

Utilizing Special Language in Street Crime Newsgathering in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article describes the newsgathering process among the crime journalist community in West Java, which involves the use of special symbolic languages. Using the ethnographic method, the study was conducted to collect data related to the practice of using special language, especially how crime journalists interpret it and how it functions for their profession. The results have shown that special language is not only used in the newsgathering process but also in daily interactions with fellow community members and police officers as news sources. As a result, the special language used consists of both abstract and concrete symbols. Abstract symbols encompass verbal and nonverbal forms that are embodied in numeric, phonetic, and cosmic codes. Meanwhile, concrete symbols are related to how they dress and use equipment, and how all these attributes represent them as crime journalists. This is related to the functions of special language, namely as a means of distinguishing themselves from other journalist groups. In addition, this special language also serves as a form of identity manipulation, allowing them to take on the role of the police in information gathering.

Keywords: special language, newsgathering, crime journalists, street crime, abstract symbol language, concrete symbol language

1. Introduction

In 2016, the city of Bandung, Indonesia had a crime rate of 3,792 cases, with 2,045 of these being street crimes. Despite the decline, however, it remained high the following year, with 3,072 cases and 2,505 cases of street crime (Kompas.com, 2017). The high crime rate in Bandung has a significant impact on the volume of crime news in the media. In the city of Bandung, street crime occurs in congested areas and residences.

Practically, crime journalists have distinct responsibilities in discovering, collecting, and publishing crime stories. In carry out their jobs, they must acquire technical skills to extract information, which can be sensitive since the material they present must be entirely accurate. Independence and language skills are particularly crucial because journalists are practically half diplomat and half investigator. This is due to the nature of the material, which is sometimes restricted to regular people. In other words, a crime journalist must comprehend the information as raw material for news production. Especially in the Indonesian context, several sources associated with street crime, particularly the police, frequently employ symbolic expressions through codes to prevent information from being used irresponsibly. Therefore, crime journalists are forced to learn these symbolic languages to obtain the information they need.

Since these abilities are specialized, consensual, and limited in scope, they may not always adhere to the general standards of journalistic language that were previously understood. As a result, crime journalists' language skills in covering stories can be divided into two categories. First, the ability of journalistic language as used to establish the reality of its coverage's outcomes. Second, language skills in a specific social setting are used as a tool for exploring information. The ability to speak in certain environmental contexts is an unofficial prerequisite for a professional journalist. For instance, sports journalists must learn certain terms used in sports, as well as journalists who cover economic issues, health, automotive, and so on. This, of course, also applies to crime journalists, who must learn practical terms frequently used in the field.

Crime journalists are often referred to as police journalists in practice. This classification is related to the police as an

authorized institution to handle criminal issues. In this sense, crime journalists collaborate or create alliances with the police as the primary source of the news. As a result of this collaboration, they frequently interact with the police. This is demonstrated by the activity of individuals who stay at the police station to constantly have the most up-to-date information.

This is consistent with the findings of Sherizen (1978) and Hill (1997), who claim that crime journalists cannot be separated from the police as the source. Sherizen mentioned that crime journalists must have a good relationship with the police since the police is a state organization that is the first line of defense in dealing with and combating crime, including street crime. Crime journalists typically obtain information from agencies or police personnel using their native language. They frequently seek or process information from police records, such as the identities of victims, the type of crime, and chronologies. According to Hill (1997), as communication technology advances, this journalist contacts the police regularly to obtain the most up-to-date information.

Crime journalists are often seen congregating at police stations in what they call “*ngepos*,” a famous Indonesian term that refers to their daily activities of waiting for the newest information from news sources. Even in Indonesia, the term *ngepos* refers to journalists who stay in other strategic locations such as the presidential and provincial government offices. According to Zaenuddin (2011: 75-76), the term *ngepos* refers to the segmentation of the coverage area so that the coverage is more focused, directed, and does not overlap among reporters. This pattern can produce news sources, allowing journalists to carry out their tasks with ease. *Ngepos* activities of journalists have been ratified through an MoU between the Press Council and the Indonesian National Police No. 2/DP/MoU/II/2017, which regulates the cooperation of the two parties in carrying out their professional duties, especially regarding the exchange of data and/or information, coordination in the field of protection of press freedom, coordination in the field of law enforcement related to abuse of the profession.

For crime journalists, the police are not only taking action against crimes but also a repository of diverse information, which is frequently symbolized by employing phrases that are typically only understood by police officers. In some ways, *ngepos* has become one of the arenas in which crime journalists recognize the symbolic world, such that *ngepos* not only assigns this journalist a specific label but also has implications for the context of association with the use of special language involving specific codes.

The commitment of crime journalists in Indonesia to a special language as a means of communication is a distinguishing feature of their profession. This is evident not only in their interactions with the police but also in their communication with one another. For crime journalists, this special language not only supplements their professional skills but also contributes to the uniqueness of their community in comparison to other journalist communities in Indonesia.

This study focuses on the crime journalist community in Bandung City, one of Indonesia’s major cities, and addresses two key issues. Firstly, this community is well-known and serves as the parent of similar communities within the jurisdiction of the West Java Regional Police in Indonesia. Secondly, the use of special language as a means of communication among crime journalists in Bandung is particularly notable. This can be linked to Bandung’s relatively high crime rate, which reinforces the widespread use of symbols and codes in their communication with each other. For instance, a code like 6-1M indicates a robbery with murder, and only through this code can they quickly arrive at the scene to cover the event. The ability to receive and interpret these codes quickly is directly related to the speed of their reporting and, consequently, their success as journalists.

A similar situation was observed by Mawby (2010) in England and Wales, where journalists covering crime news mostly rely on information from the police as their sole source of crime news in a given language. This suggests that crime journalists in these countries adopt a similar approach, wherein they study specific codes to extract information from the police. In general, the communication practices of crime journalists demonstrate a high level of language articulation that reflects a range of distinctive and unique languages resulting from cultural factors and historical awareness. The special language used by crime journalists can be viewed as a manifestation of their interpretation of reality.

In practice, the mastery of this special language is essential for accessing information on crime events possessed by the police. This understanding motivates crime journalists to develop a language that is specific to their profession, both internally and externally. In this context, crime journalists are thought to be able to create their own universe and social structure, including the world of language and communication processes. The special language used by crime journalists can symbolize their community’s unique language, which is created through mutual consent. Furthermore, this special language is one of the factors that drive their career development.

It is important to note that this language is not only verbal but also nonverbal. Crime journalists are interested not only in what the informant says but also in how the informant conveys it, such as body movements, voice tone, and other nonverbal cues. These nonverbal languages provide critical messages that supplement the event. For example, when covering a street crime event with code 365 (robbery), crime journalists not only remain at the scene but also seek information from various actors, including witnesses, victims, victims’ relatives, and police officers, all of whom are

recorded for later interpretation as complementary facts. Even the nonverbal communication of crime journalists, who are dedicated to their social milieu, can be seen in their behavior. Among Indonesian crime journalists, a senior journalist is capable of playing other people's roles to communicate with sources.

The sensationalism of a story, particularly in the case of crime news, sometimes depends on the journalists' skills in selecting precise words and facts when shaping the reality of the events they report. The crime journalists' ability to use special language in street crime news coverage includes various realities related to communication practices, particularly how this special language is formed and interpreted, its function as a communication tool, motivation, and a tool for constructing the reality of crime events. As these four components are intrinsic and contemporaneous, all new symptoms and occurrences can be evaluated as communication events. However, this study focuses on the newsgathering process, which is always tied to their ability to obtain specific, even confidential information. This necessitates unique skills, particularly in communicating with the police, who often use symbolic codes that are not understood by everyone. Consequently, this article focuses on the meaning of crime journalists in the symbolic code and how the code is related to their profession.

2. Literature Review

The study of how media content impacts audience perceptions of social reality has been explored from different angles (see Antunes & Hurley, 1977; Graber, 1980; O'Keefe & Reid-Nash, 1987; Smolej & Kivivuori, 2006; Velásquez et al., 2020). According to Pritchard & Hughes (1997), these studies, however, fail to establish theoretical explanations, notably for journalists' decisions about which crimes to publicize and which to ignore. Pritchard & Hughes (1997) demonstrate this through four types of deviation, namely normative, statistical, status, and cultural deviation. These deviations result in many crimes never being reported in the news. Other research on the journalist selection process has shown that homicide is the most likely crime to be reported (Graber, 1980). In addition, the mainstream news media pays more attention to homicides involving white people than those involving non-whites (Entman, 1992; Johnstone et al., 1994).

Pritchard & Hughes (1997) conducted a more in-depth analysis of a murder case and how two American newspapers handled it to examine deviation-based explanations for crime stories. They discovered that news of murder spread when white persons were suspects or victims, men were suspects, and victims were women, children, or senior citizens. This is a type of status deviance, and because cultural deviance is such a significant component of newsworthiness, statistical deviation (unusualness) may be far less important than is commonly supposed. Pritchard & Hughes (1997) attempt to decipher a deviation-based explanation for crime news decisions as a result. Deviance is a concept that encompasses the most prevalent causes for crime coverage patterns, such as traditional news criteria (e.g., impact, conflict, prominence, uncommon), race, and social position. Deviance is a useful theoretical tool for understanding crime news journalists' actions (Cohen & Young, 1981; Ericson et al., 1987).

These studies on crime reporting are next evaluated concerning public views of crime as reported by Velásquez et al. (2020) by disclosing a case in Peru. Even Smolej & Kivivuori (2006) discovered a relationship between crime reports and the dread of becoming a victim of violence. Using multivariate analysis, Smolej & Kivivuori (2006) demonstrate that when someone reads the front page of a tabloid that reports crime news, they become increasingly concerned about becoming a victim of crime.

However, it is commonly acknowledged that the process of news reporting related to crime journalism is a lengthy and investigative one. Several studies on the connection between journalists and the police as the authorized entity to provide information on crimes have been conducted. This is demonstrated in Mawby's (2010) studies of the connection between crime journalists and Scottish police. He discovered that crime reporters had always had a symbiotic and asymmetrical connection with the police. The symbiotic system is implemented because the media regards the police as significantly superior to journalists. Meanwhile, the asymmetrical connection is demonstrated by the fact that journalists maintain their independence and are not hampered or disturbed by anyone, including the police.

Ester Pollack and Sigurd Allern (2014) provide some intriguing insights about journalists and police in Norway in their study. It demonstrates that no significant crime narrative in Norway is ever completed, and it has garnered criticism in the form of pieces in the mainstream media as a dark spot for the police, creating a negative image of the police. In this case, the news was portrayed by the media as coming from an impartial police oversight agency. This framing sparked allegations of racism within the police department. The media chastised the investigative agency that was tasked with uncovering several significant criminal cases in Norway but was unable to correct the injustice in the police department.

Meanwhile, another study focuses on the use of media by Australian police and courts (Johnston & McGovern, 2013). By situating the courts and police in Habermas' strategic and communicative scheme of action, both investigate historical, sociocultural, and regulatory processes in their evolution, motivation, and goals for the use of social media in democratic communication practices. According to the findings, there is a distinct point of view between the police and the judiciary in terms of communication tactics and practices based on Jürgen Habermas' strategic paradigm. According

to this study, the police pay more attention to social media as a modern medium, while the courts are more cautious in their communication operations. Furthermore, Dailey & Wenger (2016) explain that the content of criminal acts has always been an important part of local news reporting in America because it is vulnerable to misuse of facilities or distortion of public policies between law enforcement and news coverage of criminal acts.

At the same time, this study confirms prior research on the impact of crime reporting on the public's fear of crime in general (see O'Keefe & Reid-Nash, 1987; Smolej & Kivivuori, 2006; Velásquez et al., 2020). Dailey and Wenger (2016) also emphasize that journalists have a responsibility not only to inform the public but also to cover topics that will affect the community in greater depth. Therefore, both highlight the importance of researching police-journalist communication patterns, particularly the language they use.

Since the publication of Fowler (1991), there has been significant growth in the study of journalistic language. Scholars from various disciplines including linguistics, discourse studies, media studies, sociology, and others have been drawn to the form, function, and politics of journalistic language. However, these varied approaches are sometimes perceived as being too focused on viewpoints and tactics rather than the language of journalism, specifically the special dialectical relations of signals between journalists and their text genres, texts and audiences, and journalism and larger social formations. In other words, journalism generates writings that can be analyzed using the same categories, methods, and linguistic concepts as other forms of texts. Richardson's (2008) study shows that newspaper texts can be studied in the same way as magazines, political speeches, and a series of discourse genres.

The journalistic language is fascinating to investigate because it describes each journalistic genre. These sorts of language aid in understanding how journalists gather information, form opinions, disseminate expected news, and how media language varies from other languages. Investigative reporting, interviewing, and fact-checking are essential components of journalism, which are then disseminated to the public to provide knowledge and improve public trust, even in the pandemic situation (Hajimia et al., 2022). Journalists can also use their reports to send messages that contain codes through the choice of words and sentences that seem to function as self-censorship in using words that have the potential to produce provocative news. Practically every journalist has a fundamental mission to learn and practice their particular language for the needs of their profession.

In general, language is the result of human creativity while also demonstrating the high level of human culture in speaking with one another. Language can be represented in speaking and writing (verbally), or through particular signs (nonverbal). As a result, language is a symbolic representation of every thought about something (Mulyana & Solatun, 2007). According to Spradley (1997: 121), "all cultural meaning is created employing symbols." These symbols serve as the foundation for individual identification in social situations.

Even the use of these symbols is evidence that humans have a high culture through which they can communicate and give meaning to the natural phenomena around them. Giving meaning to symbols is a communication process that is influenced by socio-cultural conditions that develop in a society. A meaning contained in the symbols used in communication is not only influenced by cultural factors but also psychological factors, especially when the message is decoded by the recipient. A message conveyed with the same symbol may have different meanings in different contexts.

Van Peursen (1984) theorizes that symbols have numerous functions in human life: First, it serves as a means for humans to communicate with one another. Second, it serves to reduce human reliance on the environment. The human brain reduces millions of items acquired by the senses through symbols, which are then born in the form of images or images that are processed into meaning, concept, or meaning. Third, symbols combine notions to create new information that did not previously exist. Humans who think about concrete objects and can give them meaning are known as denotations; humans who think about symbols and can give them meaning are known as connotations or imagination. In this context, communication is defined as the process of transferring meaning through the use of symbols such as language.

Language, as a communication instrument, has two components: linguistic and non-linguistic, both of which contribute to the development of language communication (Alwasilah, 1993; Chaer, 2010). Linguistic levels include phonological, morphological, and syntactic. These three stages aid in the construction of semantics, which includes meanings, ideas, ideas, and concepts. The paralinguistic aspect includes a person's speaking patterns, which include a high voice (falsetto), fragmented voice (staccato), segmental speech (pressure/stress), tone (pitch), intonation, distance, and body gestures. Touch is associated with the sensation of taste. Both language and paralinguistic features serve as communication tools, working in tandem with the situation's context to construct specific circumstances in the communication process.

Crime journalists can be characterized as a typical community with distinct characteristics because they are a homogeneous and specific community. They may use generic language in everyday interactions that are unrelated to news information, as do other cultures. When individuals enter the environment of communication that is substantively relevant

to their job, however, specific codes develop that can only be understood by their fellow humans. This shared understanding is known as a convention (Anshori, 2017). This convention arose not as a result of different distances and families but as a result of the community's common desires and interests, which resulted in it becoming a special language.

On the other hand, it should be noted that this form of community-specific language style is usually spoken. Members communicate with the police and with one another using this language, particularly when delving into the substance of news information. The functional importance of this language lies in affirming group borders, self-identification, and isolating outsiders from the internal community. Furthermore, this particular language serves as a protective mechanism and influences social identities within their networks.

3. Method

This study uses ethnographic methods that rely on open, naturalistic interview techniques, participatory observation, and document analysis. In communication research, ethnography is commonly used to analyze communication patterns in a social group (Spradley, 1997). The use of ethnography in this study was to explore, understand, and analyze the use of specific language among the police journalist community in Indonesia. Therefore, this study involved fieldwork, including observing, asking questions, and participating in the activities of the crime journalist community in Bandung, Indonesia, which was concentrated in several police headquarters. Practically, 15 journalists were purposively selected based on their work experience of 10 to 25 years in the same area.

Data collection was first obtained from the gatekeeper or someone who understands the problem that was the focus of the research. The gatekeeper then connected researchers with research informants. The main informants in this research are the advisory board and community leaders who are seen as the main gatekeepers of the crime journalist community. To accomplish this, the researcher approached primary informants in stages, enlisting the assistance of third parties. This was done as a practical step to facilitate community access, a procedure known as "getting access and reporting" as stated by Creswell (2012). To avoid direct rejection from the informants, researchers did not pose direct questions to the informants to grasp some of their concerns. This step was designed to provide the opportunity for researchers to make observations and ask informants questions about the data requested. As a result, data was gathered through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis (Creswell, 2014).

Participatory observation was carried out through researchers being directly involved in the field together with the subject to be studied so that they could obtain direct data that is on the spot. In this way, the researchers were expected to be able to identify the communication model commonly used by police journalists in covering the news. In an ethnographic process, the writer in this case is an insider because, as emphasized by Kuswarno (2008), ethnographic research makes observations from both within (insider) and outside perspectives. It is important to note that one of the authors has 20 years of experience as a crime journalist for an Indonesian newspaper, making it easier to make participatory observations. To obtain natural and authentic data, researchers followed police journalists in covering street crime events. These two methods were carried out to directly observe police journalists using special language when communicating with news sources to maintain data validity.

Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted with informants who are crime journalists in the city of Bandung, including daily, weekly, and online media journalists. This was done to get a picture from a first-person point of view regarding the meaning of symbols and codes in communication using specific language in the news coverage process. Meanwhile, document analysis or literature study was carried out by analyzing literature related to problems such as books, scientific research results, newspapers, and so on, which aims to complete the analysis carried out, especially about their special language function concerning their profession as crime journalists.

The data that has been collected is then analyzed simultaneously, which has been started since the researcher determined the research problem and continues to be verified through a triangulation process to ensure data validity until it ends in writing a conclusion. Triangulation is carried out through theoretical triangulation to determine the credibility of the data and source triangulation to determine the data validity by confirming temporary conclusions on the research subject so that the conclusions become more valid.

4. Results and Discussion

In the execution of their duties, crime journalists utilize common social language, much like other journalists, particularly those in Indonesia and Sundanese, when communicating with information sources. However, the crime journalist community in Bandung City employs a unique language as a means of interaction and communication with news sources or fellow journalists, which is predominantly influenced by the language of police officers. This specific language of crime journalists serves as their primary means of communication in their daily work and has been accepted and recognized as a distinguishing feature of their profession. The adoption of a specific language as the speech-language of crime journalists is evident not only in their interactions with colleagues but also in their communication with the public.

When writing news, journalists adhere to the principles of journalistic language, which is typically concise, clear, economical, and designed to present fascinating, current, and essential news or comments in a way that readers can easily comprehend. This research aims to explore the significance of the unique language utilized by crime journalists, which incorporates numerous codes and symbols, and how it relates to their profession.

4.1 The Meaning of the Special Language of Crime Journalists

The need to understand the significance of symbols in the special language of the community is quite strong because journalists are aware that the symbols not only serve as a social language but also represent the reality of crimes. Journalists who comprehend these symbols can work more efficiently and effectively. The symbols referred to in this research are numerous codes that are involved in the association of the crime journalist community. However, it is recognized that the social language of the crime journalist community is inextricably linked to the socio-cultural milieu, and this specific language is their attempt to depict the reality of an object or event.

According to the findings of this study, the informants believe that these symbols are divided into abstract and concrete symbols. Abstract symbols are terms that convey thoughts or ideas without providing appropriate explanations, while concrete symbols are concepts, values, and meanings expressed through specific objects, such as clothes, work equipment, and so on.

Regarding abstract symbols, the meanings held by journalists suggest that the symbols in this specific language are related to created meanings. These languages, which are generally verbal and nonverbal, are symbols in the form of words used to express thoughts and feelings, including the intentions of the individual. Meanwhile, nonverbal language is a means of conveying messages in the form of gestures, paralanguage, artifacts, and so on, which have consequences for differences in understanding depending on the context of space and time.

The skill of using this special language is one of the determining factors for success in interacting with the police to obtain news material. The special language of crime journalists is principally the language of the community created by journalists through their culture and social environment. In other words, this special language is a language constructed from the police environment where they interact in carrying out their professional duties. Through the use of this special language, they can understand information about crime events, making this language skill ultimately a requirement for journalists. Therefore, practicing this special language is an essential element in carrying out crime journalism rituals without questioning the meaning of these symbols.

“This (special) language is a kind of communication tool for us to carry out our job as this language describes our social environment. Using this kind of language is the main key in covering news, so we have to understand and use this language properly” (Interview, Informant 03).

However, it can be practically determined that the language used in the police environment conveys information on various aspects of criminal events, such as types of crimes, modes, and perpetrators. For journalists, numerical symbols play a crucial role as they can be transformed into symbols with both denotative and connotative meanings through mutual agreement. Numeric symbols ranging from 1 to 10 provide information on summons and crimes, making it essential for crime journalists to learn this language. On the other hand, phonetic symbols are represented through the alphabet from A to Z, which describe the identity of objects related to the criminal realm. In the crime journalist community, a phonetic alphabet is used, where the names of famous cities in Indonesia are spoken to convey the identity of an object. For instance, the word “Demak 2345 Flores Ambon” refers to vehicle number “D 2345 FA”.

In addition to numerical and phonetic symbols, crime journalists also use cosmic symbols, which refer to the police ranks’ territory by taking one of the environment’s primary characteristics. For instance, Cikuray, a mountain in the Garut region, serves as a cosmic symbol for journalists to refer to the Head of Garut Police, represented as Cikuray-1 in the cosmic language. In concrete symbolic terms, crime journalists often express themselves through their clothing and equipment. They typically dress in simple and practical attire, such as t-shirts, sandals, community jackets, and handy talkies for communication needs. According to them, this simple outfit is suitable for all situations. One of the informants stated the following,

“It is impossible for us to dress neatly with shiny shoes because the target of coverage is in uncertain locations. If we dress too neatly, how are we going to work? Clothes that are too neat can interfere with focus at work. The casual clothes of police journalists illustrate that our coverage is dominantly on the outside” (Interview, Informant 05).

Within this community, it is common for members to wear a black jacket, which they refer to as the “community jacket.” This jacket features the Lodaya logo, which is the local term for “panther” and references the symbol of the West Java police force. Additionally, the jacket is adorned with the word NEWSHAWK on the back. According to community members, the jacket represents the ideas and characteristics of crime journalists in West Java, as well as the togetherness

among community members. This simple jacket is designed to withstand various weather conditions, as it is waterproof and ready for any situation. Consequently, the jacket serves both a practical and symbolic function. It symbolizes strength and acts as a shield when covering events, making it easier for community members to hunt for news. Essentially, when community members wear this jacket, it symbolically implies that the jacket can support their profession. Other informants describe the following,

“I think the jacket has a deep meaning related to my profession as a crime journalist. I almost wear it every day and very useful for rain and cold situations and at the same time, created a symbol to provide convenience for my duties. Overall, the jacket has represented our preparedness to hunt the news” (Interview, Informant 03).

In addition, another concrete symbol utilized by crime journalists is the handy talky (HT), also known as Halong Timor. Similar to the community jacket, the HT has a significant impact on every crime journalist’s work. By using the HT, journalists can gain information more quickly by accessing the police radio channel. Additionally, the HT symbolically strengthens their role, contributing to their performance. The presence of the HT among crime journalists is a fundamental asset in the process of investigating incidents. The speed at which information is obtained is directly related to the speed of news reporting. This is stated as follows,

“I always use HT every day. The radio call owned by the police is an information channel that journalists should listen to because any information will be broadcasted or reported by the police through the radio call” (Interview, Informant 07).

According to this informant, crime journalists possess a deep understanding of how to obtain news sources, even by becoming a substructure of the news source itself, which, in this case, is the police. Although they have access to standard communication tools, they view the HT as the most accurate tool. This is due to the fact that the HT contains specific types of information that are essential material for news reporting. Therefore, the use of the HT serves as a symbol that embodies their technical methods of gathering raw material for newsgathering.

4.2 Symbolic Language as a Distinctive among Journalists

Crime journalists consider the use of special language and artifact symbols as a means of upholding the standards of their profession. They establish strong ties with police stations, colleagues, and other crime journalists, and become proficient in the symbolic languages used within the community. Mastery of these codes and symbols is a prerequisite for facilitating their news reporting duties. Additionally, concrete symbols, such as their attire and tools for news coverage, are utilized to demonstrate their appreciation and support for their profession.

In general, two primary functions of using symbolic language among crime journalists in Indonesia can be identified. Firstly, the use and application of this special symbolic language serves as a means of distinguishing themselves from other journalist communities. Secondly, the utilization of symbolic language is a form of identity manipulation, which collectively aims to facilitate the accomplishment of their work.

Crime journalists believe that their language is distinct from other communities as a means of distinguishing themselves. This belief is influenced by the fact that they operate within a specific environment with distinct social practices. By posting at the police station and using similar symbolic spoken languages as the police, crime journalists are motivated to master these languages since they are related to their profession. In this regard, one of the informants expressed the following,

“The culture of crime journalists is more directed to the cultural norms and social environment where we are assigned. This social environment influences our behavior. The concrete symbols attached are formed from our social environment. Simply, the absorption of concrete symbols and meanings is commonly related to the environment and social structures that influence our mindset” (Interview, Informant 11).

Another informant also noted that crime journalists’ special language is essentially the language commonly used by police. They actively learn and master this symbolic language to better navigate their environment and easily access sources and information related to crime events. Here is one of their expressions,

“I can say that using this special language is not for stylistic purposes or other objectives. We believe that utilizing this language is crucial in carrying out our journalistic duties effectively. Therefore, we view communicating with this symbolic language as a starting point for success in the field of crime journalism and for understanding its meaning.” (Interview, Informant 09).

These two informants have emphasized the importance of mastering a special language for crime journalists. As they gain experience in the field, they become more proficient in using this unique and symbolic language. This suggests that their ability to use this language is a key characteristic that distinguishes them from other journalists. In fact, the level of expertise in using this special language can even differentiate between senior and novice members of the crime journalist community. These findings align with Sumarsono’s (2009) notion that a special language within a community

serves a dual function of conveying meaning and motivating community members. Within the specific context of crime journalism, this special language with symbolic nuances motivates each member to learn it as part of their professional development and contribution to the community.

In contrast to abstract symbols, concrete symbols are frequently utilized by crime journalists as part of their physical appearance, as evidenced by their use of community jackets and handy talkies to establish their identity. These concrete symbols represent and describe the reality of their daily lives. Various concrete symbols within the community serve not only to convey meaning, but also to express the fact that the community has developed its own socio-cultural structure. Similar to the use of symbolic language originally employed by the police, crime journalists adopt certain aspects of the police identity. They acknowledge that the police environment and culture, in which they work closely with, has become internalized in their behavior, especially in their news reporting. This was explained by one of the following informants,

“Just like police officers, crime journalists are not only robust in chasing news but also in dealing with many situations. By wearing community jackets, we can represent ourselves as police prototypes who are always ready twenty-four hours to carry out their jobs” (Interview, Informant 03).

This statement implies an understanding that the community jackets worn by crime journalists not only describe their identity as members of the community but also provide additional power in reporting. When wearing these jackets, they portray the identity of a tough police officer. Therefore, adopting this identity is not a form of show-off but rather a necessity because the police are the official source for any news they produce. In this case, an informant gave the following expression,

“For me, the police are the official source of crime information. Journalists who place the police as an official or hidden source of news naturally understand their culture. So, the way journalists dress in carrying out their activities is an attempt to represent the way journalists think and behave themselves.” (Interview, Informant 12).

Referring to this statement, the police are viewed as the primary reference for crime journalists in terms of their behavior. The police social environment is not only a place for reporting crime information, but it is also seen as a space for socializing with other social actors. This is as stated by other informants,

“For us, socialization and adaptation are essential because they allow us to not only understand the social structure but also to learn more about the culture of our social environment through socializing. The various symbols associated with crime journalists are the result of active interactions and expressions produced within a specific context and social environment.” (Interview, Informant 10).

The informant mentioned above stated that their way of communicating and dressing is one way they adapt to the police environment. This adaptation has progressed to the use of devices commonly utilized by police officers. Therefore, it can be generally stated that the use of symbols, both abstract and concrete, represents the ideas and personality traits of crime journalists, which are constructed by the cultural influence of the police environment. These symbols are essentially developed from the habits of journalists in carrying out their duties. Additionally, they represent an understanding of the ritual behavior of journalists in covering conventional crime news. In general, it can be said that the symbols that develop as a special language for crime journalists are creative abilities used to achieve meaningful life goals based on different situations. These symbols form a collective consciousness that is manifested in their daily lives.

5. Conclusion

The use of symbolic language by crime journalists is not only evident in the context of news gathering, but also in their everyday lives, as shown in the clothing they wear and the meaning behind it, indicating that their social environment has influenced the way they communicate and interact with each other. They acknowledge that these symbolic languages were derived from the language used by the police. Crime journalists recognize that adjusting to the police environment in which they operate is difficult and requires them to acquire and become accustomed to using a special language in their professional setting.

The significance of crime journalists on symbolic meanings is demonstrated in two ways. First, they understand the symbols in this language as meaning-related symbols that are created as both verbal and nonverbal, including abstract symbols, numeric, phonetic, and cosmic codes, that have meanings that change from their original meanings. Second, they not only interpret but also utilize concrete symbols, such as the clothes they wear, which adopt an easygoing police detective manner. One of the distinguishing features is the community jacket, which represents the ideas and identity of crime journalists and provides strength when performing coverage. Another tangible representation is the equipment, specifically the handy talky (HT), which has its impact because it can absorb information more quickly.

Furthermore, the symbols and special language used by crime journalists serve two general functions: distinction and identity manipulation. Crime journalists feel that the use of this special language will distinguish them from other journalists, and the utilization of symbolic language is a form of identity manipulation carried out to make it easier to

carry out their obligations. Adopting the identity of police officers through their speech style and clothing, such as community jackets and the use of handy talkies (HT), is a necessity because the police are the official source for what they produce.

However, it is important to highlight that this study has certain limitations. First, it was conducted solely within a crime journalist community in West Java, and the symbols or codes used in daily conversation among journalists may differ in other regions, although they are also crime journalists. Second, this discussion primarily focuses on their use and interpretation of symbols while searching for news materials, and the shapes of symbols and the history of symbol use are not the focus of this study. Future research can be carried out by observing and analyzing the genealogy of the symbols employed, as well as the consensus process that underpins the agreement on the use of these symbols.

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Authors contributions

DD and EM were responsible for field research and preparation of the initial manuscript. DD and RR were responsible for data collection. DD and DWS drafted the manuscript. DD, DWS, RR and EM were responsible to make a revision. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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