

EUPHEMISM ON CULTURALLY TABOO LANGUAGE IN MALAYSIAN ENGLISH
NEWSPAPER (*THE STAR*)

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study intends to examine the occurrence of euphemism in a Malaysian English newspaper, "The Star" to soften a language that would otherwise be considered taboo specifically in Malaysian context. In addition, this paper analyses the functions and use of euphemism as a discourse strategy in "The Star" newspaper.

Media discourse analysis was used as the theoretical framework and content analysis was employed as the research design of this study. Media discourse analysis was found to be suitable because it examines how meaning is shared and transferred to people through the media. On the other hand, content analysis was chosen to examine the occurrence of euphemism present in news texts. A corpus of euphemistic language extracted from the Malaysian English newspaper was analysed by categorizing euphemism into 13 different categories of taboo topics. Those topics were crime, assorted sins and non-indictable offences, sex, the body and its parts, covering up: clothing and nakedness, bodily functions and secretions, illness and injury, fading out: old age and death, work, poverty, government and politics, warfare and race.

The study reveals that euphemistic language is present in all 13 taboo topics, however, the degree of use varies from one topic to another. There are many euphemistic terms found for poverty, warfare and work but bodily functions and secretion and covering up: clothing and nakedness had a few. Euphemism in the news text was used as politeness and avoidance strategies. Under the umbrella of politeness strategy, euphemism functions as an agent to defuse strong and upsetting statements, replace racial slurs as well as to be politically correct. On the other hand, as an avoidance strategy,

euphemism functions to provide vagueness to the taboo language, as double speak and lastly, to hide frightening and unwelcome issues.

Euphemism will probably continue to be used in the future because it gives people an outlet to discuss taboo topics without offending anyone. However, there is a negative implication whereby euphemism is also used to skew and conceal certain information from readers. Lastly, it is recommended that the occurrence of euphemism in other taboo topics in Malaysia has to be examined further to strengthen the claim in this research. Furthermore, other forms of media should also be explored to study euphemism such as the internet, television and magazines.