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'Hedges' and Media Ethics: A Case in Indonesian Newspaper

Agus Hari Wibowo^{a*}, Nuraini Yusoff^b

^aUniversitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta 57127, Indonesia

^bUniversiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

Abstract

This paper attempts to reveal the use of 'hedges' as the realization of media ethics on newspaper. Hedges, expressing 'grey' meaning, are widely used by the journalists to convey certain information related to ethics. According to ethics, sensitive case associated with 'ethnicity', 'race', 'religion', and 'social group' should be presented in prudent way to avoid conflict which might appear among parties involved in the news. Accordingly, such information might not clearly and explicitly expressed. This paper will discuss the relationship between hedges realized in impersonating and protecting participants and journalistic ethics codes. This is a case study of 'hedges' employed in the editorial of *Solopos*, local Indonesian newspaper published in Surakarta.

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1. Introduction

'Hedge' is a term commonly used in economics to mean a method to anticipate risk that might happen due to the possible price changes (Winardi, 1989). Literally, the meanings of 'hedges' are 'barrier, limit, or defense' (Cabanes, 2007). There are similarities of underlying meaning of hedges used in economics and in linguistics. Watson and Hill (1997) state that 'hedges are linguistic forms which express the speaker's certainty or uncertainty about the proposition under discussion. As a matter of fact, the term 'hedges' in linguistics was firstly proposed by Lakoff (1972), which means words whose job is to make things more or less fuzzy. Swan, Deumert, Lilis, and Mesthrie (2004) suggest that *'a hedge or hedging involves the use of words or phrases that express some degree of*

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +6281329256245; Fax: +62271632488

E-mail address: ahw@uns.ac.id

qualifiaction or uncertainty.'

Referring to the clues concerning the sense of 'hedges', in this paper, the term 'hedges' refer to the linguistic units which have fuzzy meaning due to the skeptic belief on the proposition. Furthermore, 'hedges' are used with the purpose of protection and defense. Linguistically 'hedges' are realized into such linguistic units as adverbials, epistemic verbs and modal verbs, clausal structures, hypothetical constructions and the anticipatory it-clausal constructions (Heng & Tan 2000).

The study of 'hedges' has been done by some experts with different points of view, i.e., hedging in scientific articles (Hyland, 1998), hedges in woman language (Holmes, 1990). Different from the aforementioned studies, this paper aims to combine the study of hedges from linguistic and journalistic point of view, more particularly on media ethics. Concerning the relationship between 'hedges' and media ethics, there are three aspects that will be discussed, i.e., journalistic ethics, impersonation, and protecting participants (Wibowo, 2011). The media as the objects of study is a local Indonesian newspaper published in Surakarta, Central Java, i.e. *Solopos*. Founded in 1997, this newspaper has developed as non-governmental newspaper with its slogan 'increasing the dynamics of the society'. *Solopos* is chosen as the object of study, since the newspaper constitutes the leading newspaper in Surakarta which is widely distributed in such areas around Surakarta municipality as in Boyolali, Wonogiri, Karanganyar, Sragen, Klaten, and Surakarta.

2. Hedges and journalistic ethics

In any organization, ethics plays an important role when one should deal with the things related to morality. Frost (2007, p. 9) states that ethics is a way of studying morality when individuals face specific cases of moral dilemma. At their most praise-worthy, the journalist's tussles are going to be between the right of public to know and some other moral tenet – perhaps the invasion of an individual's privacy – which would militate against publication. In journalism, Keeble (2001, p. 174) cites that according to ethics, a journalist must avoid the referral of the degrading and harmful condition to the ethnicity, skin color, and religion, and do not convey the details of the ethnicity, skin color, and religion unless it is absolutely associated with the news.

Two things essentially concerned with the ethical principles of journalism involve reporting the true facts and corresponding with the interests and public virtue (Jacquette, 2010, p. 215). In Indonesia, the rules or regulations relating to journalism are Press Law and Ethics of Journalistic Codes.

According to Press Law, Article 1 paragraph (10) Press Law No. 40 of 1999 states that "Right to Reject is the right of journalist, by profession, refusing not to reveal names or other identities of news sources that must be kept secret (Directory Press Indonesia 2002-2003, 2003)." In addition to that article, Press Law Article 5 paragraph (1) states "National press is obliged to proclaim the events and opinions with respect to religious norms and a sense of public decency and the presumption of innocence (Directory Press Indonesia 2002-2003, 2003)."

By referring to this legislation, when delivering the activities of trial court, the newspapers deliver them with care in accordance with the press regulation. In connection with the case that happens in court, based on the Decree of the Press Council No. Kode 1/SK-DP/200 on Journalist Ethics Indonesia (KEWI), journalists should uphold the principle of 'presumption of innocence', as set forth in Code number 2 which confirms: Indonesian journalists should respect the presumption of innocence, should not mix up fact with opinion, should be balanced and should always check the accuracy of information and should not be plagiarism (Directory Press Indonesia 2002-2003, 2003).

The codes require that journalists in reporting and broadcasting of information, not to judge or make conclusions based on their assumption, particularly for the cases that are still on going in court. Therefore, in the following examples, journalists use the 'hedges' because the case has not been fixedly decided in court.

- Slamet might not be gambler (Solopos, 2 April 2007).
- He might just be in place and wrong time (Solopos, 2 April 2007).
- Or, even if he was caught gambling, it was unlikely that it was his habit (Solopos, 2 April 2007).

The journalist uses 'hedges' which are realized in the form epistemic modality 'might', adverb 'probably', and conditional 'if' when giving a review about case about a government officer who was caught gambling. 'Hedge' is used because the case has not been legally decided by the court that the suspect is found guilty, because the newspapers follow the rules respecting 'presumption of innocence'. De Fleur (2007) also states that journalists should be careful when naming crime suspect before being formally resolved in the trial court.

According to the Ethics of Journalistic Code of PWI (Indonesian Journalists Association), the principle of 'presumption of innocence' is described in article 3 number 7 which states that "Coverage in the course of examination of criminal cases in court proceedings must be animated by the principle of 'presumption of innocence', in the sense that the new suspect is considered innocent person to have committed a crime until he is found guilty in a court decision which has fixed supremacy. Aji (1990, p. 82) emphasizes that the journalist should have wisdom in reporting the coverage of court trial on behalf of the reputation of the suspect.

3. Impersonation as ethics

The strategy of impersonation is used in reporting events which are considered as serious matters which might threaten the nation safety. The conflicts are usually linked to the case of SARA (*Suku* 'ethnicity', *Agama* 'religion', *Ras* 'race, and *Antar Golongan* 'social group'). The newspapers try to prevent the conflict widespread. In other words, the journalists strive to set peace in the society. This can be done by way of changing 'specific' terms to the 'general' ones. In religion conflict, for example, the newspaper will prefer to write 'holy place' to 'mosque' or 'church'. By so doing it will result in creating peace and in preventing the condition become worse.

Prabhakar and Basu (2007) assert that media can reduce conflict in society. This will contribute much in supporting the jobs of the journalists in peace journalism. Journalists make report on events by reducing the potential for violence in order to create the atmosphere of 'peace' (Hanitzsch, 2007; Obony & Fackler, 2009). In Indonesia, despite the various problems in reporting incidents of conflict, journalists still try to help creating peace (Ibrahim, 2008). Journalists may indirectly play a role to prevent or reduce the burgeoning conflict. In other words, reporters should become intermediaries rather than the parties who are hostile and try to provide a solution to the problem at hand.

In the following examples, the newspaper seems carefully to disguise the actors with the aim at (1) protecting the participants involved in the conflict, and (2) preventing the conflict become worse.

- This time, friction occurred between the '*oknum*' of 732/Banau Infantry Battalion personnel and police in Ternate, North Maluku Ternate (North Maluku), Monday (24 / 9) (Solopos, 29 September 2007).
- The reason for the lack of well-being makes '*oknum*' of the army or the police betray his oath as a servant of the state (Solopos, 27 September 2007).

In these examples, the newspapers are vigilant in giving reviews, because the participants involved in the conflict were the member of the military and police force. To save the good name of the institution of military forces and police, and to prevent the conflict between those forces, newspapers use the term '*oknum*' which means 'individual'. By this way, the image of the institution remains good, as it is not broken up by the bad-mannered soldier or police. In short, impersonation constitutes an ethics which turns out to be the strategic way to maintain harmonious relationships among the society.

4. Protecting participants as ethics

Hedges are used by the journalist to protect participants - persons or institutions - related to the news in newspaper. The people or institution protected include: news sources, journalists and newspaper.

News sources or informants must be protected because journalism regulations explicitly guarantee their rights. Gamble and Gamble (1986, p. 111) point out that if the journalists and the news sources have agreed to be 'off the record', the journalists should get along with the deal. It means that the journalists do not need to mention names and identity of the news sources. Usually the reporters state "from sources unnamed" to protect news sources as well as to keep the validity of the news.

If the reporters do not protect sources even betray, reporters will have difficulty in getting the news in the future. In addition, this condition may lead lives of journalists and news sources in danger. Prabhakar and Basu (2007, p. 161) affirm "Journalists recognise that betraying sources not only inhibits their own ability to investigate; it also makes it more difficult for every journalist to work, and may even put their lives at risk, as well as the safety of the informants."

In Indonesia journalistic regulation, protection of news sources is called '*hak tolak*' a 'right to reject', which

means, journalists have the right not to mention the news sources. This right is intended to give protection to the news sources and to keep the validity of the news as the news sources are safe of being intimidated from individuals who oppose the news. This right is enshrined in Article 1 paragraph (10) Press Law No. 40 of 1999 which states that: Right to reject is the right of journalist, by profession, refusing not to reveal names or other identities of news sources that must be kept secret (Wahidin, 2006, p. 220).

In addition, in the Press Law, protection of news sources are also specified in the explanation of Code of Journalistic Ethics No. 6 which states, “Indonesian journalists protect informants who are not willing that their names and identity to be explicitly stated. Under the agreement, the request to be kept secret should be respected (Directory Press Indonesia 2002-2003, 2003).”

When dealing with cases of ethnics, race, and religion, or sensitive cases which involve children, the prudence of the journalists in the coverage of news is essential. The caution is intended to protect children and people involved, including families that might suffer from the harm (Jones, Finkelhor, & Beckwith, 2010).

5. Conclusion

The employment of hedges as linguistic units in journalism, more particularly on newspapers is unavoidable. The various kinds of ‘hedges’ realized into such forms as adjective, adverbs, epistemic modality, if-clauses, etc. which provide grey meaning are closely linked with the media ethics. There are three important aspects on the employment of hedges in media; journalistic ethics, impersonation, and protecting participants. Putting it another way, ‘hedges’, as linguistics units have contributed very important aspects to the media, particularly the media ethics. In addition, the use of ‘hedges’ in newspaper may serve as a medium to create peace among the society (peace journalism). Presenting exact and accurate information to the public is really necessary, but many aspects need to take into account.

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