

FUNCTIONS OF TABOO WORDS AND EUPHEMISMS FOUND IN CHASE ATLANTIC'S SONG LYRICS: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji penggunaan mekanisme eufemisme dalam menggambarkan fenomena hubungan toksik dalam lirik lagu grup musik Chase Atlantic. Melalui pendekatan sociolinguistik dan analisis wacana kritis, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana motivasi di balik provokasi verbal dan penyimpangan linguistik dikemas secara estetis dalam genre alternatif/dark pop. Penelitian kualitatif deskriptif ini menerapkan metode analisis tekstual untuk mengidentifikasi unit data berupa frasa dan klausa lirik yang mewakili isu-isu tersebut. Analisis ini ditujukan untuk memetakan lanskap wacana guna mengungkap anomali linguistik, perbedaan konseptual, serta deskripsi cedera fisik yang disamarkan melalui berbagai bentuk eufemisme. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan bahasa eufemistik oleh Chase Atlantic tidak berfungsi untuk melunakkan makna konvensional, melainkan bertindak sebagai instrumen provokatif yang menormalisasi dan mengaburkan batas-batas destruktif dalam dinamika hubungan antarpribadi. Keunikan penelitian ini terletak pada pergeseran objek penelitian ke genre musik hibrida modern, yang membuktikan bahwa pragmatik wacana kontemporer di luar musik rap tradisional dapat berfungsi sebagai bidang kritis untuk menguji pengaruh identitas penutur terhadap penyimpangan linguistik.

Kata Kunci : Sociolinguistik, Eufemisme, Hubungan Toksik, Chase Atlantic.

Abstract

This research examines the use of euphemistic mechanisms in portraying the phenomenon of toxic relationships in the song lyrics of the band Chase Atlantic. Through a sociolinguistic approach, this research explores how the motivations behind verbal provocation and linguistic deviation are aesthetically packaged within the alternative/dark pop genre. This descriptive qualitative study employs text analysis to identify data units, specifically phrases and clauses within the lyrics, that represent these issues. The analysis seeks to map the discursive landscape to uncover linguistic anomalies, conceptual distinctions, and descriptions of physical abuse that are obscured with euphemisms. The findings indicate that Chase Atlantic's use of euphemistic language does not serve to soften conventional meanings but rather acts as a provocative instrument that both normalizes and obscures destructive

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boundaries within the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. The novelty of this research lies in the shift of the subject matter to the modern hybrid music genre, demonstrating that the pragmatics of contemporary discourse outside traditional rap music can serve as a critical arena for examining the influence of the speaker's identity on linguistic deviation.

Keywords : Sociolinguistics, Euphemism, Toxic Relationships, Chase Atlantic.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the process of sharing meaning and information between people using symbols, language and contextual behaviour. In everyday social interactions, people often choose specific linguistic strategies to express deep emotions or in informal situations, including the use of taboo words. Wardhaugh (2006) states that “taboo is the avoidance in any society of behaviour, believed to be harmful to its people because it causes anxiety, embarrassment or shame”. It is these social prohibitions that require speakers to be more creative in using vulgar language so that the main message is still conveyed effectively.

Although considered inappropriate in formal contexts, the textual use of taboo words is commonly found in works of art such as the lyrics of popular music. Previous research by Kadek & Santika (2025) has shown that Eminem's rap lyrics use explicit taboo words to attract public attention and express disrespect. However, not all musicians convey their taboo ideas in a crude and blunt manner, as practiced in the conventional rap genre. This is where euphemisms play a significant role as a linguistic bridge to soften or disguise concepts perceived as uncomfortable by society.

This concept of softening vulgar language is explored in depth by Holder (1967), who defines euphemism as “the use of mild, vague, or roundabout expressions in preference to words that are precise, blunt, and often uncomfortably accurate”. This linguistic phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the works of the band Chase Atlantic, one example in the lyrics of the song ‘Consume’. In contrast to Eminem, who tends to be confrontational, Chase Atlantic chooses to use linguistic hyperbole or semantic avoidance by wrapping taboo topics, such as substance addiction, emotional harm, and self-destructive behaviour in euphemistic language.

This research analyses how taboo and vulgar vocabulary in the lyrics of some Chase Atlantic's song is reconstructed through the lens of euphemism. The analysis will focus on a combination of euphemism classifications based on Holder's (2002) theory and the purposes of their use, which refer to the functions of taboo words according to Wardhaugh (2006), such as “to draw attention to oneself, to show contempt, to be aggressive or provocative, or to mock authority”. By combining these two analytical frameworks, this research aims to provide new sociolinguistic insights into how dark and vulgar discourse is transformed into a form of aesthetic-poetic expression.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Method: The research uses a qualitative descriptive approach to analyse linguistic phenomena in detail. This approach was chosen because the focus of the research is not on numerical data, but on textual interpretation, specifically the shift in

meaning of taboo words into euphemistic expressions in several Chase Atlantic song lyrics, such as: Consume, Beauty in Death and Cassie.

Research Time and Place: This research was conducted during the even semester of the 2025-2026 academic year, from March to June 2026. The research was carried out at the researchers' campus, The School of Foreign Language JIA (STBA JIA). The entire process of searching for song lyrics, gathering theoretical references and conducting discourse analysis was carried out virtually via the internet using the researchers' computer.

Research Subjects: The subject of this research is the Australian alternative-pop or R&B band Chase Atlantic. Meanwhile, the object of this research is divided into two parts: the material object and the formal object. The material object of this research consists of the lyrics of several songs titled 'Consume', 'Beauty in Death' and 'Cassie' released by Chase Atlantic. On the other hand, the formal object of this research is the vulgar euphemisms and the function of taboo words contained within the lines of the song's lyrics, based on Ronald Wardhaugh's theoretical perspective.

Data Collection Method: The data of this research was collected using the observation and note-taking technique. The first step involved listening carefully to the songs whilst reading the official lyrics on the genius.com platform. The second step was to filter the lyrics to identify lines containing taboo or vulgar elements. The final step was to record the selected data, along with the timestamps of their occurrence, into a corpus for further analysis.

Data Analysis Technique: The data analysis technique applied in this sociolinguistic research adopts the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of three stages carried out in a continuous process. The first stage is data condensation, in which the researchers select, filters and simplifies the transcripts of Chase Atlantic's song lyrics. The researchers sorted and selected the clauses or lines of lyrics that, in context, contained vulgar vocabulary that had undergone a shift in meaning to become euphemistic expressions. Meanwhile, lines of lyrics that did not contain euphemistic characteristics were eliminated from the data corpus.

The second stage is data display, in which the selected song lyrics are structured into a collection of textual data for classification. These song lyric fragments are presented alongside their timestamps to simplify contextual identification. At this stage, the researchers began conducting an in-depth descriptive analysis by cross-referencing the two theoretical analytical frameworks employed. The researchers classified the form and contextual meaning of these euphemistic expressions based on Holder (2002) perspective on euphemism, while also analysing the motives behind their use using Wardhaugh (2006) theory of the four functions of taboo words.

The third and final stage in this methodological process is conclusion drawing and verification. The researchers review all the results of the cross-referencing of theoretical data presented in the data presentation stage to identify overall patterns of linguistic shift. The researchers interpret how Chase Atlantic uses hypocrisy or the semantic device of euphemism to transform dark discourse into poetic and aesthetic expression. The final conclusions will be presented narratively to address all the research questions of this sociolinguistic research in a valid and objective manner.

Research Instruments: In this qualitative research using a sociolinguistic approach, the primary or key instrument used is the researchers themselves. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative researchers act as planners, data collectors, analysts and

interpreters of the data, as only the human instrument has the flexibility to understand and respond to a fluid linguistic context. As the primary instrument, the researchers take full responsibility for identifying the shift in meaning from vulgar vocabulary to poetic metaphorical expressions. The researchers also play a crucial role in providing a contextual interpretation of the dark discourse found in the songs of the band Chase Atlantic.

To maintain objectivity and accuracy in the linguistic analysis, the researchers also drew upon several non-human supporting instruments in the form of academic literature. The first supporting instrument was Wardhaugh's (2006) book on sociolinguistics, which served as a formal reference for identifying the four main functions of taboo vocabulary. The second supporting instrument is Holder's (2002) textbook on classification and dictionary of euphemisms, which was used to analyse patterns of roundabout expressions. Finally, the researchers also used a data sheet of a digital text corpus containing the transcript of the song lyrics, along with timestamps of their occurrence, as a means of systematic data classification.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Datum 1

Lyrics from Consume: "Pressing on her fingers 'til the bones break" (0:30-0:33)

Explanation: The discursive landscape in the song "Consume" presents a striking linguistic anomaly through the clause "Pressing on her dingers 'til the bones break" (0:30-0:33). Viewed through a sociolinguistic lens, this sentence construction exploits the phrase "bones break", which is closely linked to the social taboo surrounding extreme physical violence. Civil society generally imposes verbal restrictions on descriptions of such biological physical injuries to prevent the spread of horror or the normalisation of aggression in the public sphere. However, Chase Atlantic explicitly displays this cultural repression as a metaphorical reflection of the intensity of a destructive intimacy.

When analysed using Holder's (2002) theoretical framework, these lyrics represent a form of euphemistic manipulation through the mechanism of roundabout expressions. The speaker is not, in fact, literally documenting a criminal act or physical abuse. In contrast, the extreme visualisation of gripping fingers until the bones snap is adapted as a linguistic metaphor to obscure the concept of an interpersonal relationship that is excessively binding, possessive, and stifling of the partner's inner freedom. This shift in meaning transforms a situation of toxic psychological attachment into a manifestation of a desire for absolute closeness that is both poetic and tinged with a Gothic atmosphere.

Evaluating this phenomenon based on Wardhaugh's (2006) functional typology of taboo words, the content of this sharp discourse serves the function of being aggressive or provocative. Chase Atlantic employs linguistic provocation through imagery of physical violence to produce a psychological shock effect that affirms both dominance and masochistic submission within the romantic relationship. This operational finding offers a conceptual distinction that is vastly different when compared with the observations of Kadek & Santika's (2025). Whilst the use of taboo language in Eminem's musical repertoire is exploited to undermine social stability or external subjects (to show contempt), Chase Atlantic, by contrast, navigates the realm of provocative euphemisms to lay bare the complexity of internal pain deliberately relished by a couple.

Datum 2

Lyrics From Consume: “But a needle to the skin will make the pain fade” (0:36-0:39)

Explanation: From a sociolinguistic perspective, this line of lyrics is rooted in the taboo discourse surrounding substance abuse, particularly the use of illegal drugs via injection. The topic of drug addiction and dependence is culturally classified as taboo because it intersects with self-harm, illegality and medical risks. In line with Wardhaugh’s (2006) view, society tends to avoid discussing this issue head-on as it has the potential to trigger feelings of discomfort, anxiety or social fear amongst its members.

Rather than explicitly mentioning the names of chemical substances or the act of injecting drugs, Chase Atlantic employs euphemisms to obscure this grim reality. According to Holder’s (2002) theory, this phenomenon represents an euphemistic discourse that uses roundabout expressions in the form of the visual description ‘a needle to the skin’. The use of this phrase functionally avoids the harshness of direct language and replaces it with poetic imagery. This transforms the destructive act of injecting drugs into a metaphor for an escape from emotional pain that sounds aesthetically pleasing to the listener’s ear.

Through the lens of Wardhaugh’s (2006) theory of taboo word functions, the use of this taboo discourse, cloaked in euphemism, predominantly serves the function of drawing attention to oneself. Chase Atlantic explores this discourse on syringes not to verbally attack others, but to elicit empathy and the audience’s full attention towards the fragile psychological state of the protagonist, caused by extreme pain. This finding reinforces the novelty of the earlier research by Kadek & Santika (2025). Whilst Eminem’s rap songs use taboo words directly to show contempt, Chase Atlantic instead takes the path of linguistic hypocrisy through poetic euphemisms to express an inner escape from emotional trauma.

Datum 3

Lyrics from Consume: “Take another bite” (045-0:47)

Explanation: From a sociolinguistic perspective, the word ‘bite’ or the act of biting is literally rooted in the biological need of living beings for food. However, in the context of the song “Consume”, this term has suffered an extreme shift in meaning as it overlaps with the taboo discourse surrounding self-destructive behaviour, whether in the form of the consumption of harmful chemical substances (such as psychotropic pills) or the cycle of attachment within toxic interpersonal relationships. According to Wardhaugh (2006), actions or habits that risk damaging one’s social well-being are categorised as taboo because they trigger collective anxiety and fear amongst the surrounding community.

To mask the harsh reality of drug addiction or such a torturous relationship, Chase Atlantic practices the shifting of meaning using euphemisms. Drawing on Holder’s (2002) theoretical perspective, this phenomenon indicates the use of elliptical expressions that borrow from the realm of domestic-culinary activities (“take another bite”) to disguise the concept of consuming something destructive. The use of euphemisms serves as a linguistic cover that softens the harsh reality of the phrases ‘swallowing a pill’ or ‘enduring a cycle of emotional toxicity’, transforming them into a metaphor for addiction that sounds poetic, abstract and aesthetic.

Viewed through the lens of Wardhaugh’s (2006) functional analysis of taboo language, the use of this taboo discourse disguised as euphemism mainly serves the function of being

aggressive or provocative. The expression ‘take another bite’ is employed by Chase Atlantic as a form of intense psychological provocation that risks danger to satisfy the protagonist’s absolute craving. Conceptually, this finding distinguishes the direction of this sociolinguistic research from previous studies by Kadek & Santika (2025). While in Eminem’s lyrics the aggression of taboo words is unleashed externally to insult outsiders (to show contempt), Chase Atlantic instead takes the path of internal aggression through provocative euphemisms that challenge both themselves and their partner to continue sinking into a destructive relationship.

Datum 4

Lyrics from Consume: “And I know there’s a blade where your heart is, and you know how to use it” (1:00-1:04)

Explanation: Chase Atlantic offers a thrilling analogy through the lyrics “And I know there’s a blade where your heart is, and you know how to use it” (1:00-1:04). From a sociolinguistic perspective, the appearance of the word ‘blade’ immediately directs the collective memory of society towards taboo topics surrounding physical aggression, threats involving weapons, or criminal acts that endanger lives. Social communities generally condition people to avoid such language in public conversation to reduce fear. Interestingly, in narrative of the song “Consume”, the essence of the danger posed by this sharp object is instead drawn into a personal, emotional realm.

Through the euphemism approach formulated by Holder (2002), these lyrics serve as a concrete example of how the speaker disguises the accuracy of a blunt statement through roundabout expressions. Rather than using blunt, casual adjectives to label their partner as cruel, manipulative, or causing emotional torment, Chase Atlantic wraps this cruelty in the visual metaphor of a knife lodged in the chest. This linguistics shell successfully transforms a horrific psychological conflict into a poetic ornament and creating a distinctive aesthetic impression of ‘dark romanticism’.

When analysed using Wardhaugh’s (2006) map of taboo word functions, this softened taboo content primarily carries the function of being aggressive or provocative. The linguistic provocation in this line feels both deeply intimate and masochistic; the protagonist is fully aware that his lover holds complete control to shatter his feelings into pieces (“and you know how to use it”), yet he chooses to surrender himself to that danger. This characteristic offers a new perspective absent from the research by Kadek & Santika (2025). Unlike Eminem, who throws around taboo language to degrade figures of authority or enemies outside himself (to mock authority), Chase Atlantic channels this euphemistic aggression inwards to describe vulnerability and emotional surrender within the dynamics of a toxic relationship.

Datum 5

Lyrics from Consume: “And you can take my flesh if you want, girl, but baby don’t abuse it” (1:06-1:10)

Explanation: Chase Atlantic presents highly controversial and rather disturbing construction of discourse through the line “And you can take my flesh if you want, girl, but baby don’t abuse it” (1:06-1:10). Viewed through a sociolinguistic lens, the use of the word ‘flesh’ (human flesh) basically touches directly upon one of the most deeply socially taboo areas: cannibalism and bodily mutilation. Culturally, narratives surrounding the consumption or physical dismemberment of humans are always avoided in normal

communication because the trigger psychological anxiety and a collective sense of horror. Interestingly, Chase Atlantic reappropriates this cultural fear to reflect a boundless level of emotional surrender to a woman.

When analysed through Holder's (2002) theoretical lens on linguistic distortion, this line of lyrics illustrates how taboo discourse is transformed through roundabout expressions to blur the reality of a relationship that would be too crude if expressed literally. Rather than using conventional romantic diction to express willingness to surrender body and soul, or employing vulgar adjectives to convey her inner helplessness, the speaker chooses to borrow the imagery of cutting flesh from the body. This linguistic shell softens the condition of extreme emotional dependence (toxic dependency) into a metaphorical expression that is poetic, abstract, and possesses a dark aesthetic allure for the listener at the same time.

Viewing this phenomenon from the perspective of the motives behind its use, the function of the word 'taboo' according to Wardhaugh's (2006) that stands out most in this data is a combination of 'to draw attention to oneself' and 'to be aggressive or provocative'. The use of this biological mutilation metaphor serves as a highly provocative communicative shock to draw the audience's full attention to the speaker's emotional vulnerability—allowing themselves to be exploited, provided it does not cross the line ("but baby don't abuse it"). This linguistic reality underscores the conceptual differentiation from earlier sociolinguistic studies by Kadek & Santika (2025). Whilst rap artists such as Eminem use taboo vocabulary directly to belittle external targets (to show contempt), Chase Atlantic, on the other hand, frames this taboo territory through poetic euphemisms to express the totality of an intimate yet self-destructive emotional sacrifice.

Datum 6

Lyrics from Beauty in Death: "There's beauty in death sometime" (1:13-1:15)

Explanation: Within social conventions and macro-sociolinguistics, the word 'death' represents an absolute taboo discourse that occupies a position that is both sacred and terrifying. Discussions regarding morality or the natural loss of life are typically associated with grief, despair and human existential fear. However, Chase Atlantic deconstructs this cultural spectre by juxtaposing death with the aesthetic concept of beauty.

If viewed through the conceptual framework of Holder (2002), this linguistic phenomenon demonstrates how roundabout expressions serve to soften the sharpness of literal (accurate and blunt) meaning. The speaker is not explicitly referring to biological or medical processes of decay or death. Rather, this phrase serves as a euphemistic mask to soften the collapse of a life phase, the end of traumatic relationship, or the lowest point in the protagonist's mental health. The concealment of meaning transforms the misery of symbolic death into a romantic glorification that seems to offer a new sense of peace.

Based on pragmatic function of taboo words as outlined by Wardhaugh (2006), this deviation in diction strongly represents a manifestation of 'drawing attention to oneself'. Chase Atlantic purposely breaks this taboo surrounding morality to capture the listeners' attention and evolve their emotional sympathy, encouraging them to focus on the protagonist's dark inner existential struggle. This linguistic style validates the novelty of this research when compared with the findings of Kadek & Santika (2025). While the personification of taboo words in Eminem's songs is exploited explicitly as verbal aggression to attack external morality, Chase Atlantic instead takes the path of philosophical euphemism to celebrate inner fragility as a melancholic work of art.

Datum 7

Lyrics from Cassie: “But Cassie don’t you overdose” (3:12-3:14)

Explanation: The sociolinguistic exploration in this research moves towards a more crucial discourse by examining the lyrics of another Chase Atlantic song entitled ‘Cassie’. The line “But Cassie, don’t you overdose” (03:12-03:14) explicitly features the word “overdose”, a lexical item that is strictly taboo in conventional discourse. As a linguistic concept, overdose is a taboo discourse centred on the threat of medical fatality, physical failure, and the reality of tragic death resulting from drug addiction. Social conventions label this terminology as something too horrific to be discussed in public, to minimise the transmission of psychological trauma within the community.

Even so, Chase Atlantic uses this terrifying word as a dramatic anchor in their song by modifying the structure of the euphemism. When examined using Holder’s (2002) theory, this phenomenon demonstrates the use of roundabout expressions that borrow a personal name (‘Cassie’) to downplay the terrifying reality of addiction. Rather than detailing organ damage or explicitly naming the type of poison consumed, the narrator employs an intimate plea addressed to this fictional character. This linguistic layer softens the gripping medical crisis into an aesthetic narrative of romantic concern.

When analysed through Wardhaugh’s (2006) framework on the functionality of taboo words, the use of these taboo words predominantly serves the function of being aggressive or provocative. The verbal provocation in these lyrics is constructed as an urgent psychological warning from the speaker to their partner, urging them not to go too far towards the brink of death. Chase Atlantic cloaks the aggressiveness of this discourse on overdose through intimate, protective euphemisms to voice deep anxiety amidst the destructive cycle of addiction.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusions: Based on a comprehensive analysis of the lyrics to Chase Atlantic’s song ‘Consume’, ‘Beauty in Death’ and ‘Cassie’, this research concludes two fundamental points regarding the existence and dynamics of taboo words and phrases within the discourse of alternative music:

- a. **Euphemistic Realisation Through Roundabout Expressions:** Chase Atlantic do not use culturally taboo words literally to describe aggression or social deviance. Instead, they adopt taboo-laden diction (such as depictions of extreme physical violence, substance dependence and mortality) as a euphemistic cover. This linguistic tactic serves to refract and simultaneously obscure the complexity of destructive, possessive and toxic interpersonal relationships (toxic attachment), transforming them into a poetic yet gothic manifestation of a desire for closeness.
- b. **Dominant Functional Typology:** Contrary to the general hypothesis regarding popular music discourse, the sharp language in this song serves solely to be aggressive or provocative (Wardhaugh, 2006). This verbal provocation is exploited not to undermine external stability or degrade an external subject, but rather as a tool to trigger a psychological shock effect that reaffirms the power dynamic (domination and masochistic submission) deliberately enjoyed by a couple in a private setting.

Recommendations: With a view to the future development of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, the researchers have formulated several strategic recommendations:

- a. For Future Researchers (Novelty & Shift Object): Given that this study focuses on male music groups within the alternative/dark pop genre, future researchers are advised to conduct a cross-gender comparative analysis (for example, analysing songs with similar themes performed by female soloists or musicians). This is important to test whether the motivation for verbal provocation and the use of euphemistic mechanisms in portraying toxic relationships is influenced by the speaker's gender identity.
- b. For Students of Sociolinguistics: It is recommended to explore the pragmatics of contemporary discourse beyond traditional rap music (such as Eminem, who has been the dominant focus of previous research). Modern hybrid genres, such as those championed by Chase Atlantic, have proven to be a new 'goldmine' for the study of linguistic deviance and critical sociolinguistics.

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