


The Role of Euphemisms in Daily Communication: A Contrastive Study of Palembang and Minangkabau Languages

***Ikhwanul Habib¹, Sintya Rahmadewi²**

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang
Jl. Raya Ir. Soekarno No.34 Dadaprejo, Pendem, Kec. Junrejo, Kota Batu,
Jawa Timur 65324, Indonesia

²  orcid id: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2797-8821>

*habibikhwanul8@gmail.com

Keywords:	Abstract
Euphemism, Palembang Language, Minangkabau Language	<i>Euphemisms are an important part of the Indonesian language tradition, including in big cities like Palembang and Padang. The term refers to the use of more subtle words or expressions to replace words that are considered rude, taboo, or impolite. This study aims to examine the use of euphemisms in daily conversations in the two cities, each of which has different language features and cultural influences. This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data collection techniques used interviews and observations. The data sources came from the observations of researchers and native speakers of Palembang and Minangkabau languages. Data analysis uses data reduction, data explanation and concluding. Data validity uses triangulation. The results showed that the use of euphemisms in these two cities is different, based on the theory put forward by Allan and Burridge. In the Minangkabau language, there are nine forms of euphemisms, while in the Palembang language, there are thirteen forms. Both languages reflect the way people maintain social harmony and show respect for others through polite and subtle language. This research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the role of language in maintaining politeness values in Palembang and Padang communities.</i>
Kata Kunci: Eufemisme, Bahasa Palembang, Bahasa Minangkabau	Eufemisme merupakan bagian penting dalam tradisi berbahasa masyarakat Indonesia, termasuk di kota-kota besar seperti Palembang dan Padang. Istilah ini merujuk pada penggunaan kata-kata atau ungkapan yang lebih halus untuk menggantikan kata-kata yang dianggap kasar, tabu, atau tidak sopan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji penggunaan eufemisme dalam percakapan sehari-hari di kedua kota tersebut, yang masing-masing memiliki kekhasan bahasa dan pengaruh budaya yang berbeda. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode field research studi kasus. Teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan wawancara dan observasi. Sumber data berasal dari pengamatan peneliti dan penutur asli bahasa Palembang dan Minangkabau. Analisis data

menggunakan reduksi data, penjabaran data dan menarik kesimpulan. Validitas data menggunakan triangulasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan eufemisme di kedua kota ini berbeda, berdasarkan teori yang dikemukakan oleh Allan dan Burridge dalam bahasa minangkabau ditemukan sembilan bentuk eufemisme sedangkan dalam bahasa Palembang memiliki tiga belas bentuk. Kedua bahasa mencerminkan cara masyarakat menjaga keharmonisan sosial dan menunjukkan rasa hormat terhadap orang lain melalui bahasa yang sopan dan halus. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan pemahaman lebih dalam mengenai peran bahasa dalam menjaga nilai-nilai kesantunan di dalam masyarakat Palembang dan Padang.

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1. Introduction

Language is a means of communication to obtain information and plays an important role in human life. Before becoming the focus of a separate science, language change is not an important study and cannot be studied specifically. However, because there is a continuous change in language caused by the development of the times and other factors, this is what makes language change a separate branch of science that can be studied. The fact that Indonesia has many islands and an area from Sabang to Merauke is what makes the languages in Indonesia diverse and varied and also makes Indonesia the country with the most languages after Papua New Guinea (Hafizah, 2018).

If the history is drawn, it turns out that the languages in Sumatra have one language family in common with other languages based on the proximity of their geographical location, namely Malay (Collins, 2005). The basis of the Indonesian language comes from a variety of Malay languages and is used by many speakers, for example, in Sumatra with the Minangkabau language and Kalimantan with the Ibaku language. The two languages have different dialects, even in the same location have different dialects. This variety of dialects is the hallmark of the Indonesian language because of the multidialectal environment in society (Rahman and Kurniati 2021). The changes in language variation can be seen in terms of sound (phonology), word changes (morphemes), sentences (syntax), meaning (semantics) and lexicons (Reniwati et al. 2016).

Euphemism is taken from the Greek word *euphemizein*, which means to use words with a good meaning or a good purpose (Sutana, 2012). So euphemism is an expression intended to respect and not insult others; it can also be called an expression with subtle language and the purpose of politeness. For example, the word *dead* would be better replaced with *dead* if this word referred to the death of a person and not an animal or plant. For example, the word *labour* is changed to the *employee*, and the word *obscene* is changed to *indecent acting*. The language style of euphemism is often used in daily life, and we also often find it in writing, where the writer or writer conveys their feelings and thoughts to look more polite and polite (Sahani, 2020).

The *Majapahit* Kingdom and other Javanese kingdoms such as Demak and Pajang have heavily influenced Palembang language. This is because Palembang was once under Majapahit rule in the 14th century, as stated in the Palapa Oath, and there was close cultural and political interaction between the kingdom in Palembang and the kingdom in Java. As a result, the Palembang language is the result of acculturation between the original Malay language and the Javanese language, especially in the form of a subtle language known as *beast* (Alfaridzi, 2024). Meanwhile, the Minangkabau language is influenced by the distinctive matrilineal culture in Minangkabau society. This central role of women also affects the use of the Minangkabau language, including aspects of politeness and forms of language that respect the position of women in society (Billa et al., 2025).

Among the many linguistic phenomena, euphemism stands out as a crucial strategy for maintaining politeness, minimizing conflict, and navigating social taboos in everyday conversation. Euphemisms are a style of comparative language used to minimize conflict (Imamah, 2021). The euphemism developed by Allan and Burridge is an important contribution to the study of linguistics, especially in understanding how language is used to convey meaning more subtly. According to them, there are various forms of euphemism, namely *figurative, remodelling, meaning beyond statements, circumclosure, cutting, acronyms, omission, substituting other words, general to specific, hyperbole, partial for whole, technical terms, and metaphors* (Allan and Burridge 1988).

A relevant research on euphemism is a study by Julita Veronica in 2009 entitled "Euphemism in English and the Tontembon Language: A Contrasting Analysis", with the results in the form of an analysis of euphemisms in English and Tontemboan languages showing differences and similarities in the use of more subtle expressions to replace terms that are considered rude or taboo (Supit et al., 2019). Modern Indonesian society faces rapid cultural shifts, increased intercultural contact, and evolving norms of communication. In multicultural cities like Palembang and in tradition-rich societies like Minangkabau, euphemisms are not only a matter of politeness but also a means of negotiating identity, respect, and social boundaries.

This study not only documents the forms and functions of euphemism but also examines how cultural values shape linguistic choices in real-life communication. The researcher is very interested in raising this title because it is to study the use of euphemisms in everyday conversations in the cities of Palembang and Padang, each of which has different language peculiarities and cultural influences.

2. Methods

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Data collection techniques used observation and interviews. Researchers observed daily oral communication interactions in Palembang and Minangkabau communities to get the form of euphemism usage in various social situations, such as talking about death, economic status, work, or physical conditions. We also conducted semi-structured interviews with native Palembang and Minangkabau speakers (aged 20-50 years), both male and female. This aims to get an explanation of the meaning, function, and reasons for using certain euphemisms and collect concrete examples of euphemisms in different social contexts.

The data analysis technique uses the stages of selecting and sorting data related to the use of euphemisms, then grouping and classifying data on the use of

euphemisms based on Allan and Burridge's theory, and then drawing conclusions by comparing the patterns of euphemism use between the two languages, interpreting the differences and similarities in the context of culture and communication. The data validity technique used is triangulation, namely by comparing research findings with existing theories.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. *Euphemism in The Context of Palembang and Minangkabau Culture*

The people who speak Malay in Palembang are mostly of ethnic Malay, and they have been using Malay for generations, adding local dialects. With time, the Malay dialect of Palembang is now called Palembang. Population mobilization is very common in densely populated cities. This mobility influences the existence of the Palembang language. The diversity of Palembang dialects is influenced by mobility. Dialects spoken by locals include *Komering*, *Rawas*, *Musi*, *Pasemah*, and *Semendo*. The Palembang language has evolved into a lingua franca for everyday use.

Not only the indigenous people live there, but also people who come from other areas, such as Java, Minangkabau, Madura, Bugis, and Banjar. Palembang is a city that has a rich culture and language as well as a sense of politeness. Palembang, a dialect of the Malay language, often uses euphemisms to make conversations more relaxed and not offensive to others (Harahap, 2020). For example, in a situation where someone dies, the people of Palembang prefer to use the expression "telah meninggal dunia" or "*telah pergi*" rather than immediately saying "dead". This is an example of euphemism that aims to reduce the feeling of sadness and heaviness that may arise from the use of the word.

In addition, in daily life, the people of Palembang often use euphemisms when talking about economic status or work. For example, rather than saying someone "*tidak punya uang*," they're more likely to use the phrase "*seret rezeki*" or "having a hard time." This phrase is more polite and does not hurt the feelings of the person who is going through difficulties. In informal conversations, euphemism is also widely used to describe a person's less-than-ideal physical situation or condition. For example, Palembangians may use the term "*kurang sehat*" to replace the word "*sakit*" to make it sound lighter and not make the person who hears it feel too worried. In the Palembang language, there are several examples of euphemisms or more subtle or polite expressions that are used to replace words that are considered rude or inappropriate. Euphemistic words and phrases allow us to talk about unpleasant things and neutralize discomfort (Supit et al., 2019).

According to Allan and Burridge, in Palembang, euphemistic expressions are commonly employed to address sensitive topics such as death, unemployment, or undesirable behaviour. For instance, rather than stating directly that someone has died, speakers might say, "*anaknyo sudem pegi selamonyo*" ("his son was gone for good"), a figurative expression that softens the finality of death. Similarly, when discussing unemployment, the phrase "*masih belum ado gawe*" ("still not working") is preferred over more direct or potentially stigmatizing terms. This aligns with Allan and Burridge's notion of remodelling, where expressions are altered to reduce harshness or social discomfort.

Circumlocution is another prevalent form, as seen in phrases like "*cerito dio tu di lebeh lebeh ke nyo*" ("he talks a lot that is exaggerated"), which indirectly refers to dishonesty or lying. This strategy allows speakers to address negative traits

without direct confrontation, reflecting the cultural value placed on maintaining interpersonal harmony. Hyperbolic euphemisms, such as "*kurang ngerti pelajaran*" ("does not understand the lesson"), are used to avoid labelling someone as "*stupid*" thus preserving the individual's dignity.

Metaphorical language also plays a significant role, as in "*lagi ado masalah di pikirannyo*" ("has a problem in his mind"), a gentler way to refer to mental health issues. The use of technical terms and jargon, like "*tukang*" for skilled workers, and acronyms such as "CCDT" ("*cak cak dak tau*," meaning "*pretending not to know*"), further illustrates the creative adaptation of language to fulfil social needs. These findings echo those of Supit, Rattu, and Pamantung (2019), who observed similar mechanisms in other regional languages, highlighting the universality of euphemism as a means of navigating social taboos and sensitivities.

Minangkabau is one of the regional languages in Indonesia. The Minangkabau people themselves use the Minangkabau language in their daily lives to communicate and convey ideas or intentions (Hutri, Deliana, and Nasution 2020). In Minang, various languages are also used. The most striking is the dialect of the speaker, which a certain group usually speaks. Dialects in several locations have differences where districts or cities have their own way of speaking the language. This dialect is what distinguishes society, which has become a linguistic system. Even though they have a different language system, they still have a harmonious relationship in society (Hermawan, 2018).

Each way of communicating with a group or person has certain characteristics, but there are also those that are only general. One of the characteristics in question is a special rule in speaking. In the Minangkabau language, which is thick with religion and customs that are upheld by the community, they have ethics in communicating. These ethics are a reference and unwritten rules; this is called the term "*Kato Nan Ampek*", which provides a reference and manners in speaking by being divided into four levels. And speaking ethics which are distinguished over four types of communication opponents (Mahdayeni, Alhaddad, and Saleh 2019). This is included in euphemism in sociolinguistic studies because its use in daily activities is for the purpose of refining language and politeness and avoiding insults. Words or expressions that are not worthy of expression are replaced with euphemisms.

In Minangkabau, euphemism is equally significant and is shaped by cultural norms such as "*Kato Nan Ampek*" which prescribes appropriate speech levels based on context and interlocutor. Figurative expressions like "*nyo rancak di labuah se nyo*" ("he is good on the street") subtly critique superficiality, while remodelling is evident in phrases like "*lah lapang baju nampaknyo*" ("clothes look roomy"), a gentle way to comment on someone's weight loss. Circumlocution, as in "*indak ado angin*" ("no wind"), is used to avoid direct reference to unlikely or taboo events. The Minangkabau language also employs metaphors, such as "*bantuak ayam lapeh dari kandang*" ("like a chicken out of the cage"), to describe someone who likes to wander, and flippant expressions like "*manjunjuang balacan*" ("upholding shrimp paste") to refer to disgrace in a less confrontational manner.

3.2. *Implementation of Euphemisms in daily life in the Palembang and Minangkabau communities*

In the application in daily life, a euphemism used in the Minangkabau language based on allan and bridge theory there are several forms that are most often used,

namely the nine connotations of language refinement that are often used, namely euphemism in the form of figurative, remodelling, circumlocation, general to special words, words that replace other words, flippancy, metaphors, and meanings beyond the statement and form of euphemism in the Palembang language based on allan theory and Bridge was found in twelve forms, more than Minangkabau with additional forms of euphemism, technical terms, acronyms and repetitions (Rahman & Kurniati, 2021).

Table 1. Comparison of Euphemism in Minangkabau and Palembang

No	Euphemisms in Minangkabau language	Euphemisms in Palembang language	Description
1	<i>Nyo rancak di labuah se nyo</i>	<i>sudem pegi selamonyo</i>	<i>Figurative</i>
2	<i>Lah lapang baju nampaknyo</i>	<i>belum ado gawe</i>	<i>Remodeling</i>
3	<i>Indak ado angin</i>	<i>di lebeh lebeh ke</i>	<i>Circumlocation</i>
4	<i>Sagadang samuik</i>	<i>kurang ngerti</i>	<i>Hiperbola</i>
5	<i>Urang rumah</i>	<i>anak Angkat</i>	<i>General to specialized</i>
6	<i>Karando</i>	<i>dak make kain.</i>	<i>Replace another word</i>
7	<i>Manjunjuang balacan</i>	<i>Lah, kau pikir aku cak mano?</i>	<i>Flippancy</i>
8	<i>Inyo tu bantuak ayam lapeh dari kandang</i>	<i>Wong itu, lagi ado masalah di pikirannyo</i>	<i>Metaphor</i>
9	<i>Mangaum indak manangkok</i>	<i>Beneri oi sikap kau tu, jagan kasar gino jadi uonk</i>	<i>Makna diluar pernyataan</i>
10		<i>Tukang</i>	<i>Technical terms</i>
11		<i>CCDT</i>	<i>A Meaning beyond statements Kronim</i>
12		<i>Biaso bae</i>	<i>Disappearance</i>

The categorization in the table is grounded in Allan & Burridge's typology, which remains a foundational framework in euphemism studies. Their work emphasizes that euphemisms are not random but systematic, serving clear communicative and social functions such as avoiding taboos, showing respect, or maintaining harmony.

Based on Table 1 above, a comparison of two languages in terms of the use of euphemisms can be seen, namely between Minangkabau and Palembang. Euphemism is heavily influenced by culture, reflecting values, norms, and ways of communicating in both societies. Of course, with the aim of mutual respect and devotion in speaking. The Palembang language is influenced by a long history of interaction with various ethnicities and cultures, including influences from the Majapahit, Demak, and Pajang Kingdoms, while the Minangkabau language is heavily influenced by the matrilineal traditions of its people, where women have an important role in the family and society (Ridho, 2018). In comparison, in the use of euphemisms, the Minangkabau people have a language that has a certain meaning both in words and in sentences in everyday life. A key aspect of Minangkabau communication is the concept of *Kato Nan Ampek*, This system

guides speakers to choose words that are appropriate for the listener's status and the context, often resulting in the use of euphemisms to soften or veil direct meanings (Oktaviani & Yahya, 2023).

4. Conclusion

Euphemistic expressions in Palembang and Minangkabau manifest in different forms, with twelve types identified in Palembang and nine in Minangkabau, reflecting the sociocultural backgrounds of each region. The Palembang language shows influences from the Majapahit kingdom, characterized by a hierarchical and civilized communication style. In contrast, the Minangkabau language is shaped by matrilineal traditions that elevate women's roles in social and familial contexts, affecting how politeness and indirectness are conveyed in conversation. These findings are significant for understanding how cultural norms influence linguistic choices, as euphemism serves as a form of linguistic politeness and social negotiation, mirroring deeper societal values, gender roles, and historical influences. Recognizing these variations can enhance cross-cultural communication and underscore the importance of context in linguistic analysis.

However, the study's findings may not be generalizable to other languages or regions in Indonesia, and the categorization of euphemism types may be subject to subjective interpretations, indicating a need for further quantitative and cross-linguistic research. From a broader perspective, euphemisms function as tools for maintaining social harmony, avoiding offense, and navigating taboo topics. In both Palembang and Minangkabau societies, euphemisms act as social lubricants that reflect communal values such as respect for elders, politeness, and conflict avoidance. Thus, euphemisms not only shape individual communication but also reinforce social structures and cultural continuity, highlighting their vital role in societal interactions.

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