

Euphemism And Social Prejudice In The 2024 Presidential Debate: Anies's Rhetoric Toward Prabowo

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze euphemistic expressions that reflect social prejudice in the 2024 Indonesian presidential debate, specifically those used by Anies Baswedan in reference to Prabowo Subianto. The study is significant in revealing how linguistic strategies are employed in political communication to deliver implicit yet ideologically charged criticism. Adopting a qualitative descriptive method within an ethnocommunicative framework, data were collected through passive participatory observation, note-taking, and documentation of debate recordings and transcripts. The data were analyzed using content analysis in five stages: problem formulation, theoretical framework development, methodological design, application of analytical techniques (classification, semantic interpretation, and contextual inference), and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that Anies Baswedan employed three types of euphemism—underspecification, overstatement, and understatement (*litotes*)—to express negative evaluations containing various forms of social prejudice, including stereotyping, social judgment, and antilocution.

Keywords: *Content Analysis, 2024 Presidential Debate, Political Euphemism, Covert Communication, Social Prejudice.*

1. Introduction

Entering the 2024 election stage, the political debate forum between presidential candidates and vice-presidential candidates has become an important activity held by the General Election Commission (KPU). Presidential election debates in Indonesia are held in accordance with the provisions of Law Number 23 of 2003. Based on Article 36, paragraph (2), candidate pairs are required to present their vision, mission, and programs orally or in writing to the public (Yuniarto, 2024). This step is an important part of an ideal campaign, and one of its implementations can be realized through public debate or open debate between candidates.

In the presidential candidate debate, the candidates explain their vision and mission, as well as the programs they will implement in the next five years to attract public sympathy. Apart from that, they are also expected to provide arguments and responses to questions related to social and government issues. It can be said that in this debate, the candidates debate each other to strengthen their ideologies and ideas and promote themselves in order to gain public support. According to Aditya Perdana, political science lecturer at the University of Indonesia and director of Algorithmic Research and Consulting, presidential candidate debates still have a significant impact on people who are looking for clarity regarding the programs promoted by each pair of candidates (Aco, 2023).

The essence of political debate usually lies in the candidates' ability to project a positive image and promote themselves, while covering up their weaknesses and their party. On the other hand, they tend to highlight the negative image and weaknesses of their opponents in public, especially in the context of presidential candidate debates in Indonesia. Debate competitions generally involve differences of opinion in response to the issues being discussed, so the language used is often firm. In an effort to win an argument, candidates often use language that is hasty, subjective, and accompanied by negative prejudices towards their debate opponents.

However, negative sentiments are not always conveyed directly. Instead, they are often disguised in the form of euphemistic expressions, which serve to soften harsh criticism or mask ideological opposition in polite terms. Euphemistic communication, in this context, becomes a subtle strategy to deliver social prejudice without provoking overt backlash. Therefore, the political debate serves as a unique discursive arena where euphemistic expressions may become vehicles for implicit prejudice.

Clear differences in interests between candidates in a debate can amplify social problems, such as prejudice, that are difficult to avoid.

Increased support for certain groups can also exacerbate prejudice against other groups (Greenberg, 1990). According to Myers, the essence of prejudice is a negative assessment of a group and individuals from that group (Myers, 2012). Walgito stated that prejudice is an assessment of groups or individuals based on their affiliation with a particular group, which tends to lead to negative assessments. Evaluation of other groups is often seen as a need that is believed to improve the welfare of that group (Bimo, 2003).

In the context of the 2024 presidential election debate, candidates such as Anies Baswedan (serial number 1), Prabowo Subianto (serial number 2), and Ganjar Pranowo (serial number 3) often use statements that can be classified as prejudiced. As revealed in a statement made by one of the candidates:

"At a time when more than half of our soldiers do not have official residences, the minister (Prabowo), according to Pak Jokowi, has more than 340 hectares of land in this republic. I am clarifying the missing data, sorry Mr. Prabowo, the figure is too small, but it is 340 thousand hectares."

Anies Baswedan and Prabowo Subianto are two presidential candidates who are often the focus of public attention, especially in the political debate for the 2024 presidential election. In this context, Anies Baswedan often criticizes the performance of the Ministry of Defense under the leadership of Prabowo Subianto. This criticism has made the atmosphere in the presidential election debate even more heated.

To analyze this phenomenon, this study draws on the theoretical concept of attitude and prejudice in social psychology. According to Brigham (1991), there are two general approaches related to the concept of attitude. The first approach states that attitudes consist of three components: affection (feelings), cognition (knowledge), and conation (tendency to act). The second approach considers attitude as an evaluation or feeling towards an object (Abidin, 2009). In the context of prejudice, these two approaches are also relevant. Like the first approach to attitudes, the first approach to prejudice also consists of three elements: cognitive (beliefs about the characteristics of an individual or group), affective (emotional reactions towards a group or its members), and conative (actions that accept or reject an individual based on group membership). The second approach to prejudice follows the second approach to attitudes, which emphasizes the affective or emotional aspect. In this context, prejudice is defined as a negative emotional evaluation of individuals or groups based on their membership in a particular social group (Abidin, 2009).

In this study, researchers adopted a second approach to attitudes, considering attitudes as evaluations or feelings towards certain objects. The implication of applying this theory is that researchers also follow a second approach to prejudice, defining prejudice theoretically as a negative emotional evaluation of a particular social group. In the context of the 2024 presidential election political debate, this means interpreting Anies Baswedan's attitude towards Prabowo as a negative emotional evaluation.

Prejudice is one of the main themes in social psychology, describing a universal phenomenon in everyday social life, especially in the context of competition that strengthens hostility and produces negative judgments (prejudice) against other groups (outgroups). The study of prejudice, especially Anies Baswedan's expression towards Prabowo Subianto in the 2024 presidential election debate from a social psychology perspective, focusing on negative emotional evaluations and manifestations of prejudice, would be an interesting topic to research.

Several studies related to presidential candidate debates have been conducted previously. For example, research by Wanfau and colleagues (2020) reviewed "Content Analysis in the 2019 Presidential Candidate Debate of the Republic of Indonesia." (Wanfau, 2020). Apart from that, research by Wati Kurniawati and colleagues (2022) regarding "Semantic Power in Critical Discourse Analysis of the Jokowi-Amin, Prabowo-Sandiaga Presidential and Vice President Debate" (Wati Kurniawati, 2022). Next, Wilda Fizriyani and team (2023) explored "The Use of Language Style in the Political Speech of the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Candidate, Anies Baswedan." (Wilda Fizriyani, 2023). This research highlights the linguistic analysis of the 2019 presidential candidate debate as well as the language style in Anies Baswedan's 2024 political speech.

However, there has been no research that specifically examines the prejudice that Anies Baswedan may have shown towards Prabowo Subianto in the 2024 presidential election political debate. This research also tries to present innovation by applying a social psychology approach to analyze the negative emotional evaluation made by Anies Baswedan towards Prabowo Subianto in the political debate. Apart from that, this research also aims to examine the impact of these prejudices on behavior that may arise in the context of political debate. In particular, this study focuses on how euphemistic language can function not only as a rhetorical strategy but also as a subtle expression of social prejudice.

2. Method

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative method as its primary approach. A qualitative method is considered most appropriate as it enables an in-depth exploration of linguistic phenomena, particularly

euphemistic communication and its implicit socio-psychological functions in political discourse. Unlike quantitative approaches, this research does not seek to measure frequency or statistical relationships, but rather to interpret meaning and contextual nuance within political utterances (Creswell, 1998).

In addition, the study applies an ethnocommunicative approach, positioning communication as culturally-situated human behavior. Rooted in the tradition of ethnographic communication research, this approach highlights how language reflects cultural values, ideologies, and power relations in specific social contexts (Abar, 2000). The language of Anies Baswedan during the 2024 presidential debates is thus analyzed as communicative behavior embedded in political culture rather than merely as isolated linguistic data.

2.1. Data Sources and Collection Techniques

The primary data source consists of audiovisual materials from the 2024 Indonesian presidential debates, focusing on utterances by Anies Baswedan that potentially reflect euphemistic communication and social prejudice towards Prabowo Subianto. These materials were obtained from official KPU broadcasts and reputable media outlets. The audiovisual data were transcribed orthographically to identify relevant linguistic units, including words, phrases, and sentences containing implicit evaluative content.

Data collection was conducted through passive participatory observation, allowing the researcher to observe naturally occurring communicative acts without direct involvement in the interaction (Moleong, 2007). Supporting techniques included note-taking, recording, and document analysis. To ensure validity and reliability, triangulation of data sources and peer checking were applied. Selected data excerpts were reviewed by two independent coders to strengthen intercoder reliability.

2.2. Data Analysis Procedures

The study employs content analysis guided by the five-stage framework of Subiako (Subiako, 2006):

- a) Formulating the research problem, focusing on identifying euphemistic expressions with prejudicial significance.
- b) Constructing a theoretical framework, particularly drawing from social psychology and critical linguistics.
- c) Selecting methodological tools, including ethnocommunicative principles and qualitative textual analysis.
- d) Applying analytical techniques such as coding euphemistic forms, semantic mapping, and affective tone classification.

- e) Interpreting and discussing findings, linking them to political communication theories and the broader sociopolitical context of the 2024 presidential election

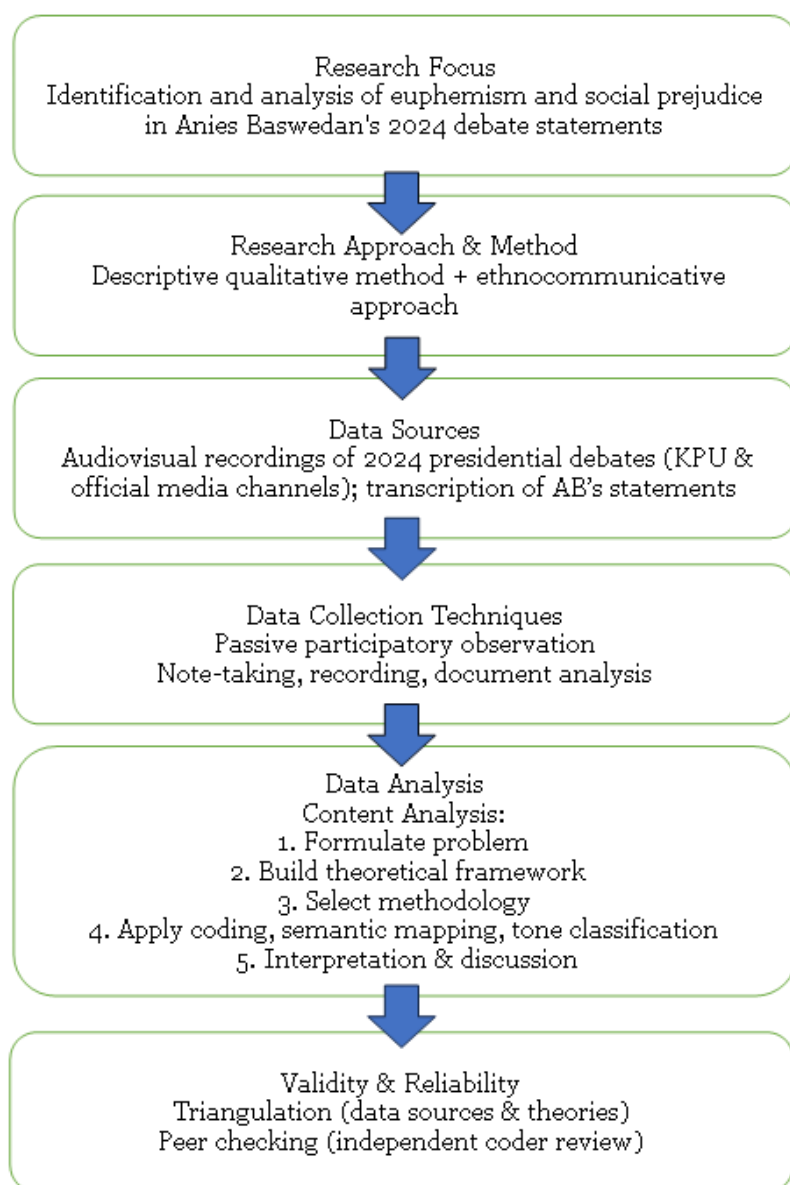


Figure 1. Research Diagram

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. *Euphemistic Strategies and Prejudice Mechanisms*

This section examines how euphemistic language was used by Anies Baswedan (AB) during the 2024 Indonesian presidential debate as a strategic rhetorical device to convey affective disapproval, criticism, and

forms of social prejudice toward his political rival, Prabowo Subianto (PS). The analysis identifies three primary euphemistic strategies: underspecification, overstatement, and understatement (litotes), and links each to specific social prejudice mechanisms: *stereotyping*, *social judgment*, and *antilocution*. The discussion draws upon relevant theoretical frameworks, including *framing theory* (Iyengar, 1990), *insinuation theory* (Berger, C. R., and Calabrese, 1975), *agenda-building theory*, *doublespeak* (Lutz, 2016), and classical *rhetoric* (Aristotle).

3.1.1. Underspecification

During the 2024 Indonesian presidential debate, Anies Baswedan (AB) strategically employed underspecification—the deliberate use of vague or generalized language—to indirectly criticize his political rival, Prabowo Subianto (PS). Rather than issuing direct accusations, AB utilized ambiguous references and emotionally suggestive phrasing to cast doubt or imply misconduct without committing to explicitly verifiable claims. This rhetorical strategy aligns with what BurrIDGE (2012) defines as euphemistic underspecification: linguistic vagueness used to obscure meaning, particularly when addressing taboo or sensitive political issues (K. BurrIDGE, 2012).

A content analysis of AB's debate performance identified 16 instances of underspecification. This quantitative pattern indicates not merely a spontaneous rhetorical style but a consistent and intentional strategy within his political communication. The frequent recurrence of such expressions—typically lacking clear attribution, contextual clarification, or evidentiary support—suggests a deliberate attempt to maintain plausible deniability while subtly shaping negative public perceptions. The following examples illustrate this strategy:

Data-1:

“When there is a violation of ethics and you remain with a vice presidential candidate who violates ethics, it means there is an ethical compromise.”

Data-2:

“At a time when more than half of our soldiers do not have official residences, while the ministers, according to Pak Jokowi, have more than 340 hectares of land in this republic.”

Data-3:

“When you led the Ministry of Defense, there were many ‘insiders’ in the procurement of defense equipment... then there were insiders in food estate management.”

These statements refrain from naming specific individuals, yet the references are clearly inferable. For instance, “a vice presidential candidate who violates ethics” in Data-1 strongly alludes to Gibran Rakabuming

Raka, while Data-2 and Data-3 indirectly critique Prabowo Subianto and senior government figures. This pattern illustrates how underspecification enables AB to imply serious accusations—such as unethical behavior, corruption, or misuse of power—without inviting direct rebuttal or legal consequences.

From the perspective of prejudice mechanisms, these utterances reflect at least three forms of social bias:

- a) Social Judgment: AB conveys moral evaluations implying systemic ethical failure, particularly through vague condemnations of corruption and inequality.
- b) Stereotyping: The portrayal of military and political elites as corrupt or exploitative reinforces negative generalizations about those in power.
- c) Antilocution: These indirect criticisms function as veiled attacks, allowing audiences to internalize negative impressions without the speaker needing to substantiate them explicitly.

These mechanisms of prejudice are embedded in linguistic ambiguity, enabling the speaker to shape ideological narratives while preserving decorum. According to framing theory, AB's statements exemplify thematic framing, where individual issues are presented as part of a broader moral crisis. Instead of isolating faults, AB crafts a frame of systemic dysfunction, thereby enhancing the rhetorical impact of his criticism.

Furthermore, insinuation theory (Berger, C. R. dan Calabrese, 1975) Explains how subtle verbal cues, suggestive tone, and indirect lexical choices can activate suspicion and erode an opponent's credibility. In this case, AB's rhetorical ambiguity—especially in references to “insiders,” “used equipment,” and “ethical compromise”—performs the function of antilocution: criticism without confrontation, allowing the audience to reach prejudicial conclusions independently.

The social implications of this strategy are significant. Euphemistic underspecification may reinforce public mistrust, normalize exclusionary narratives, and perpetuate political polarization. While euphemism appears to preserve civility, its instrumental use in veiling prejudice undermines ethical transparency and complicates democratic deliberation.

In conclusion, underspecification in AB's debate discourse functions not merely as a stylistic device but as a strategic rhetorical mechanism that activates social prejudice. Through calculated vagueness, AB was able to stereotype, judge, and delegitimize political opponents while avoiding direct verbal confrontation. This allows for persuasive influence under the guise of polite discourse, ultimately raising questions

about the ethical boundaries of political communication in democratic settings.

3.1.2. *Overstatement*

Euphemistic *overstatement* refers to the use of exaggerated or hyperbolic language to dramatize a message or amplify its perceived urgency. While often deployed to attract attention or reinforce an argument, it may also mask unverified claims or shape negative impressions of others through emotional intensity. BurrIDGE (2012) suggests that overstatement can conceal controversial meanings behind heightened language (K. BurrIDGE, 2012). In the 2024 Indonesian presidential debate, Anies Baswedan (AB) employed this strategy to intensify emotional resonance and indirectly criticize Prabowo Subianto (PS). The use of overstatement was identified in 15 instances throughout AB's statements during the debate. The following data excerpts illustrate this technique:

Data-4

AB: "On the 25th, Prabowo registered with the KPU as a vice presidential candidate, after the Constitutional Court's decision and then at the Constitutional Court the MKMK was formed, the results of which said that there had been a serious ethical violation which caused the decision made by the Constitutional Court to be ethically problematic."

Data-5

AB: "This ordeal phenomenon is annoying. Throughout Indonesia, we are facing an ordeal phenomenon. If you want to join a team, there are rules; if you want to become a teacher, there are rules... There are ordals everywhere."

Data-6

AB: "Over 800 million cyberattacks, human trafficking, child trafficking. How women and children became victims of more than 3,000 people, and drugs invaded Indonesia. 4.8 million people are exposed to drugs. Our families suffer because of this. And that's very painful."

These utterances reflect euphemistic overstatement in different forms:

In Data-4, the phrase "*serious ethical violation*" is an emotionally charged label that conveys moral condemnation without legal specificity. It functions as social judgment, framing the Constitutional Court's decision—and by implication, Prabowo's candidacy—as ethically illegitimate. In Data-5, the assertion "*there are ordals everywhere*" generalizes perceived nepotism or favoritism (*orang dalam*) to all levels of society. This hyperbole reflects stereotyping, reinforcing a public narrative that corruption is omnipresent and institutionalized, regardless of factual grounding. In Data-6, the mention of "*800 million cyberattacks*" and "*4.8 million drug victims*" represents numerical inflation or unverifiable claims.

These serve as antilocution, dramatizing societal threats to evoke fear and moral panic, while implicitly discrediting the current leadership.

Through these overstatements, AB constructs a rhetorical reality in which his opponent is associated with systemic failure and moral crisis. The exaggerations appeal to pathos, one of Aristotle's persuasive appeals, intended to stir public emotion and discredit opponents by amplifying fear, anger, or moral outrage (Kennedy, 2007).

This strategy aligns with agenda-building theory, which explains how issues are not only presented to the public but also ranked in importance (Cobb, R. W., & Elder, 1983). Overstatements function as framing tools that elevate specific threats—ethical violations, nepotism, national insecurity—above others, constructing a dominant narrative that marginalizes complexity or nuance.

While emotionally effective, such language raises ethical concerns when detached from verifiable data. Reviewer 2's concern is valid: claims such as “800 million cyberattacks” demand contextual verification to prevent rhetorical manipulation and distortion. Otherwise, overstatement risks becoming a tool of disinformation rather than discourse.

From the perspective of social prejudice, overstatement is a subtle yet powerful vehicle for reinforcing biased interpretations:

- a) *Social judgment*: assigning moral blame without due process through emotionally inflated language.
- b) *Stereotyping*: generalizing misconduct to entire systems or groups without clear evidence.
- c) *Antilocution*: propagating exaggerated critiques to provoke public disapproval of targeted figures or institutions.

In conclusion, euphemistic overstatement enables speakers to mobilize emotional responses while embedding prejudice in seemingly factual narratives. It dramatizes reality to activate suspicion, moral condemnation, and general distrust, especially potent in political discourse where persuasion depends not only on logic, but also on perception and affect.

3.1.3. Understatement (*Litotes*)

Understatement, particularly in the form of *litotes*, represents a rhetorical strategy that softens direct criticism through negation and subtle language. According to Burrige (2012), *litotes* involves the use of negative expressions to imply the opposite meaning, thereby reducing the apparent severity of the message while maintaining its critical intent (K. Burrige, 2012). In political rhetoric, this technique allows the speaker to express disapproval without openly confronting or offending opponents. It reflects what Lutz (2016) conceptualizes as *doublespeak*—language designed to

obscure, evade, or soften reality, often for manipulative purposes (Lutz, 2016).

During the 2024 Indonesian presidential debate, Anies Baswedan (AB) employed litotic understatement to subtly undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of government policies associated with his opponent, Prabowo Subianto (PS). This rhetorical strategy was identified in eight instances throughout AB's statements during the debate. The following examples illustrate this technique:

Data-7

AB: "People do not believe in the current democratic process."

Data-8

AB: "These days, the order in which we organize government is often not in accordance with legal principles."

Data-9

AB: "Add to that the cassava food estate that profits cronies, destroying the environment and producing no results."

These statements exemplify litotes—understatements that rely on negation or minimization to convey implicit critique. Rather than issuing direct accusations, AB uses softened phrasing to maintain a tone of civility while delivering sharp ideological criticism.

In *Data-7*, the expression "do not believe" subtly conveys a broad public distrust in democratic institutions, suggesting systemic disillusionment without overtly blaming specific actors. In *Data-8*, the phrase "not in accordance with legal principles" indirectly implies legal violations or misconduct, signaling structural dysfunction. Meanwhile, *Data-9* employs the phrase "producing no results" to criticize the failure of a government initiative, masking the accusation of incompetence behind a seemingly neutral observation.

Through these litotic constructions, AB performs rhetorical restraint that enhances ethos while activating audience suspicion, thus reinforcing euphemism's dual role as both communicative shield and affective cue.

From the perspective of social prejudice, these litotic statements embed the following dimensions:

- a) *Social judgment*: AB delivers veiled moral evaluations about the legitimacy of the democratic process (*Data-7*), the erosion of the rule of law (*Data-8*), and the misuse of public resources (*Data-9*), positioning the government as ethically and administratively flawed.
- b) *Stereotyping*: By referencing *cronies* and systemic policy failure, the speaker reinforces generalized perceptions of government as

corrupt, incompetent, and self-serving, contributing to a persistent stereotype of elite mismanagement.

- c) *Antilocution*: Rather than issuing direct accusations, AB employs softened rhetoric to encourage negative judgments. These litotic expressions serve as euphemistic antilocution—indirect criticism designed to incite public discontent while preserving the speaker's ethos as rational and respectful.

This rhetorical approach aligns with William Lutz's theory of *doublespeak*, in which seemingly neutral or polite language conceals aggressive critique (Lutz, 2016). In political settings, such strategies are instrumental in maintaining a composed public image while conveying strong disapproval. As Allan & Burridge (1991) argue, euphemisms can serve dual purposes: enhancing self-presentation and delivering veiled attacks (K. A. & K. Burridge, 1991).

The use of understatement in this context also appeals to *ethos*, one of Aristotle's rhetorical appeals. AB preserves his credibility and moral high ground by avoiding incendiary language, thus positioning himself as a balanced and measured leader. At the same time, the understated critique generates *pathos* by subtly appealing to public frustration over systemic failures.

In conclusion, litotes operates as a nuanced euphemistic strategy in political rhetoric, enabling speakers to express social prejudice through judgment, stereotyping, and veiled condemnation, without overt hostility. By concealing sharp critique beneath linguistic restraint, this approach allows speakers to shape public opinion, delegitimize opponents, and sustain persuasive narratives with minimal political risk.

Euphemistic language plays a pivotal role in formal communication by allowing speakers to convey messages diplomatically, minimizing the risk of offense or derogatory implications as a form of linguistic politeness. Nevertheless, in political discourse, euphemisms may function strategically to obscure meaning, mitigate criticism, or manipulate public perception. They can serve to veil dishonesty, subtly delegitimize opponents, and reinforce power structures, all while projecting an image of unity and inclusivity. In electoral debates, candidates often deploy euphemisms to moderate contentious statements, thereby safeguarding their elite status and avoiding direct confrontation (M. Anwar Firdousi, 2024)

Across all three types—underspecification, overstatement, and understatement—euphemism operates as both a linguistic and rhetorical strategy. These expressions allow AB to encode political criticism in polite, ambiguous, or dramatic terms that activate social prejudice toward PS without overt aggression. Underspecification enables the insinuation of

ethical failure. Overstatement magnifies public fear and discontent. Litotes delivers criticism with a softened tone but pointed implication.

All three contribute to stereotyping, moral judgment, and indirect condemnation (antilocution)—framing political opponents as corrupt, incompetent, or morally unfit, while protecting the speaker from direct reprisal.

Thus, euphemistic strategies not only shape the content of political messaging but also govern the tone, perception, and ethical plausibility of critique. They function as subtle yet potent instruments of political prejudice in the public sphere.

3.2. *Interactions between Euphemism and Political Rhetoric*

The interaction between euphemism and political rhetoric is both strategic and ideologically potent. Euphemistic strategies—such as underspecification, overstatement, and litotes—not only soften discourse but also serve rhetorical objectives rooted in classical persuasion. In political discourse, euphemism functions as more than a stylistic embellishment; it becomes a discursive shield that allows political figures to maintain a refined public persona (*ethos*) while delivering incisive critiques and moral judgments through implication rather than accusation. This interplay facilitates rhetorical ambiguity that enhances persuasion while concealing aggression.

Euphemisms enable politicians to construct ideological narratives, shape public opinion, and marginalize opponents, without triggering overt hostility or appearing confrontational. This supports the deployment of rhetorical appeals in the Aristotelian tradition:

- a) *Ethos*: Speakers appear composed, principled, and morally superior.
- b) *Pathos*: Emotional language amplifies perceived threats and mobilizes audience sentiment.
- c) *Logos*: Arguments are structured logically, even if supported by vague or exaggerated data.

For instance, when AB stated, “There are regulations everywhere that make meritocratic systems fail,” he employed overstatement not just to critique bureaucracy, but to evoke public frustration. While the statement seems general and factual, it subtly appeals to shared grievances—mobilizing pathos while preserving ethos.

By encoding negative evaluations in euphemistic form, speakers preserve deniability while activating audience cognitive bias and reinforcing in-group/out-group distinctions. This enhances their credibility and influence, especially in televised debates, where public image is paramount. As a result, rhetorical ambiguity becomes a form of soft

power—used to moralize, delegitimize, and reframe political opposition in ways that are difficult to rebut without appearing defensive.

3.3. *Euphemism as a Tool of Covert Prejudice*

The strategic use of euphemism in political rhetoric also functions as a vehicle for covert social prejudice. Rather than expressing bias through overt discrimination, euphemisms enable subtle signaling of negative stereotypes, moral judgments, and indirect condemnation. This practice can foster divisive narratives under the pretense of civility, contributing to polarization and social exclusion.

The following table illustrates how different euphemistic strategies interact with rhetorical function and prejudice mechanisms, as demonstrated in AB’s discourse during the 2024 presidential debate:

Table 2. Types of Euphemism, Rhetorical Functions, and Linked Prejudice Mechanisms in the 2024 Presidential Debate

Euphemism Type	Function in Rhetoric	Linked Prejudice	Example Data
Underspecification	Indirect moral judgment	Social judgment	Data 1–3
Overstatement	Emotional exaggeration	Stereotyping, fear, and bias	Data 4–6
Understatement (Litotes)	Softened criticism	Antilocution, minimization	Data 7–9

Each euphemistic type contributes to shaping audience perception while obscuring the speaker’s intentions. These rhetorical devices reinforce pre-existing public prejudices—such as the portrayal of opponents as corrupt elites or ineffective leaders—without incurring the risks of direct confrontation. As Allan and BurrIDGE (2007) observe, euphemism not only mitigates offense but can also “smuggle in” ideologically loaded judgments under the guise of linguistic politeness (K. A. & K. BurrIDGE, 2007).

This mapping reveals how euphemistic rhetoric is calibrated not only to avoid overt conflict but also to exploit latent biases in audience cognition, making prejudice appear rational, indirect, and socially acceptable.

3.4. *Manifestations of Prejudice*

While Section 4 explores the rhetorical and ideological role of euphemism in political communication, this section focuses on the specific linguistic strategies employed by AB during the debate and how each contributes to particular manifestations of prejudice. To better understand how euphemistic strategies translate into real-world prejudice, this section

explores the specific manifestations of prejudice—namely, stereotyping, social judgment, and antilocution—as reflected in the debate excerpts.

3.4.1. *Stereotyping*

Stereotyping refers to generalized assumptions about the behavior or character of individuals based on group membership, often shaped by incomplete information and subjective bias. In intercultural and political communication, stereotypes hinder objective assessment by reducing individuals or groups to oversimplified traits (Shoelhi, 2015). In the context of the 2024 presidential debate, Anies Baswedan (AB) employs rhetorical strategies that reveal stereotypical judgments, particularly aimed at delegitimizing political rivals such as Prabowo Subianto (PS). The following data excerpts illustrate this:

Data-10

AB: These days, the order in which we organize the government is often not in accordance with legal principles.

Data-12

AB: So it's not a decision to shop for defense equipment based on taste and based on past preferences.

Data-13

AB: Not establishing a Republic for the benefit of his group or his family.

In Data 10, the claim that the government frequently acts against legal principles constructs a broad negative generalization, framing government behavior as systematically flawed. Data 12 suggests that procurement decisions in the defense sector are often guided by subjective preferences rather than rational considerations, implying institutional incompetence or self-interest. Data 13 furthers this narrative by insinuating nepotistic motives, suggesting that some political actors prioritize familial or group interests over national duty.

These statements do not refer to specific individuals or offer empirical substantiation, thereby functioning as rhetorical stereotyping. They convey a consistent portrayal of the ruling elite as ethically compromised, self-serving, and detached from public interest. This aligns with the theory of social stereotyping, which denotes the cognitive act of attributing fixed traits to individuals based on group affiliation, often in exaggerated or distorted ways. AB's rhetorical construction capitalizes on these pre-existing public biases, amplifying collective suspicion of political insiders.

Moreover, the strategy also incorporates several key rhetorical features:

- a) Generalization without Specific Evidence – Statements such as “often not in accordance with legal principles” lack empirical grounding, reinforcing generalized distrust.

- b) Negative Framing – By implying that procurement is influenced by “taste and past preferences,” AB delegitimizes the decision-making competence of defense officials.
- c) Implicit Moral Condemnation – The reference to establishing a republic “for the benefit of his group or family” encodes a moral critique without direct accusation.

These rhetorical moves serve to frame the opponent within a morally inferior, corrupt archetype. Such framing sustains negative social imagery while protecting the speaker from direct rebuttal, given the absence of named referents or concrete claims. Ultimately, stereotyping in AB’s debate performance functions both as a persuasive technique and a vehicle of covert prejudice. It reinforces existing societal divides by repackaging subjective critique as apparent moral reasoning—thereby shaping public perception through implication rather than confrontation.

3.4.2. *Social Judgment*

One of the salient manifestations of social prejudice is predisposition in decision-making, in which individuals form judgments based on prejudice or stereotypes rather than objective evidence or critical reasoning. This is often realized through social judgment, which refers to the process by which individuals evaluate events, policies, or persons as right or wrong, influenced by social explanation, social learning, pragmatic language use, and emotional reasoning (Nuqul, 2018). In other words, social judgment often reflects biased or emotionally driven interpretations that lack empirical grounding.

In the 2024 presidential debate, Anies Baswedan (AB) demonstrated this rhetorical pattern through the following statements:

Data-14

AB: In reality, Sir, when you led the Ministry of Defense, there were many 'insiders' in the procurement of defense equipment.

Data-15

AB: Then there are insiders in managing the food estate. Add another cassava food estate that profits cronies, destroys the environment, and doesn't produce anything.

Data-16

AB: There are regulations everywhere that make meritocracy not work, that make ethics disappear.

Data-17

AB: And the practices of insiders that I mentioned earlier will damage the foundations of our national life, damage us.

Each of these statements reveals elements of subjective judgment framed as objective observation. In Data-14, the use of “many insiders” suggests a sweeping assertion without supporting data, relying instead on insinuation to evoke suspicion. Data-15 uses emotionally charged phrases

such as “profits cronies” and “destroys the environment,” which frame the opposing party in a negative light through value-laden generalizations. Similarly, Data-16 employs hyperbolic language—“regulations everywhere”—to suggest systemic dysfunction without concrete reference. Finally, Data-17 invokes national peril—“will damage the foundations of our national life”—amplifying emotional stakes through rhetorical escalation rather than factual analysis.

These examples typify social judgment as a rhetorical strategy. Several features characterize this usage:

a) Subjectivity

AB’s statements reflect personal or ideological evaluations rather than neutral observation. For instance, “*That’s precisely where the problem lies*” reveals a definitive stance without elaborating on factual causality.

b) Emotional Appeal

Statements such as “*it is ironic that the Ministry of Defense will be the Ministry that will be hacked by hackers*” are constructed to provoke outrage or disillusionment, enhancing political appeal through pathos.

c) Lack of Empirical Support

Assertions regarding “insiders,” “cronies,” and “damage” are made without verifiable data, indicating reliance on rhetorical persuasion over evidentiary reasoning.

d) Political Instrumentality

The statements are aimed at achieving specific political goals—undermining opponents, constructing a favorable self-image, and appealing to voter sensibilities. For instance, “*When there is a violation of ethics and you continue with a vice presidential candidate who violates ethics...*” constructs a narrative of moral superiority.

e) Shaping Public Perception

AB’s rhetoric seeks to influence how audiences perceive both the issues and the opposing candidate’s credibility. Through repeated reference to ethics, corruption, and national damage, the speaker fosters distrust and urgency around specific issues.

These rhetorical strategies are closely aligned with the theory of agenda building, an extension of agenda-setting theory. While agenda-setting focuses on media influence over what the public thinks about, agenda-building refers to the active role of political actors in constructing the salience and framing of political issues (Scheufele, 2000); (Tewksbury, 2007).

In this context, AB is not merely addressing topics of national interest—he is strategically framing them to resonate with voters’ emotions

and values. His use of social judgment does not aim solely at informing; it attempts to steer public discourse, mobilize opinion, and position himself as a credible reformist in contrast to the status quo. Through emotionally resonant, albeit often unverifiable, claims, the speaker curates an image of political and moral clarity while delegitimizing his opponents.

Such use of social judgment as rhetorical strategy underscores the intersection between language and power in political debates. It enables a candidate to simultaneously critique, persuade, and polarize—without the burden of empirical substantiation. This has profound implications for democratic discourse, where clarity, accountability, and transparency are essential for informed civic engagement.

3.4.3. *Antilocution*

Antilocution, as conceptualized by Samovar et al. (1981, p. 124), represents the earliest and most subtle stage in the manifestation of prejudice. It occurs when individuals or groups speak negatively about others in their absence, often within peer groups or closed circles, without engaging in direct confrontation. This form of prejudice is characterized by derogatory language, criticism, or ridicule directed at another group or individual, frequently masked under the guise of opinion or commentary (Samovar, L. A., Porter, R. E., & Jain, 1981).

In the context of the 2024 Indonesian presidential debate, instances of antilocution are evident in the discourse of Anies Baswedan (AB), particularly in his critiques of defense-related issues. Consider the following exchanges:

Data-18

GP: The defense budget is not yet ideal. I said earlier that we need 1–2% of GDP; currently, it is still 0.78%. To purchase defense equipment, we still have to rely on debt, and our debt in 2023 increased from 20.7 billion to 25 billion dollars. In fact, I need to extend our Strategic Plan target for 2024, as it has only reached 65.49% of the minimum essential force. What is the economic defense solution to catch up and strengthen our defense?

AB: Ensure that corrupt practices are eliminated... eliminate middlemen in defense procurement, such as laws and regulations that mandate G-to-G schemes or direct deals with manufacturing corporations... we are talking about clean defense spending without involving corporations tainted by corruption. This ensures budget efficiency and prevents leakage.

Data-19

AB: At that time, you also gave an assessment of law enforcement performance in Indonesia, scoring it a five. Now, what is your score for the Ministry of Defense under Mr. Prabowo's leadership? Please, Mr. Ganjar.

GP: Also five. I have the data and will present it—I've prepared it all.

AB: Our TNI, military, and police perform extraordinarily in the field and deserve

our respect. But in my view, policy management has deteriorated. During President SBY's era, salaries were increased nine times; during this era, only three increases occurred—one planned for the election year. Meanwhile, performance allowances are not given serious attention—only 80% are fulfilled. Look at the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Public Works; ministers are working to improve allowances there. Now look at the used defense equipment—the risk falls on our soldiers. They protect every inch of this republic's territory, yet they are unsupported. So in my opinion, the score is below five, Mr. Ganjar, if five is your benchmark.

These statements reveal the characteristics of antilocution in several ways:

- a) Use of Negative and Demeaning Language
AB's language includes pointed criticism that undermines the integrity and performance of the Ministry of Defense, such as referring to “middlemen,” “corrupt corporations,” and “used defense equipment.” Though framed as concern, these statements serve to delegitimize the target institution without direct substantiation or engagement.
- b) Indirect Accusation Without Engagement
The criticism is not directed through dialogue with representatives of the Ministry of Defense but rather broadcast to a wider audience in a confrontational style that does not permit rebuttal. This pattern aligns with Allport's (1954) definition of antilocution—prejudicial speech behind the subject's back, rather than face-to-face confrontation.
- c) Public Denunciation in the Absence of the Criticized Party
Although delivered in a public forum, AB's statements are strategically addressed to the audience and his political opponents, not to those directly responsible for the policies in question. This indirect mode of critique reinforces stereotypes and negative assumptions without granting the criticized party a fair chance to respond.
- d) Shaping Public Perception Through Implicit Accusation
AB's rhetoric, through emotionally charged examples and comparative framing (e.g., contrasts with previous administrations), guides the audience toward viewing the current Ministry of Defense as inefficient or unethical. This framing functions as an act of indirect social exclusion, reinforcing negative images without overt hostility.

This pattern of discourse aligns with Gordon Allport's (1954) theory of prejudice, particularly the stage of antilocution as a gateway to more severe forms of bias. As emphasized by Pettigrew (1998), such speech is damaging because it normalizes prejudice under the cover of free expression or political critique, perpetuating stereotypes without accountability.

In conclusion, Anies Baswedan's rhetorical strategies in the 2024 presidential debate exemplify how antilocution operates in modern political discourse. His comments, while not overtly discriminatory, function to subtly marginalize opposing figures and institutions through implied moral and administrative failure. Such rhetorical tactics contribute to broader patterns of political polarization, where civility masks covert prejudice and critique becomes a conduit for social othering.

3.5. *Ethical Ambiguity and Interpretive Complexity in Political Euphemism*

The strategic use of euphemism in political discourse offers rhetorical advantages but simultaneously raises profound ethical and interpretive concerns. Euphemism functions not merely as a tool of stylistic decorum but as a mechanism of framing, concealment, and potentially, ideological manipulation.

On one hand, euphemistic language allows political figures to maintain civility, protect public image, and engage broader audiences without overtly inflammatory remarks. This strategic ambiguity, a common rhetorical device in political communication, helps politicians craft messages that are flexible in interpretation and shielded from legal or reputational risk.

However, the consistent recurrence of emotionally loaded, vague, and ideologically suggestive phrases—such as references to “insiders,” “ethics violations,” or “used defense equipment”—indicates deliberate patterning rather than neutral ambiguity. These rhetorical choices, especially when paired with a lack of evidentiary support, align with what scholars identify as covert forms of prejudice.

This ambiguity complicates public perception and democratic deliberation in several ways:

- a) **Manipulation of Public Understanding:** Euphemistic expressions may downplay serious issues, such as corruption or ethical violations, by couching them in softened or indirect language.
- b) **Reinforcement of Prejudice:** Social stereotypes and moral judgments can be embedded in neutral or abstract phrasing, allowing the speaker to activate audience bias without explicit accusation.
- c) **Erosion of Accountability:** Vague or generalized critiques resist direct rebuttal, weakening the norms of mutual transparency essential in democratic debate.
- d) **Obfuscation of Deliberative Clarity:** Euphemism blurs the boundary between critique and insinuation, making it difficult for the public to assess the factual basis or ethical intent of political claims.

The distinction between cognitive prejudice (generalized stereotypes or beliefs) and emotional prejudice (disdain, anger, moral outrage) becomes central here. AB's use of logos-appearing statements that are not empirically substantiated—such as questionable statistics or sweeping generalizations—suggests a predominance of affective rhetoric over rational argumentation.

Thus, while the euphemisms in the 2024 presidential debate may be interpreted as tactics of strategic ambiguity, their frequency, emotional tone, and ideological orientation strongly support their interpretation as rhetorical instruments of soft prejudice. They do not merely preserve decorum—they shape public bias while shielding the speaker from direct accountability.

Ultimately, the ethical use of language in democratic discourse demands more than politeness—it requires clarity, integrity, and a commitment to truth. Euphemism, when weaponized, becomes a threat to informed citizenship, ethical representation, and fair political competition.

4. Conclusion

This study has examined the strategic use of euphemism in Anies Baswedan's rhetorical performance during the 2024 Indonesian presidential debate, with a particular focus on how euphemistic expressions function as covert instruments of social prejudice. The analysis identified three primary types of euphemism—underspecification, overstatement, and understatement (litotes)—each of which corresponds to distinct prejudice mechanisms: stereotyping, social judgment, and antilocution. Through these strategies, negative evaluations were communicated implicitly, reinforcing in-group favoritism and delegitimizing the political opponent without direct confrontation.

The findings suggest that euphemistic political language is not merely a matter of stylistic choice but a powerful rhetorical and ideological tool that can normalize bias under the guise of civility. By encoding social prejudice in emotionally charged yet vague expressions, political actors may shape public perception, reduce accountability, and contribute to affective polarization. This mode of communication, while effective in preserving political decorum, poses serious ethical concerns for democratic discourse, especially in contexts where voters depend on clarity, honesty, and fairness to make informed decisions.

The implications of this study point to the urgent need for critical literacy in political communication and media discourse. Understanding how language manipulates perception and perpetuates exclusionary narratives is essential for safeguarding democratic values and promoting social cohesion in Indonesia. The study also underscores the role of

euphemism in eroding deliberative clarity, as rhetorical ambiguity can obscure ideological hostility and hinder meaningful debate.

However, this study is limited by its focus on a single political figure and one debate event, which may not capture the full complexity of euphemistic strategies across parties or over time. Future research should expand the data scope by incorporating cross-party comparisons, examining multiple debate events, or exploring audience reception to euphemistic rhetoric. Additionally, studies may investigate the relationship between euphemism and political misinformation or assess how euphemistic framing influences voter attitudes and trust.

In conclusion, euphemistic language in political discourse must be approached not only as a linguistic phenomenon but as a socio-political force. When weaponized to subtly embed prejudice, euphemism threatens democratic accountability and social unity. Scholars, educators, and political communicators must remain vigilant in unpacking the ethics of such discourse, ensuring that linguistic politeness does not mask ideological exclusion.

Table 3. Euphemism Types, Prejudice Mechanisms, and Communicative Implications

Type of Euphemism	Mechanism of Prejudice	Communicative Implication
Underspecification	Stereotyping	Implicitly reinforces group identity superiority, masks direct accusations.
Overstatement	Social judgment	Amplifies flaws of the opponent, frames the opponent negatively without overt hostility.
Understatement (Litotes)	Antilocution	Minimizes the value/competence of the opponent while maintaining civility

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