



The Crisis of Ethics in Public Officials' Communication Language in the Context of Nationalism and Governance

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Abstrak

Kata kunci:
Etika Bahasa,
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Nasionalisme,
Pemerintahan

Bahasa komunikasi pejabat publik merupakan representasi etika, moralitas, dan tanggung jawab dalam menjaga stabilitas nasional dan legitimasi pemerintahan. Namun, belakangan ini banyak muncul fenomena krisis etika berbahasa, ditandai dengan ujaran yang kontroversial, diskriminatif, hingga mengandung unsur ujaran kebencian. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis krisis etika bahasa komunikasi pejabat publik dalam perspektif nasionalisme dan tata kelola pemerintahan. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada analisis relasional antara etika bahasa pejabat publik dengan nilai nasionalisme dalam konteks tata kelola pemerintahan yang demokratis. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya pembinaan etika komunikasi berbasis nilai Pancasila dan prinsip komunikasi politik etis. Metode yang digunakan adalah library research dengan menelaah literatur, artikel ilmiah, dan berita kredibel terkait isu etika komunikasi pejabat publik di Indonesia. Peneliti menggunakan teori etika komunikasi untuk menganalisis data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa krisis etika bahasa berdampak pada melemahnya kepercayaan publik, menurunnya wibawa negara, serta berpotensi memicu disintegrasi sosial. Krisis etika bahasa pejabat publik bukan hanya persoalan linguistik, tetapi juga terkait erat dengan legitimasi pemerintahan dan integritas nasionalisme. Bahasa yang kasar, diskriminatif, atau provokatif tidak hanya merusak etika komunikasi, tetapi juga merusak persatuan nasional dan legitimasi pemerintah. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pejabat publik perlu menginternalisasi etika komunikasi berdasarkan nilai-nilai moral, Pancasila, dan prinsip-prinsip demokrasi untuk menjaga martabat bangsa.

Abstract

Keywords:
language ethics,
public
communication,
nationalism,
government

The language of communication of public officials represents ethics, morality, and responsibility in maintaining national stability and government legitimacy. However, recently, there has been a frequent phenomenon of language ethics crisis, characterized by controversial, discriminatory speech, and even containing elements of hate speech. This study aims to analyze the crisis of language ethics in public officials' communication from the perspective of nationalism and

governance. The novelty of this study lies in the relational analysis between the language ethics of public officials and the value of nationalism in the context of democratic governance. This study emphasizes the importance of fostering communication ethics based on Pancasila values and the principles of ethical political communication. The method used is library research by reviewing literature, scientific articles, and credible news related to the issue of communication ethics of public officials in Indonesia. Researchers use communication ethics theory to analyze data. The results of the study indicate that the crisis of language ethics has an impact on weakening public trust, decreasing state authority, and has the potential to trigger social disintegration. The crisis of public officials' language ethics is not only a linguistic issue, but is also closely related to the legitimacy of government and the integrity of nationalism. Abusive, discriminatory, or provocative language not only undermines communication ethics but also undermines national unity and government legitimacy. This research demonstrates that public officials need to internalize communication ethics based on moral values, Pancasila, and democratic principles to maintain national dignity.

INTRODUCTION

Public officials' communication is a vital instrument in building legitimacy, maintaining social harmony, and strengthening nationalism. In the context of government, the language used by officials serves not only as a medium for information but also as a representation of the nation's values, ethics, and morality. However, contemporary political realities demonstrate a crisis in language ethics, such as the use of harsh and sarcastic diction, which has sparked public controversy.

The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) Supervisory Board (2023) recorded 82 public complaints regarding ethical violations by KPK personnel. The board highlighted the lack of firmness in the chain of command and minimal adherence to the code of conduct, reflecting an integrity crisis at the leadership level.

In the context of nationalism, language should be a unifying force for the nation, not a trigger for conflict. Therefore, this research is crucial to provide an in-depth analysis of the crisis in language ethics in public officials' communication in relation to nationalism and governance. Language plays a strategic role in politics and government. Public officials' communication is not only informative but also performative—influencing public perception, legitimacy, and trust. However, the rise in cases of unethical language use by public officials signals a crisis in communication ethics. Public officials' communication is a vital instrument for building legitimacy and social harmony. However, contemporary political reality in Indonesia shows a significant crisis in language ethics. According to

Habermas (1996), ideal communication must be based on openness and rationality to avoid the domination of power.

This crisis is not merely an individual issue, but is closely related to political culture, leadership, and governance. In the context of nationalism, language should strengthen social cohesion, but it can actually weaken national spirit when used unethically. Therefore, this analysis is crucial for understanding how public officials' communication impacts nationalism and government legitimacy.

This research aligns with the study by Arifin, S.A. & Kusuma, H.W. (2024), which examined the Principles of Islamic Communication Ethics in Da'wah. The various methods of oral preaching seen from the perspective of the language of the Qur'an include Qaulan Baligha, Qaulan Layyinan, Qaulan Ma'rufa, Qaulan Maysura, Qaulan Karima and Qaulan Sadida. According to Habermas (Habermas, 1996), ideal communication must be based on the principles of openness, equality, and argumentative rationality to avoid the domination of power. In the Indonesian context, research by Hidayat (2019) found that officials' language style, which often displays arrogance and a lack of sensitivity to the people's needs, worsens the government's image in the eyes of the public. Meanwhile, a study by Setiawan (2020) emphasized that the language of public officials serves not only as a tool for administrative communication but also as a symbol of nationalism, reflecting national identity.

The above issue is certainly not free from several related literature studies, so that its benefits are not only one-way but can be broader (Pratama et al., 2022). Thus, studying the crisis in language ethics in public officials' communication is crucial, particularly within the framework of nationalism and governance. Based on research data, this language ethics crisis involves various levels of officials, starting from the regional level to cabinet ministers, namely Sudewo (Regent of Pati), Nusron Wahid (Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/Head of BPN), Hasan Nasbi (Head of the Presidential Communications Office), Viktor Bungtilu Laiskodat (Governor of NTT), General Maruli Simanjuntak (Chief of Staff of the Indonesian Army/KSAD), Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan (Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment), Yudian Wahyudi (Head of BPIP). This study aims to analyze the crisis of language ethics in public officials' communication from the perspective of nationalism and governance.

METHOD

This study used a library research method with a qualitative approach. Data sources were obtained through books on political communication and government ethics, journal articles related to public communication and language ethics, credible media reports documenting cases of communication by public officials, policy and regulatory documents related to the communication ethics of state officials. Data were collected from political communication books, regulatory documents, and 7 specific cases from credible media reports (Tempo, Detik, Liputan6) between 2020–2025. The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis techniques, emphasizing contextual interpretations of public official communication phenomena related to ethical values, nationalism, and governance.

The researcher used Qualitative Content Analysis based on Richard L. Johannesen's Theory of Communication Ethics (2008). This method interprets the performative impact of language on public trust and national integrity.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Forms of the Language Ethics Crisis Among Public Officials are the use of harsh, sarcastic, and personal language; discriminatory statements against certain social groups; communication that is inconsistent and contradictory to public policy and controversial statements that cause political and social unrest.

Unethical language used by public officials can weaken the sense of national unity. Discriminatory and divisive speech erodes national solidarity, while the use of derogatory language actually strengthens social polarization.

The language ethics crisis results in decreased public trust (in government officials and institutions), degraded political legitimacy, which impacts democratic stability, crisis of state representation, because public officials are seen as unable to set moral and ethical examples in communication.

Public official communication is a crucial instrument in building government legitimacy and strengthening nationalism. The language used by officials serves not only to convey information but also to reflect ethical attitudes, moral responsibility, and commitment to national values. However, in practice, a number of public officials in Indonesia frequently issue controversial statements that generate controversy, trigger unrest, and even undermine public trust. The following are several examples of public official communication that fall under the umbrella of an ethical crisis in communication language.

Table 1. The Communication Language of Public Officials in an Ethical Crisis

No.	Communication Language Category	Public Official (Name & Position)	Statement Quote	Analysis
1.	Arrogance in Official Communication	Sudewo (Regent of Pati)	<i>"Who will refuse, I will wait. Not just 5,000 people, I will also face 50,000 people."</i> (Regent of Pati, Sudewo) (Humas Indonesia, 2023)	This statement demonstrates arrogance and closes off space for public deliberation. From the perspective of political communication ethics, this kind of language reinforces the distance between the government and the people, thereby weakening the spirit of nationalism that should be built on deliberation.
2.	Harsh Satire Against the People	Nusron Wahid (Minister of Agrarian Affairs)	<i>"Is it true that your grandfather, your ancestors could make land?"</i> (Minister of Agrarian Affairs Nusron Wahid) (Detik Indonesia, 2024)	This expression is considered sarcasm, demeaning to the people. Ethically, public officials are obligated to convey policies in constructive language. Cynical language actually creates a psychological distance between the government and the public.
3.	Underestimating Freedom of the Press	Hasan Nasbi (Head of Presidential Comm.)	<i>"(The pig's head) has already been cooked... that means he's not in danger, right?"</i> (Head of Presidential Communications, Hasan Nasbi)(Tempo,	This statement was deemed an affront to press freedom. Rather than demonstrating a commitment to

			2025)	journalists, the official's language contained insults that undermined democratic principles.
4.	Stigmatization of the Poor	Viktor B. Laiskodat (Governor of NTT)	" <i>The characteristic of poor people is that they eat a lot of rice.</i> " (Governor of NTT Viktor Bungtilu Laiskodat) (Liputan6, 2024)	This language emphasizes poverty reduction through consumption patterns, ignoring structural factors such as employment and economic policy. Such communication has the potential to widen the social gap between the government and the poor.
5.	Language that Demeans Criticism	Gen. Maruli Simanjuntak (Army Chief of Staff)	" <i>Brains (thinking) like this are plebeian.</i> " (Army Chief of Staff General Maruli Simanjuntak) (Tempo, 2025)	This statement reflects a condescending communication style. Public criticism should be viewed as participation in democracy, not as something demeaning.
6.	Attacking Political Opponents with Unsubstantiated Accusations	Luhut B. Pandjaitan (Coordinating Minister)	" <i>Don't be so quick to criticize, wait and see. We sometimes act like we know everything, but when he was in office, he was also a thief.</i> " (Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment, Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan) (Tempo, 2025)	This language contains personal accusations without evidence, making it unethical. This type of communication can criminalize criticism and worsen relations between the government and the public.

7.	The Controversy Between Religion and Pancasila	Yudian Wahyudi (Head of BPIP)	" <i>Pancasila's greatest enemy is religion.</i> " (Head of BPIP Yudian Wahyudi) (Republika, 2020)	This statement sparked controversy because it failed to prioritize public sensitivity to religious issues. Within the framework of nationalism, such language has the potential to undermine social cohesion.
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Based on a literature analysis of books, scientific articles, regulatory documents, and credible media coverage related to public official communication in Indonesia, the following key research findings were obtained:

1. Forms of Language Ethics Crisis in Public Official Communication

The study results indicate several patterns of emerging language ethics crises, including:

- Use of harsh and emotional language that undermines the authority of state institutions.
- Discriminatory statements against certain community groups that have the potential to cause polarization.
- Language contradictory to government policy, causing public confusion.
- Provocative or hyperbolic statements that spark controversy and political upheaval.

2. Impact on Nationalism

Unethical language has been proven to have serious impacts on nationalism, namely:

- Weakening social cohesion and widening the gap between the people and the government.
- Eroding national solidarity, due to feelings of exclusion among groups offended by officials' speech.
- Giving rise to political and social polarization, which ultimately weakens the spirit of national unity.

Public officials are not only administrative media, but also ideological instruments that build or destroy nationalism.

3. Implications for Government

The crisis of language ethics among public officials has several consequences for governance:

- Decreased public trust in government institutions.
- Delegitimization of leadership, because officials' language is considered not to reflect moral exemplars.
- Vulnerability of democratic stability, due to the breakdown in communication between the government and the public.

4. The research results also identified the need for conceptual solutions, namely:

- Developing a clear and binding code of ethics for public official communication.
- Strengthening Pancasila-based political communication ethics education.
- Implementing the principles of ethical and inclusive communication to rebuild public trust.

The crisis in the ethics of public officials' communication not only damages the relationship between the government and the people, but also has the potential to weaken nationalism. Therefore, a reform of communication ethics that is oriented towards transparency, empathy, and public participation is needed.

The theory of Communication Ethics (Johannesen, 2008) emphasizes that communication is not simply the conveyance of a message, but rather a moral act with social consequences. The main principle of this theory is that all forms of communication must respect human dignity, be accountable to the truth, and consider their impact on the public. In the context of public official communication, analysis using the theory of communication ethics reveals the following:

1. Principles of Moral Responsibility

Public officials play a strategic role as representatives of the state. The language they use should reflect exemplary moral conduct. However, research has found numerous examples of public officials' speech that violate this principle: the use of harsh language, emotional expressions, and even discriminatory statements. This violates moral responsibility by causing public unrest and undermining public trust.

2. Principle of Respect for Human Dignity

Communication ethics require the use of language that respects the diversity and dignity of every individual. Statements by public officials that demean a particular group directly violate this principle of respect. The impact is not only that the offended group feels discriminated against but also that it creates social polarization that undermines nationalism.

3. Principles of Truth and Honesty

Public officials' communications should be based on facts and honesty. However, there are instances where communication contradicts official government policy. From the perspective of communication ethics theory, this practice constitutes a violation because it ignores the obligation to convey accurate, clear, and consistent information

4. Principle of Concern for Social Impact

Communication ethics theory emphasizes that every message must consider its impact on the wider community. Provocative statements by public officials without considering the psychological and social consequences have the potential to trigger unrest, weaken national solidarity, and even lead to disintegration. Therefore, the use of such language constitutes unethical communication

5. The Relationship between Nationalism and Government

- Upon further analysis, the crisis in public officials' language ethics is not merely an individual issue, but also touches on fundamental aspects of nationalism and governance. Unethical language:
- Weakens national bonds by fostering a sense of alienation among certain groups.
- Reduces government legitimacy because unethical communication damages the image of leadership.
- Threatens the integrity of democracy because political communication is no longer based on the principles of truth, justice, and politeness.

The language of public officials is not only understood as a medium of communication but also as a symbol of national identity. From the perspective of communication ethics, every official's statement should be directed at strengthening a sense of togetherness and love for the homeland. However, when language is used to divide, blame certain groups, or create political polarization, it contradicts the principles of inclusive nationalism. Thus, the crisis in language ethics among public officials not only violates communication norms but also undermines the foundations of nationalism.

Based on communication ethics theory, the crisis in public officials' language ethics can be concluded as a form of violation of moral principles in political communication. Harsh, discriminatory, or provocative speech demonstrates officials' disobedience to moral responsibility, truth, respect for human dignity, and social concern. Communication ethics reform is crucial for public officials to build government legitimacy and strengthen national unity. Therefore, resolving this crisis requires:

1. A public communication code of ethics based on communication ethics theory.
2. Moral communication development for public officials from a Pancasila perspective.
3. Institutional oversight to ensure that every official's statement aligns with ethical communication values.

This analysis confirms that communication ethics theory provides a normative framework for evaluating and improving public officials' communication practices in the context of nationalism and governance.

CONCLUSION

The crisis of language ethics in public officials' communication is a serious issue in the context of nationalism and governance. Unethical language not only undermines communication ethics but also undermines nationalism and the state's legitimacy. Therefore, public communication development based on ethical values, Pancasila, and nationalism is necessary so that public officials can serve as exemplary communication models while maintaining the nation's dignity.

The crisis in communication ethics among public officials is a serious phenomenon affecting nationalism and governance. When public officials ignore communication ethics, public trust in the government is weakened, public participation is reduced, and national solidarity is threatened. Conversely, ethical, transparent, and inclusive language can be an effective means of building government legitimacy and strengthening nationalism. Thus, the crisis of language ethics is not merely a matter of word choice, but also a matter of the direction of state communication policy in maintaining national unity. Abusive, discriminatory, or provocative language not only undermines communication ethics but also undermines national unity and government legitimacy. This research demonstrates that public officials need to internalize communication ethics based on moral values, Pancasila, and democratic principles to maintain national dignity.

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