

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

The need for word substitutes when talking about sensitive topics has increased today in a globalized society. Often when people feel their words may sound blunt or offensive, they tend to look for relatively mild ways to share their opinions. Such alternatives are called euphemisms. Fromkin and Rodman (1993) define a euphemism as "a word or phrase that replaces a taboo word or serves to avoid frightening or unpleasant subjects." To summarize, the concept of a euphemism as a linguistic phenomenon is to find socially appropriate words for those that are inappropriate since it is often difficult to talk about sensitive topics many people dislike, despise, or regard as taboo while not directly naming them. For that reason, people have always felt the need to use euphemism while talking about sensitive topics such as death, illness, sex, and even politics.

As a matter of fact, the phenomenon of the use of euphemism can be found in almost every area of life, such as death, sex, disease, crime, profession, and politics (Samoškaitė 2011). For instance, in euphemisms about death, the word 'Die' is associated with the word 'pass away,' 'fall asleep,' and 'deceased.' In euphemisms regarding sex, 'Mrs. V' can be used to replace the word 'vagina.' Furthermore, concerning euphemism about diseases, the word 'lung trouble' and 'hard hearing' all of which can be used to replace tuberculosis and deaf. Also, euphemism regarding

crime the word 'the candy man' used to substitute drug dealers. Moreover, a term like 'beautician' is used for substitute hairdressers in a profession euphemisms. Additionally, in political issues, the euphemism 'undocumented workers' is used instead of illegal immigrants.

According to Linfoot-Ham (2005), the need for euphemism is social and emotional because it enables taboo and sensitive subjects to be discussed while retaining the appearance of civility. This does not merely occur in the daily life of society and community members but also in mass media such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio, the internet and others. Southerland and Katamba describe euphemism as the avoidance of words that may be perceived to listeners or readers as offensive, vulgar, or somehow disturbing (as cited in Grinová 2017).

The notion of euphemization is particularly apparent in media texts because they produce news and viewpoints as seen by journalists or news outlets (Fairclough 2003). Journalists from a particular news outlet might use euphemism expressions to follow particular guidelines from their institutions on writing articles and avoiding certain language, such as sexist language. The press is there to provide information throughout the 2020 US presidential election, which has been the most prominent topic in the US media in recent months. Most Americans between the ages of 18 and over who has the right to vote to get information about presidential elections not from direct contact with the candidates or with the politicians or campaign teams, but through print or broadcast mass media, and primarily electronic, for example, printed or online newspapers and magazines, television, and radio. Crawford (2004) argued, "The new media also provide a watchdog

mechanism for the public, work as a liaison between the public and its leaders, and influence candidate images and reputations." Therefore, Americans use the mass media to gain information about the candidates, political debates, opinion polls, and later use the media to become more familiar with it and understand and evaluate the candidates' roles.

During a presidential debate, occasionally, the candidates might discuss a sensitive topic. If the candidate uttered directly harsh and impolite words, it could have a negative effect on the candidate's image. To prevent potential loss of face, Allan and Burrige (1991) further describe euphemism as an alternative to a blunt expression: either one's own face or that of the audience, or of any third party, by giving offense. Additionally, to give a good effect to the reader, journalists and editors in newspapers usually avoid offensive words (Hojati 2012). Thus, the news articles written in newspapers or magazines also have a deliberate semantic change done by the author or journalists to respect those who are reported and attract readers. Undeniably, the media plays a significant role in the manipulation of public opinion. This change in meaning was taken by using words certain to smooth out harsh or rude words is known as a euphemism. Euphemisms can either be presented as written or verbal utterances, and they act as a protector against obnoxious and offensive language. Euphemisms in the media help correct politicians' errors, monitor their words and opinions, and, therefore, also reconstruct public opinion about politicians' personalities (Arif 2015).

Apart from providing different types of information in real-time and presenting what is currently happening now to readers as news, the mass media also builds public opinion, which can indirectly influence the masses' ideology. Media use language as a tool to communicate their meanings and influence the public's opinions. Language can be spoken as well as written, which implies that euphemistic expressions are used not only orally but also in written expressions, such as in books, magazines, tabloids, advertisements, and newspapers. In this case, spoken language is when the candidates give political speeches in the presidential debate, while written language occurs when newspapers and magazines publish information about the presidential election.

To further understand how the power of media in building the ideology of the masses, McChesny pointed out that in any society, the media is at the center of the struggle for power and control (as cited in Ryabova 2013). Thus, the way the media controls media discourse is by framing information in the desired ideological perspective by using euphemism as an instrument of ideological framing, especially in political communication or in the discourse of politicians (Ryabova 2013).

This research is focused on the euphemism phenomena in political discourse, especially in the newspapers. The example of euphemism in the newspapers itself is quite common. The most prominent example is when American media covered the Iraq War during the Bush Administration. The news platforms such as *The Washington Post* and *The Chicago Tribune* journalists used descriptions such as "positive stories about war"; "pseudo news reports"; "good news about war"; and others to euphemized the term propaganda (Ryabova 2013).

Many studies on the use of euphemism in mass media have been conducted. Musfiroh (2014) conducted one of the studies titled *"A Study of Euphemism Used by President Barack Obama in the First Inaugural Address."* In this study, Musfiroh focused on finding the types and functions of euphemism used by Obama in his inaugural speech. Another study was conducted by Prasetyo and Widyastuti (2014) titled *"Application of B. Warren's Model to Political Euphemisms in United States Presidential Debate 2012."* This research only focused on finding the types of euphemism in verbal language, namely presidential debate. The next study was conducted by Ardhan (2018) titled *"Euphemism Used by Anies Baswedan and Sandiaga Uno Candidate Pair in the First Round of Jakarta Gubernatorial Election Debate 2017."* This study identified the types of euphemism as well as the functions of euphemism made by Anies Baswedan and Sandiaga Uno in a gubernatorial election debate. Another study was done by Setiawan (2018) titled *"Euphemisms In Cosmopolitan Magazine of United Kingdom."* This research identified the types of euphemisms formation and the functions related to sex such as body's part, disease, and death in *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. Furthermore, the next study was conducted by Dewi, Huda, and Supriyatno (2019) titled *"An Analysis of Euphemism in Online Written Mass Media in Indonesia; Jakarta Post and Republika Newspaper in Political Section."* In this study, they observed the types and functions of euphemism and the most frequent type of euphemism formations and functions in the Politics section of *The Jakarta Post* and *Republika* online newspapers.

From the examples of several previous studies mentioned above, all of the studies discussed the types of euphemism and the motives or the function of the

euphemism. Moreover, the majority of the studies above focus on finding the types and the functions of euphemism in a political context. From the examples above, the sources of data used by the previous research vary. Three out of five previous studies mentioned above used speeches from an important person, and the other is speeches from presidential debates. In contrast, the rest used mass media such as magazines and newspapers, which is to be expected because written language and oral language can be used to find out the use of euphemism. However, none of the previous studies that focused on finding euphemism types and functions in the political sphere uses English newspapers, and the *Cosmopolitan* magazine one is focused on finding euphemism in other spheres. Instead, the study that focused on political news articles used *The Jakarta Post*, Indonesia's daily English language newspaper, and the *Republika* newspaper.

Therefore, in this study, the writer focuses on identifying the types of euphemism and the functions of euphemism in political news articles. *The New York Times* is chosen to be the subject of the study because it is one of the most popular newspapers in the United States, with a large readership, and it has won the most Pulitzer Prizes of any newspaper (Britannica 2020). The writer is interested in exploring the euphemism used in the Election 2020 news articles of *The New York Times* since euphemism is regarded as one of powerful linguistic tools for controlling power in the media. Furthermore, presidential elections are important occasion in American political life, and two strong candidates will be frequently brought up in the news articles. The 2020 Election has changed because of the pandemic, starting with the changes in voting process and campaign method,

canceled conventions, as well as public health and economic and racial inequality happening urging the public to reconsider what qualities they want in the next president elect (Ball 2020). Considering the coverage of such topics, this study looked at the way *The New York Times* utilized euphemism in their coverage of the Election 2020. Moreover, the writer uses news articles as the object rather than using speech as an object of research like some previous studies have done. These become the writer's reasons to study the use of euphemism in *The New York Times* online newspaper when delivering the news about Election 2020.

This study aims to identify the euphemism formations found based on the theory of types of euphemism by Allan (2012) and describe the functions of euphemism based on the theory of euphemism function by Burrige (2012). Allan (2012) proposed the eleven types of euphemism formations, namely remodeling; contractions (clipping, acronym, abbreviation, and omission); general for specific; part-for-whole; upgrades, downgrades, deceptions, and obfuscations (circumlocution, litotes or understatement, and hyperbole or overstatement); substitution; appearance-based metaphor; color-based metaphor; sound-based metaphors or onomatopoeia; smell, taste, and touch-based X-phemism; and verbal play. Burrige (2012) also suggested the six functions of euphemism, namely protective euphemism; underhand euphemism; uplifting euphemism; provocative euphemism; cohesive euphemism; and ludic purpose.

Based on the explanation above, This study is a useful piece of information and reference for the next researchers who will conduct a euphemism study. This research aims to give better knowledge and understanding about the types and

functions of euphemism that is used in the election 2020 news articles published in *The New York Times* newspaper, as well as to give a contribution to the linguistic field.

### **1.2 Statements of the Problem**

The writer formulates statements of the problem based on the information given in the background above, and the writer formulates research questions such as the following:

1. What are the types of euphemism formations found in the Election 2020 news articles of *The New York Times* Online Newspaper?
2. What are the functions of euphemism found in the Election 2020 News Articles of *The New York Times* Online Newspaper?

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study in relation to the problem are:

1. To describe the types of euphemism formations found in the Election 2020 news articles of *The New York Times* Online Newspaper.
2. To explain the functions of euphemism formations found in the Election 2020 news articles of *The New York Times* Online Newspaper.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**



The result of this study is intended to give benefit to the readers and to contribute to the linguistics field. The result of this study is also expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the euphemism phenomenon. As for the theoretical contribution, the researcher expects that this study of euphemism can give wider knowledge about the types and function of euphemism itself for future researchers who want to conduct research regarding euphemism. As for the practical contribution, the researcher expects that this study may help people understand the implicit meaning of words used in news articles and may help journalists use correct euphemism when addressing political issues to avoid unpleasant words.

### 1.5 Definition of Key Terms

1. **Euphemism:** Words with meanings or sounds that are considered nicer, clearer, or elevated in some way and used as replacements for words that in sound or sense are considered unpleasant, crude, or ugly. (Wilson 2006)
2. **Types of Euphemism Formations:** The classification of euphemisms into eleven categories in the form of linguistic strategies that lead to the creation of new forms in language by putting forward new expressions, or new meanings to avoid harsh words (Allan 2012).
3. **Function of Euphemism:** Euphemism's tasks that explain how the euphemism is used in a specific circumstance (Burridge 2012.)

4. **US Presidential Election 2020:** The 59th quadrennial presidential election in the United States, held on Tuesday, November 3, 2020, where Joe Biden and Kamala Harris from the Democratic party defeated the Republican party of President Donald Trump and vice president Mike Pence. (Blood and Riccardi 2020)
5. **The New York Times online newspapers:** The electronic website of *The New York Times* provides instant access to most of the content of the daily newspaper for readers around the world. (Lichterhan 2016)