulness and avoid words that might be perceived as impolite or inappropriate.
- 2) Conflict Resolution and Effective Communication: The adoption of euphemisms can avert conflicts and misunderstandings in everyday discourse. In delicate situations such as discussions concerning health, mortality, or



societal issues, euphemisms facilitate empathetic communication and prevent unintentional harm to others' feelings.

- 3) **Fostering social awareness:** Development of euphemistic literacy contributes to heightened social consciousness within society. Individuals who comprehend euphemisms tend to be more attuned to societal concerns, fostering a more polite and cultivated culture.
- 4) **Appreciation of Language and Culture:** Euphemisms constitute an integral aspect of language and culture. Euphemism-based literacy education enables students to gain a deeper appreciation of the richness of the Indonesian language and the cultural nuances inherent in it. Moreover, it encourages an increased valuation of the linguistic and cultural diversity in Indonesia.
- 5) **Boosting Emotional Intelligence:** Euphemism comprehension enhances an individual's emotional intelligence. Understanding the impact of words on others' emotions is a crucial facet in managing one's emotions and nurturing healthy interpersonal relationships.
- 6) **Mitigating Stigma and Discrimination:** Within contexts addressing sensitive issues, such as mental health, disabilities, or sexual orientation, the utilization of euphemisms aids in countering stigma and discrimination. This endeavor is pivotal in creating a more inclusive and welcoming society.
- 7) **Critical Thinking in Media and Digital Contexts:** Proficiency in media literacy involves the development of critical thinking abilities. Euphemism-centered literacy education equips students to pose pertinent questions, scrutinize information judiciously, and seek robust evidence before forming conclusions. These skills hold significance across various life domains, encompassing personal and professional decision-making.

The necessity of integrating euphemism-based literacy education aligns with the modern educational paradigms. The 21st century has witnessed rapid advancements in various facets of human existence, notably in science and technology (IPTEK). These advancements have significantly impacted global education (Kristyowati & Purwanto, 2019). In the realm of contemporary learning, students are expected to possess diverse skill sets encompassing: a) profound knowledge and comprehension of scientific concepts and processes essential for active participation in the digital era; b) the capability to seek and discern answers to questions arising from curiosity and everyday experiences; c) proficiency in elucidating and predicting phenomena; d) Competence in engaging in social dialogues that entail the ability to read and comprehend scientific articles; e) aptitude to identify issues in science and information technology; f) competence in assessing scientific information based on its sources and methodologies; g) the ability to formulate conclusions and arguments, accompanied by the capacity to evaluate arguments grounded in evidence (Kristyowati & Purwanto, 2019).

Euphemism-based literacy learning is in harmony with the objectives of Indonesian language instruction. This includes equipping students with the ability to read and produce various types of textual content. In terms of reading proficiency, students must demonstrate the ability to comprehend and identify text structures,

content, and linguistic elements. In the context of writing skills, students must be able to convey information derived from a multitude of existing texts. Additionally, students should be able to articulate the acquired information verbally, underscoring the importance of oral communication (expressing opinions). Furthermore, effective listening skills are also indispensable for comprehensive oral information acquisition (Subandiyah, 2017).

## CONCLUSION

Euphemisms are employed within online mass media news headlines in Indonesia. This euphemistic practice has emerged as a strategy employed by the mass media for language censorship. A censored language encompasses expressions or vocabulary that possess the potential to be offensive, sensitive, or perpetuate negative stereotypes among readers. The findings of this study indicate that at a minimum, five specific vocabularies are frequently utilized by mass media outlets in framing news stories. These vocabularies include *lakalantas*, *tunarungu*, *gratifikasi*, *pramuria*, and *pekerja migran Indonesia*. The adoption of euphemisms in mass media reflects the media's endeavor to cultivate a narrative that is more neutral and less offensive. This practice underscores how language can be harnessed as a tool to influence people's perception and comprehension of a given issue.

The implications of euphemisms within news headlines extend to literacy learning in three primary contexts: literacy instruction within Indonesia, literacy instruction for BIPA (Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers), and literacy instruction for Indonesian schools in Malaysia. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of the present study. First, it exclusively identified and focused on five frequently employed vocabularies. Second, it provides only an initial overview of euphemism as a form of language censorship. Third, the examination of euphemism was confined solely to news headlines. Consequently, the author encourages subsequent researchers or reviewers to explore the practice of euphemism within a more comprehensive and diverse range of contexts.

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