

Rhetoric of the State: A Discourse Analysis of the 2023 State of the Nation Address

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the euphemistic expressions used in the 2023 State of the Nation Address (SONA). Focusing on their types and pragmatic functions. Recognizing that euphemisms are common rhetorical strategies in political discourse, this research aims to identify and classify these expressions and examine the semantic, social, and cultural functions within the context of Filipino communication norms. The study employed a qualitative research design using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its methodological lens. Euphemisms were extracted from the official transcript of the 2023 SONA and analyzed using Allan and Burridge's typology for classification, while Zhang's framework guided the functional analysis. A total of nine euphemistic expressions were identified and examined. Findings reveal that metaphorical euphemisms were the most dominant type, followed by circumlocution and understatement. Semantically, euphemisms primarily functioned metaphorically to soften or re-frame politically sensitive issues. Socially, they served as politeness strategies that helped maintain a respectful tone and avoid confrontation. Culturally, all euphemisms reflected Filipino-specific values such as indirectness, unity, and emotional sensitivity. Hence, euphemisms in the 2023 SONA were strategically employed not only to manage public perception but also to reflect and reinforce prevailing cultural norms in political communication. These findings provide insights into the subtle use of language in national rhetoric and offer a basis for developing instructional materials in discourse analysis.

KEYWORDS: Euphemism, State Of The Nation Address, Political Discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis, Filipino Culture

ARTICLE DETAILS

Published On:

21 August 2025

Available on:

<https://ijiissh.com/>

INTRODUCTION

The State of the Nation Address (SONA) is a presidential speech that is a crucial platform where the Philippine President communicates achievements, priorities, and policy directions. In this context, Cuarte and Obenza (2024), assert that presidential speeches are political discourse that employs rhetorical devices such as euphemism—linguistic devices used to sugarcoat or filter sensitive and offensive words and statements. In particular, it is considered an essential component of a political discourse, as euphemism, mild or indirect expressions used in place of harsh or blunt terms—are often employed in political speeches to frame issues favorably. Furthermore, Lustanas and Litao (2024) argue that euphemisms remain “a tool of manipulation and deception.” Euphemisms allow politicians to re-frame negative realities in ways that protect institutional image, mask failure, and protect self-interest without triggering backlash.

In addition, Crespo-Fernandez (2014) and Aytan et. al (2021), stressed that politicians employ euphemisms as a strategic way to make something sound nicer and less upsetting, build a good political image, avoid offensive statements towards marginalized individuals, criticize their political rivalry in polite manner, and avoid or mitigate public backlash. It helps politicians to achieve their goal such as persuading the public's perception, filter sensitive topics, avoid direct accountability, and protect their political image.

In the Philippine, there are several extensive studies regarding euphemisms in political context. Lustanas (2014); Cuarte and Obenza (2024) analyzed numerous news articles and presidential speeches and found out that Euphemisms are being used not just to establish good relationships but also to deceive audiences. It is important to note that none of these previous studies analyzed the State of the Nation Address (SONA), a presidential speech mandated by the Philippine Constitution to be delivered annually.

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Hence, this study aims to identify the types of euphemisms employed using a critical discourse analysis in the 2023 SONA. It also aims to analyze their semantic, social, and cultural functions. This understanding helps foster critical thinking skills and political awareness among Filipino students.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design specifically the critical discourse analysis (CDA) solely focused on the 2023 State of the Nation Address (SONA) of the President. Critical Discourse Analysis is a research method that delves and analyzes the hidden discrimination, power, and control (Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

This single-case study was guided and anchored on the framework established by Wodak and Meyer (2015). They explained that critical discourse analysis may be utilized in small-scale studies as it does not rely on the numbers of the analyzed text, but rather on depth and relevance. They emphasize that such an approach prioritizes social relevance over the quantity of data, and what matters the most is that the selected data allow the researcher to show the obscured power relation, ideological strategies, discursive manipulation; the cognitive, social, cultural functions of language used.

This design was well-suited for exploring how euphemisms function ideologically and linguistically in political discourse.

The primary source of data for this research was the official 2023 SONA speech transcript of the President. The data were composed of 21 pages with 8257 words and retrieved from the official website of the Presidential Communication Office and examined and analyzed.

The selection of this particular SONA speech was based on its significance as a comprehensive articulation of the administration's policy directions and national priorities, making it a rich source for analyzing the strategic use of euphemistic language in political discourse. The following criteria were considered in choosing the data source: First, Institutional and Social relevance – SONA is an annual report mandated by the Philippine Constitution. The incumbent Philippine President delivers the speech to report the national status and the legislative agenda. It holds institutional weight as it carries the administration's official stance on the key national issues, making it a potent data for critical discourse analysis. Second, the discursive discourse and ideological content, SONA is a political discourse which contains languages and rhetorical devices carefully framed to influence public perceptions and opinions and even to filter sensitive agenda. It aligns with Cuarte and Obenza (2024), stating that presidential speeches contain rhetorical devices such as euphemisms used to conceal offensive and negative realities. Lastly, unlike the 2022 SONA which was inaugural and vision oriented speech, 2023 SONA was chosen because it was politically pivotal as it offered administrations own ideological stance regarding national key issues. La Vina et. al (2023), state that the 2023 SONA was a redirection of the President Bong Bong Marcos highlighting evidence and science-based approaches and the importance of rule of law.

Each euphemism was coded under the following categories: types of euphemism (based on Allan & Burridge, 1991; semantic feature: metaphorical, metonymical, and Vague (Zhang, 2025); Social function: politeness, taboo, embellishment, and humor (Zhang, 2025); and cultural function: universal culture, culture specific, and social group (Zhang, 2025). The extracted euphemisms were sent to the experts for the reliability test to ensure that the identified euphemisms were reliable.

This study strictly adhered to ethical principles of respect, fairness, and integrity to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research (Polit & Beck, 2020). Since the data analyzed consisted exclusively of publicly available discourse—the 2023 State of the Nation Address (SONA) of the President. No human participants were involved, and therefore, issues related to participant consent and privacy were not applicable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The State of the Nation Address 2023 centered on the theme of unity and progress amid global and domestic challenges. He highlighted the government's key achievements during his first year in office, including economic recovery efforts, infrastructure development under the "Build Better More" program, modernization of agriculture, expanded access to digital services, and continued investments in health, education, and clean energy.

Throughout the speech, the President framed complex national issues—such as inflation, public debt, bureaucratic inefficiency, and geopolitical tensions—in optimistic and diplomatic language. His administration's campaign against illegal drugs was portrayed as reformative rather than punitive, while peace and reconciliation efforts with former insurgents were emphasized as signs of national healing. He also declared the arrival of the "Bagong Pilipinas" or "New Philippines," positioning his leadership as ushering in transformative change.

The speech used carefully constructed euphemisms to soften political realities, build public trust, and promote a future-oriented national narrative. These linguistic choices provided fertile ground for examining how political discourse employs euphemism as a rhetorical strategy.

Types of Euphemisms

Metaphorical euphemisms were the most frequently used (77.78%), followed by circumlocution and understatement. These types

were strategically selected to soften political statements and re frame sensitive issues.

Metaphorical euphemisms allow the political figures to frame their statement into a positive tone exemplifies below:

Extract 1 “The campaign against illegal drugs continues – but it has taken on a new face.” The statement “The campaign against illegal drugs continues – but it has taken on a new face.” is an example of metaphorical euphemism as defined by Allan and Burrige (1991), explaining the metaphor in euphemism conceal harsh, unpleasant, and offensive statements. The phrase “But has taken on a new face” indirectly implies that his administration will continue to fight the illegal drugs, but will not follow the implementation style of his predecessor, which is known for a “bloody war against illegal drugs”. In this regard, the phrase “new face” is a figurative comparison to a new policy or way of combatting the illegal drugs. This euphemism reframed the new identity of the campaign in a politically accepted way, avoiding direct confrontation with the concerned parties, while stating the narratives of the development.

Extract 2 “Unscrupulous law enforcers and others involved in the highly nefarious drug trade have been exposed.” This statement is an example of circumlocution type of Euphemism - the use of indirect and elaborate phrasing to avoid direct expression. Instead of bluntly saying “corrupt cops” or “police killers”, it replaces that with “Unscrupulous law enforcers and others involved”. The phrase avoids direct naming of subjects, wrapping the accusation in a longer and more tactful form. This is consistent with Allan and Burrige (1991) framework that circumlocution is used to conceal the offensive statement using longer and or indirect words.

Extract 3 “We have now progressed together towards peace and development.” This statement is a metaphorical euphemism that re frames violence and political instability. Instead of directly using words such as conflict, violence and insurgency, the statement presented a forward-moving of unity, peace and development. This is consistent with Allan and Burrige (1991) framework, this metaphorical euphemisms function to replace taboo objects with more acceptable explanation and figurative expressions that imply the same implied meaning. The statement avoided divisive language and promoted unity which also reflects polite Filipino Culture.

Extract 4 “Former adversaries are now partners in peace.” This statement exemplifies metaphor in euphemisms. It symbolically transformed “former adversaries” from the enemies of the state into peace-building partners (partners in peace). According to Allan and Burrige’s (1991) metaphorical euphemism function by obscuring socially taboo concepts with figurative expressions that soften its impact. The phrase “former adversaries” may refer to rebel groups, while “partners in peace” re-branded their identity into positive note.

Extract 5 “We will install individuals with unquestionable integrity.” The statement is metaphorical euphemism because it implicitly compared the unnamed former government officials into corrupt officials. The concept “Integrity” is abstract and utilized metaphorically to represent purity and incorruptibility - without saying that the predecessors lacked these traits. This is consistent with Allan and Burrige (1991) framework, these metaphorical euphemisms function to replace taboo objects with more acceptable explanation and figurative expressions that imply the same implied meaning. The statement avoided divisive language and promoted unity which also reflects polite Filipino Culture.

Extract 6 “The state of the nation is sound, and is improving.”The extracted euphemism is an example of understatement, the phrase “The statement of the nation is sound” used to minimize the severity and reality of the situation by using this vague language. Describing the country and only using the phrase “sound and improving” downplays the economic, societal, and political issues, making the situation appear more stable. This is consistent with Allan and Burrige (1991), explaining that understatement euphemism is being used to downplay the significance of something by replacing the negative statement with the positive opposite to avoid blunt, unpleasant, or taboo words.

Extract 7 “Dumating na po ang Bagong Pilipinas (The New Philippines has arrived).” The statement “The New Philippines has arrived.” reflects metaphorical euphemism, it is consistent with Allan and Burrige’ (1991) notion that metaphorical euphemism is a rhetorical device used to replace unpleasant statements with a more acceptable explanation. The phrase “Bagong Pilipinas” or “The New Philippines” does not literally mean a newly established state or country, but metaphorically conveys a renewed or re-branded vision of the national government. It also implicitly avoided stating the failures and controversies of the previous administration while symbolically conveying a notion of radical reform and hope.

Extract 8 “We will build better, and more. This statement is an example of metaphorical euphemisms. It conveys the continuity of the “Build, Build, Build” program of the previous administration. The words “Better” and “More” imply improved infrastructure projects without directly mentioning the lapses or failures on the infrastructure projects of the previous administration. It makes the statement sound more positive and avoids direct criticisms of the previous administration. It is in line with Alan and Burrige (1991), stating the notion that metaphorical euphemism is a rhetorical device used to replace unpleasant statements with a more acceptable explanation.

Extract 9 “Unity was what made us rise once more.” The statement is an example of metaphorical euphemism equating the nation’s recovery with the abstract concept and value of unity. As defined by Allan and Burrige (1991), metaphorical euphemisms replace taboo objects with more acceptable explanation and figurative expressions. In this context, the word “Unity” indirectly mentioned the division of the past that hindered or slowed the national development. It is also a metaphorical euphemism encompassing the consolidated efforts into a potent and emotional notion.

The most prevalent euphemistic expression employed in corpus is metaphorical. This suggests that political discourse such as the 2023 SONA employs such rhetorical devices. As it enables politicians to frame narrative into their favor such as in addressing sensitive national issues and in criticizing their political opponents. Crespo-Fernandez (2018) reveals that the American politicians utilize euphemisms as “discursive strategies”, and the communicative function of these euphemistic expressions, both metaphorical and non-metaphorical, is a major strategy for the legislators for self protection and positive-self presentation. It enables them to address the marginalized sector of society in an inoffensive manner, criticize their political opponents in socially acceptable ways, and to frame critical narrative into their favor. For instance, the statement “We have now progressed together towards peace and development.” is a metaphorical euphemism that reframes violence and political instability. Instead of directly using words such as conflict, violence and insurgency, the statement presented a forward-moving of unity, peace and development. Another example, the statement “The campaign against illegal drugs continues – but it has taken on a new face.” Both statements are examples of metaphorical euphemisms as defined by Allan and Burrige (1991), explaining the metaphor in euphemism is used to conceal harsh, unpleasant, and offensive statements. The phrase “But has taken on a new face” is an indirect implication that the current administration shall implement different strategies in combating illegal drugs which his predecessor is known for a “bloody war against illegal drugs”. In this regard, the phrase “new face” is a figurative comparison to a new policy or way of fighting the illegal drugs. This euphemism reframed the new identity of the campaign in a politically accepted way, avoiding direct confrontation with the concerned parties, while stating the narratives of the development.

Furthermore, mitigation devices such as hedges, euphemisms, and parenthetical verbs are integral components of Philippine Presidential Speeches. These rhetorical devices enable political leaders to soften statements, express empathy, and manage public expectations. These also serve as an aid for politicians to maintain credibility, avoid direct accountability, and build audience trust in sensitive situations.(Cuarte & Obenza, 2024). Additionally, Crespo-Fernandez (2018) states that politicians employ linguistic tools such as euphemisms to ensure that they communicate in socially acceptable manner. Otherwise, it puts their positive public image at risk.

ON EUPHEMISTIC FUNCTIONS

Semantic Functions:

Most euphemisms functioned metaphorically, framing unpleasant or controversial realities through figurative expressions. A small number exhibited vague or metonymic functions.

Extract 1 “The campaign against illegal drugs continues – but it has taken on a new face.”The phrase “new face” is a metaphorical statement that replaces the previous violent connotation of the drug war. According to Zhang (2025), metaphorical euphemisms compare unpleasant realities with more neutral or positive tones. In this context, the “New face” implies the renewed or perhaps more humane approach indirectly referring to the aggressive approach of the previous administration.

Extract 2 “Unscrupulous law enforcers and others involved in the highly nefarious drug trade have been exposed.” The statement above is an example of the metonymic semantic function of euphemism. The phrase “Unscrupulous law enforcers and others involved” indirectly pertains to corrupt or abusive police officers. Metonymy, according to Zhang (2025), uses related concepts to obscure harsh and unpleasant realities.

Extract 3 “We have now progressed together towards peace and development.” The phrase “peace and development.” metaphorically replaces the concepts of armed violence particularly insurgencies that happened in the past such as the Marawi Siege. It creates a tone of progress without naming the prior violence. According to Zhang (2025), metaphorical euphemisms compare unpleasant realities with more neutral or positive tones

Extract 4 “Former adversaries are now partners in peace.” The symbolic transformation of “former adversaries” to “Partners” uses metaphor to rebrand, soften and reframe the identity of rebel groups into positive note. According to Zhang (2025), metaphorical euphemisms compare unpleasant realities with more neutral or positive tones.

Extract 5 “We will install individuals with unquestionable integrity.” The statement “unquestionable integrity.” is metaphorical euphemism that implies the removal of corrupt officials which reframe the statement positively. According to Zhang (2025), metaphorical euphemisms compare unpleasant realities with more neutral or positive tones.

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Extract 6 “The state of the nation is sound, and is improving.” The phrase “sound, and is improving” is vague and non-specific language to conceal the many serious issues of the Philippines. It is consistent with Zhang (2025), who explains the vague semantic function of euphemisms as an intentional usage of ambiguous terminologies to soften the unpleasant impact of realities.

Extract 7 “Dumating na po ang Bagong Pilipinas (The New Philippines has arrived).” The phrase “Bagong Pilipinas” (The New Philippines”) does not literally mean a newly established state or country, but metaphorically conveys a renewed or radical change being implemented without explicitly naming the failures of the previous administration. According to Zhang (2025), metaphorical euphemisms compare unpleasant realities with more neutral or positive tones.

Extract 8 “We will build better, and more.” The words “Better” and “More” imply improved infrastructure projects without directly mentioning the lapses or failures on the infrastructure projects of the previous administration. It is consistent with Zhang (2025), stating that metaphorical euphemisms compare unpleasant realities with more neutral or positive tones.

Extract 9 “Unity was what made us rise once more.” The word “Unity” avoided mentioning the political division that took place in the past that contributed or hindered the national progress of the Philippines. It is also a metaphorical euphemism encompassing the consolidated efforts into a potent and emotional notion. It is consistent with Zhang (2025), stating that metaphorical euphemisms compare unpleasant realities with more neutral or positive tones.

Generally, the most pervasive semantic function of the identified euphemisms employed in the 2023 SONA speech of Bong Bong Marcos is metaphor. These framed his speech into a more positive and softened version. It reframes sensitive issues into favorable manners, making it more appealing and convincing. Some euphemisms such as “Build Better More” and “has taken a Face” are strategically framed to highlight the improved approach of his administration in dealing with complex issues without directly mentioning the failures of the previous administration. Thus, this rhetorical device helped the incumbent president frame his speech into more acceptable and persuasive ways while avoiding direct confrontation with concerned individuals. It is consistent with Zhang (2025) that states euphemisms serve to sugarcoat and soften the unpleasant realities through figurative language. This is evident in repeated phrases like “Bagong Pilipinas” and “A New Face” - which suggest reforms and national renewal without mentioning the past shortcomings.

This notion is aligned with Crespo-Fernandez (2018), highlighting that politicians utilize metaphorical euphemisms to deliver speeches in a sound and socially acceptable way. It helps them to achieve communicative, social, and political goals.

Therefore, the semantic function of the prevalent euphemisms in 2023 SONA is metaphorical. They functioned to soften and reform unpleasant statements into positive political narratives and positive self presentation. As Wang (2024) notes that euphemisms in political discourse function (SONA) to disguise harsh truths.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

The predominant social function was politeness (77.78%), serving to maintain respect and avoid direct confrontation or blame. Taboo avoidance and embellishment also appeared in select cases.

Extract 1 “The campaign against illegal drugs continues – but it has taken on a new face.” This euphemism helps structure the contentious issue of drug war in a more acceptable manner, showing an attempt to rebrand or soften this public fear and criticism. It maintains a diplomatic tone and avoids confrontation. It is consistent with Zhang (2025), explaining that politeness euphemisms are primarily used to show politeness, respect, courtesy, and avoid someone feeling embarrassed.

Extract 2 “Unscrupulous law enforcers and others involved in the highly nefarious drug trade have been exposed.” The phrase “Unscrupulous law enforcers” is a taboo euphemism used to implicitly express the concept of corrupt and dishonest law enforcer. It is in line with Zhang (2025), stating that Taboo euphemism is used to replace sensitive or taboo topics. This euphemistic expression is structured to avoid blunt and offensive expressions which by not doing so are considered culturally taboo in Philippine context. In the Philippine context, taboo pertains to action, topic, or behavior that is socially and culturally prohibited because it violates moral, religious, cultural and social norms. This concept applies across domains of life including social behavior, religion, sexuality, and politics. For instance, publicly talking about “sex” is widely unacceptable in a conservative society such as the Philippines. By doing so, it is labelled a “dirty” subject due to deeply cultural and moral discomfort associated with it. Same logic applies in political context wherein discussing corruption is not just considered unethical - they are perceived as moral violations. Discussing them openly can be socially and politically dangerous mostly to those who are in power. It risks public outrage, damages reputation, and challenges the legitimacy of the institution (Manarpiis, 2022).

Extract 3 “We have now progressed together towards peace and development.” The phrase “progressed together towards peace and development.” is a euphemism that functions as a politeness strategy. Such a phrase, instead of directly mentioning the past atrocities and armed conflicts, this diplomatic language prevents confrontation and blame. Thus, it aligns with the social function

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of politeness euphemisms in Zhang's (2025) framework which states politeness euphemism is mainly used to show politeness, respect, courtesy, and avoid someone feeling embarrassed.

Extract 4 "Former adversaries are now partners in peace." The phrase "former adversaries" is a euphemism for politeness, it conceals the harshness of the past armed conflict with the rebels. The phrase "are now partners in peace" also promotes reconciliation and inclusivity which reflects a polite action. It is consistent with Zhang (2025) explaining the politeness euphemism is used to show respect, politeness, courtesy, and avoiding someone feeling embarrassed.

Extract 5 "We will install individuals with unquestionable integrity." The phrase "individuals with unquestionable integrity" is a concrete example of politeness euphemisms as it avoids bluntly stating and condemning corrupt officials. Such a statement also maintains and preserves respect while signaling reform. Zhang (2025), states that this euphemism is mainly used to express respect and courtesy.

Extract 6 "The state of the nation is sound and is improving." The statement above is an example of embellishing euphemism, the phrase "sound, and is improving" beautifies or exaggerates facts to make negative realities appear positive (Zhang, 2025). The word improving may have exaggerated the growth that his administration achieved. In contrast, Reuters reported that the Philippine poverty rate is at 15.5% in 2023 which is relatively high. Thus, such a statement - "sound and improving" was utilized to project a positive image despite harsh reality.

Extract 7 "The New Philippines has arrived." The phrase "New Philippines" is a metaphor for a systematic change without directly naming the failures of the previous administration. Such phrases highlight progress without blaming the previous government - keeping a hopeful tone and avoiding confrontation. This is consistent with Zhang (2025), explaining that politeness euphemisms are used to express politeness, respect, and avoid making someone feel embarrassed.

Extract 8 "We will build better, and more." The words "Better" and "More" imply improved infrastructure projects without directly mentioning the lapses or failures on the infrastructure projects of the previous administration; instead, it creates a tone of positivity and progression. It is consistent with Zhang (2025), explaining that politeness euphemisms are used to express politeness, respect, and avoid making someone feel embarrassed.

Extract 9 "Unity was what made us rise once more." The statement is an example of politeness euphemisms as it avoids politicizing success or assigning blame, instead giving credit to shared effort.

Generally, the 2023 SONA speech pervasively employed politeness euphemisms which can be attributed to his belief that the key to national progress is unity is exemplified in the following statements: first the "Former adversaries are now partners in peace." re frame the bluntness of the past armed conflict with the rebels. The phrase "are now partners in peace" also conveys the notion of reconciliation and inclusivity which reflects a polite action. Next, "We will install individuals with unquestionable integrity." is a statement that conceal the bluntness of the term, "corrupt officials" These statements maintain and preserve respect while signaling reform. Which is consistent with Zhang (2025) stating that polite euphemisms are mainly used to express respect, courtesy and avoid confrontation.

This is supported by Goffman's Face Theory which was further developed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The face notion entails the concept that human beings build, maintain, and protect public self image every time that they engage in social interactions. Goffman emphasized that communication is not just the converser's words or what they say, but how they are perceived when they engage in social communications. In this sense, interlocutors carefully choose their words, tone, and behavior to protect their social image.

Additionally, Brown and Levinson further explained the face notion in their politeness theory stating that humans naturally want to maintain their positive public image. Thereby, individuals adhere to social norms and utilize politeness strategies - such as politeness euphemisms - to avoid damaging one's or own image by beautifying discourse. Furthermore, one aspect of the politeness theory, particularly the positive face, explains that it is humans' desire to be appreciated and accepted.

Thus, the social function of the employed euphemisms in 2023 is politeness as the interlocutor employed polite euphemistic expressions to uphold a positive image while minimizing potential face threats to others such as the former administration.

CULTURAL FUNCTIONS

Culture-specific functions dominate (100%), showing strong alignment with Filipino values like unity, politeness, and avoidance of confrontation. Euphemisms such as "Bagong Pilipinas" invoke national identity while downplaying systemic failures. Though, all identified euphemisms (100%) reflected culture-specific functions, demonstrating alignment with Filipino values such as hiya, pakikisama, and indirectness. These reinforced the cultural preference for harmonious and non-confrontational discourse.

Extract 1 "The campaign against illegal drugs continues – but it has taken on a new face." This euphemism helps structure the contentious issue of drug war in a more acceptable manner, showing an attempt to rebrand or soften this public fear and criticism.

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It maintains a diplomatic tone and avoids confrontation. It is consistent with Zhang (2025), explaining that politeness euphemisms are primarily used to show politeness, respect, courtesy, and avoid someone feeling embarrassed.

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Extract 3 “We have now progressed together towards peace and development.” The phrase “progressed together towards peace and development.” is a euphemism that functions as a politeness strategy. Such a phrase, instead of directly mentioning the past atrocities and armed conflicts, this diplomatic language prevents confrontation and blame. Thus, it aligns with the social function of politeness euphemisms in Zhang’s (2025) framework which states politeness euphemism is mainly used to show politeness, respect, courtesy, and avoid someone feeling embarrassed.

Extract 4 “Former adversaries are now partners in peace.” The phrase “former adversaries” is a euphemism for politeness, it conceals the harshness of the past armed conflict with the rebels. The phrase “are now partners in peace” also promotes reconciliation and inclusivity which reflects a polite action. It is consistent with Zhang (2025) explaining the politeness euphemism is used to show respect, politeness, courtesy, and avoiding someone feeling embarrassed.

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Extract 6 “The state of the nation is sound and is improving.” The statement above is an example of embellishing euphemism, the phrase “sound, and is improving” beautifies or exaggerates facts to make negative realities appear positive (Zhang, 2025). The word improving may have exaggerated the growth that his administration achieved. In contrast, Reuters reported that the Philippine poverty rate is at 15.5% in 2023 which is relatively high. Thus, such a statement - “sound and improving” was utilized to project a positive image despite harsh reality.

Extract 7 “The New Philippines has arrived.” The phrase “New Philippines” is a metaphor for a systematic change without directly naming the failures of the previous administration. Such phrases highlight progress without blaming the previous government - keeping a hopeful tone and avoiding confrontation. This is consistent with Zhang (2025), explaining that politeness euphemisms are used to express politeness, respect, and avoid making someone feel embarrassed.

Extract 8 “We will build better, and more.” The words “Better” and “More” imply improved infrastructure projects without directly mentioning the lapses or failures on the infrastructure projects of the previous administration; instead, it creates a tone of positivity and progression. It is consistent with Zhang (2025), explaining that politeness euphemisms are used to express politeness, respect, and avoid making someone feel embarrassed.

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Generally, the cultural functions of euphemisms used in the 2023 State of the Nation Address (SONA) evident with 100% of the identified euphemisms aligning with culture-specific functions as defined by Zhang (2025). These linguistic expressions reflect deeply rooted Filipino cultural values, particularly the prioritization of social harmony in communication, respect in discourse, and avoidance of confrontation. Euphemisms such as “new face,” “unity,” “Former adversaries”, “unquestionable integrity” and “Bagong Pilipinas,” reframe politically sensitive issues into more diplomatic and positive narratives, avoiding direct confrontation while projecting hope and progress.

Many of the identified euphemisms serve politeness strategies, especially that those help preserve and uphold positive public images and preserve interpersonal harmony. According to Brown and Levinson theory of politeness, people are concerned with upholding

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their positive public image – that humans long for appreciation and approval of others. Thus, 2023 SONA employs carefully crafted language to maintain a positive public image and adhere to social norms.

Thus, the euphemistic expressions employed in 2023 SONA Speech exemplify the Filipino brand of politeness – communicative strategy that softens the impact of negative statements and promotes hopeful national image. These rhetorical choices are not only linguistic tools but are deeply embedded in the Filipino socio-cultural framework, aligning with the President's standpoint and belief that unity is essential to progressive Philippines.

CONCLUSION

The use of euphemisms in the 2023 SONA reflects a calculated rhetorical approach to political communication. By employing metaphorical and polite expressions, the speech presented sensitive national issues in a softened and culturally acceptable manner. These euphemisms not only shaped public perception but also mirrored deeply rooted Filipino communication values. Overall, the findings affirm that euphemisms function beyond linguistic substitution—they serve as tools for social diplomacy, cultural reinforcement, and narrative control within political discourse. The use of a single corpus in this study serves as its limitation. The future researchers may conduct similar studies employing various SONA Speeches and Cross-administration SONA.

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