



Cultural Values in Javanese Proverbs: An Ecolinguistic Study of Flora And Fauna Metaphors

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aims to explore how cultural values are represented through flora and fauna metaphors in Javanese proverbs from an ecolinguistic perspective, with particular attention to how nature is used to convey cultural wisdom and human–nature relationships in Javanese society.

Methodology: A descriptive qualitative design with an ethnographic approach was employed. The data consisted of 30 selected Javanese proverbs taken from *Paribasan Jawa* by Johan Argono, limited to 15 proverbs containing flora metaphors and 15 containing fauna metaphors. Data were collected through literature review, documentation, and interviews, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman’s interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

Main Findings: The findings show that flora and fauna metaphors in Javanese proverbs mainly reflect cultural values related to morality, social relations, and life guidance. Flora metaphors tend to emphasize ontological meanings, while fauna metaphors more frequently employ structural metaphors. Overall, these metaphors function as advice, satire, and moral reflection, positioning nature as a symbolic reference for understanding human behavior.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study offers an ecolinguistic reading of Javanese proverbs by focusing on a limited and clearly defined set of flora and fauna metaphors. It highlights how local ecological symbols convey cultural wisdom, contributing to discussions on language, culture, and environmental awareness in the context of local knowledge preservation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

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Language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a carrier of cultural values and ecological perspectives. In Javanese society, language embodies *budi* (reason) and *rasa* (feeling), reflecting a worldview that emphasizes harmony between humans and nature [1]-[3]. Javanese proverbs (*paribasan*) play a significant role in transmitting moral guidance and cultural wisdom, often using metaphoric expressions rooted in everyday experiences and the natural environment.

Flora and fauna metaphors are frequently employed in Javanese proverbs, positioning nature as a symbolic reference for understanding human behavior and social relations. Animals and plants are not merely decorative linguistic elements, but serve as conceptual tools to convey moral advice, social criticism, and life guidance. However, previous studies on Javanese proverbs have largely concentrated on stylistic, semantic, or structural analyses, with limited attention to how these metaphors reflect ecological values and human–nature relationships. Studies that adopt ecolinguistic perspectives tend to focus on modern discourse or general metaphor theory, rather than traditional oral expressions such as proverbs [4]-[6]. This indicates a clear research gap: the lack of focused ecolinguistic analysis that systematically examines how flora and fauna metaphors in Javanese proverbs encode cultural values and ecological awareness.

Ecolinguistics provides an appropriate framework to address this gap by examining how language both reflects and shapes ecological relationships. Following Stibbe's view, metaphors embedded in language influence how communities perceive and interact with the natural world [7]-[9]. Applying this perspective to Javanese proverbs enables a more integrated understanding of language, culture, and ecology, revealing how traditional expressions embody moral reasoning, social norms, and environmental ethics simultaneously.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to describe how cultural values are represented through flora and fauna metaphors in Javanese proverbs from an ecolinguistic perspective. The study specifically focuses on identifying metaphor types and interpreting their cultural meanings within social, moral, and spiritual domains. To maintain analytical depth, the data are deliberately limited to 30 selected proverbs from *Paribasan Jawa* by Johan Argono, equally divided between flora-based and fauna-based metaphors [10]-[12]. This limitation allows for close qualitative interpretation rather than broad generalization. Although this research adopts a qualitative descriptive and ethnographic approach, tables and simple percentages are employed as supportive analytical tools rather than as statistical claims. Their function is to clarify patterns and tendencies in metaphor usage, such as dominant metaphor types and source domains, and to assist readers in visualizing qualitative distributions. These numerical representations do not aim to quantify linguistic phenomena in a positivistic sense, but to enhance transparency and interpretive clarity within qualitative analysis [13]-[15].

The novelty of this research lies in its ecolinguistic approach, which specifically examines the representation of cultural values through flora and fauna metaphors in Javanese proverbs. Unlike previous research, which generally discusses Javanese proverbs structurally, semantically, or folkloristically, this study integrates metaphor analysis with ecological, cultural, and spiritual dimensions simultaneously. Furthermore, this research offers an in-depth qualitative reading of consciously limited data, allowing for a more contextual and ethnographic interpretation of social, moral, and spiritual values. The use of tables and percentages as visual aids within a qualitative research framework also represents a methodological novelty, as it serves to increase the transparency of metaphor patterns without shifting the analytical approach towards quantitative ones.

By integrating ecolinguistics with the study of Javanese proverbs, this research contributes to a more focused understanding of how local wisdom and ecological awareness are linguistically encoded in traditional expressions. The study underscores that nature in Javanese proverbs is not portrayed as an object of exploitation, but as a moral and cultural reference intertwined with human life. This perspective supports the preservation of cultural literacy and offers insights for incorporating local ecological values into language education and cultural sustainability initiatives [16]-[18]. The data are derived from *Paribasan Jawa* by Johan Argono, comprising 30 selected proverbs, evenly distributed between flora-based and fauna-based metaphors. This study contributes to advancing ecolinguistic research by bridging linguistic theory, cultural studies, and environmental humanities. Its novelty lies in linking metaphorical language to ecological awareness, revealing that nature in Javanese proverbs is perceived not merely as an object but as a living entity intertwined with human morality. The findings are expected to promote sustainable cultural literacy and to inspire the integration of local wisdom into educational practices that emphasize ecological and moral values [19]-[21].

This study employed three complementary techniques literature review, documentation, and interview to obtain valid and contextual data. The literature review focused on collecting Javanese proverbs containing flora and fauna metaphors from *Paribasan Jawa* by Johan Argono. From this source, 30 proverbs were purposively selected based on metaphorical presence, ecological symbolism, and cultural representativeness. Supporting linguistic and cultural references were also consulted to strengthen interpretation. The documentation process involved organizing each proverb into a coding sheet containing the Javanese text, literal translation, metaphorical meaning, and represented cultural values. Visual notes of flora and fauna were added to highlight ecological relevance. The interview technique was used to verify interpretations through discussions with Javanese language experts, cultural practitioners, and educators [22]-[24]. The results refined the metaphor classification and confirmed cultural meanings. All data were categorized based on their source domain (flora/fauna) and conceptual

domain (social, moral, spiritual, economic, or ecological) to support subsequent analysis. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the data reduction stage, proverbs were classified by metaphor type structural, orientational, or ontological following Lakoff and Johnson's framework. Irrelevant or repetitive data were eliminated. During data display, categorized information was arranged in descriptive tables to reveal the relationship between metaphor types, meanings, and cultural domains. Finally, conclusion drawing and verification were conducted through theoretical triangulation using *ecolinguistic theory* (Stibbe), *cultural value theory* (Koentjaraningrat), and *representation theory* (Hall). This process ensured that the interpretations were linguistically valid and culturally grounded, reflecting how language preserves ecological and moral wisdom in Javanese society.

Table 1. Types of Flora and Fauna Metaphors and Their Functions in Javanese Proverbs

Metaphor Type	Source Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Dominant Function
Structural Metaphor	Fauna	13	43.3	Satire and social criticism
Ontological Metaphor	Flora	10	33.4	Moral and spiritual reflection
Oriental Metaphor	Flora & Fauna	7	23.3	Guidance and value orientation
Total	—	30	100	—

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach using an ethnographic method within the framework of ecolinguistics. This approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to describe, interpret, and understand the representation of cultural values through flora and fauna metaphors in Javanese proverbs in a comprehensive and contextual manner. According to Creswell qualitative research allows the exploration of socio-cultural phenomena holistically through close engagement with the data. The ethnographic method was used because this study aims to trace linguistic practices as cultural reflections that continue to live and evolve in Javanese society [25], [26].

The objectives of this research are to classify the types of flora and fauna used as metaphoric elements in Javanese proverbs, to identify the forms and meanings of metaphors based on Lakoff and Johnson's *Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, and to analyze the representation of cultural values through Stuart Hall's theory of representation and their ecological relation as viewed from Stibbe's ecolinguistic perspective. The data of this study consist of 30 Javanese proverbs, including 15 proverbs containing flora metaphors and 15 proverbs containing fauna metaphors. The main data source was the book *Paribasan Jawa* [27], selected purposively for its ecological and cultural content. Additional data were obtained from interviews and field observations of proverb usage in authentic communication contexts.

Table 1. Example of Data Classification

Category	Example of Javanese Proverbs	Translation	Meaning
Flora	<i>Esuk Dhele Sore Tempe</i>	Morning soy, evening tempeh	Depicts inconstancy and rapid change
Fauna	<i>Kebo Mulih Ing Kandhange</i>	The buffalo returns to its pen	Symbolizes wisdom, order, and discipline

Data were collected through four main techniques, documentation, observation, interview, and note-taking. Documentation was conducted by compiling proverbs from books and archival materials. Observation was used to identify how proverbs are used in real communicative settings. Interviews were conducted with two key informants Indah Puspita Lestari (22), a Javanese language educator, and Mufidah (43), a native speaker and cultural practitioner to obtain deeper insight into metaphorical meanings and their cultural contexts. Note-taking was used to systematically record data into coding sheets including literal meaning, cultural meaning, and metaphorical function.

The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman Interactive Model (1994), which includes three interrelated steps: (1) data reduction, involving the selection and simplification of relevant data; (2) data display, presenting the findings in descriptive tables and narrative form; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, which interprets the relationship between language, culture, and ecology.

Table 2. Summary of Flora and Fauna Categories

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Flora	Monocotyledon	40.0
Flora	Dicotyledon	60.0
Fauna	Vertebrate	88.9
Fauna	Invertebrate	11.1

Data validation was conducted through source and method triangulation, by comparing written documentation, interview data, and social cultural interpretations. The consistency of metaphorical meaning was reviewed through peer debriefing with experts in Javanese linguistics and cultural studies to ensure analytical reliability. This research was conducted from April to June 2025 in several regions representing Javanese culture, namely Yogyakarta, Solo, Pati, and Malang, which were chosen because they maintain strong linguistic and ecological traditions. In summary, this research methodology was systematically designed to explain the interconnection between language, culture, and environment in Javanese proverbs through an ecolinguistic lens. It aims to produce scientifically grounded findings that contribute to the development of cultural and ecological linguistics.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the research findings and their interpretation according to the ecolinguistic framework. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's model through stages of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The discussion is divided into three main subsections to facilitate understanding.

3.1. Classification of Flora and Fauna Metaphors in Javanese Proverbs

The data analysis identified 30 Javanese proverbs containing metaphorical elements of flora and fauna. Among them, 15 proverbs are flora-based and 15 are fauna-based. The flora metaphors consist of 6 monocotyledonous and 9 dicotyledonous species, while the fauna metaphors comprise 16 vertebrates and 2 invertebrates. This classification shows that fauna metaphors are slightly more dominant than flora metaphors, reflecting the symbolic role of animals in Javanese moral and social representation [28], [29].

Table 3. Distribution of Flora and Fauna in Javanese Proverbs

Category	Type	Quantity	Percentage (%)
Flora	Monocotyledon	6	40.0
Flora	Dicotyledon	9	60.0
Fauna	Vertebrate	16	88.9
Fauna	Invertebrate	2	11.1

The dominance of vertebrate animals such as buffalo (*kebo*), chicken (*pitik*), fish (*iwak*), and monkey (*kethek*) indicates that animal metaphors serve as cognitive tools in expressing social hierarchies and behavioral ethics. Similarly, flora metaphors such as *tebu* (sugarcane), *gedhang* (banana), and *pari* (rice) represent agrarian values emphasizing fertility, honesty, and diligence.

3.2. Forms and Meanings of Metaphors

The metaphorical classification in this study follows Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) *Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, which divides metaphors into structural, orientational, and ontological types. The analysis found that structural metaphors dominate in fauna-based proverbs, while ontological metaphors are more common in flora-based ones. Orientational metaphors appear less frequently, mainly reflecting moral direction (up-down, good-bad).

Table 4. Distribution of Conceptual Metaphor Types

Type of Metaphor	Flora Proverbs (%)	Fauna Proverbs (%)	Total (%)
Structural	33.3	53.3	43.3
Orientalional	13.4	20.0	16.7
Ontological	53.3	26.7	40.0

These findings indicate that Javanese society tends to use living entities as analogies for human behavior, transforming natural imagery into conceptual models of morality. For instance, the proverb *Kebo nusu gudel* ("a buffalo suckles its calf") portrays a reversal of generational hierarchy, criticizing older individuals who depend on the younger. Meanwhile, *Esuk dhele sore tempe* ("morning soy, evening tempeh") conveys instability and inconsistency in one's character. Both examples reveal how metaphor serves as a moral and social reflection rooted in daily life experiences [30].

The metaphorical relationship between nature and culture may be expressed in an equation-like conceptual model below, representing the interaction between environment (E), value system (V), and human cognition (H):

$$M = \frac{(ExV)}{H} \quad \dots(1)$$

where *M* represents metaphorical meaning as the synthesis of ecological context (*E*), cultural value system (*V*), and human perception or cognition (*H*). This formulation illustrates that metaphor is not merely linguistic but conceptual, arising from ecological experiences integrated with cultural values.

3.3. Representation of Cultural Values and Ecological Awareness

Through Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of representation and Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic model, the study found that the metaphors in Javanese proverbs reflect a human-centered ecological worldview. Nature is not merely depicted as an external object but as a mirror of human behavior and morality. The flora and fauna used as metaphors function as cultural devices that regulate social ethics, emphasizing balance (*keselarasan*), harmony (*kerukunan*), and humility (*andhap asor*).

Table 5. Domains of Cultural Values Represented in Proverbs

Domain	Example of Proverbs	Implied Value
Family	<i>Kebo nusu gudel</i>	Responsibility and role balance
Society	<i>Timun wungkuk jaga imbuh</i>	Social justice and fairness
Education	<i>Esuk dhele sore tempe</i>	Consistency and self-discipline
Work	<i>Nandur pari jero</i>	Diligence and patience
Politics	<i>Asu gedhe menang karahé</i>	Power critique and leadership ethics

These domains align with the Javanese philosophy of *memayu hayuning bawana* maintaining harmony between human, social, and natural orders. The use of flora and fauna metaphors demonstrates how the natural world becomes a medium for ethical reflection. The findings also resonate with Koentjaraningrat's (1984) classification of cultural systems, emphasizing the intertwining of moral, social, and environmental values in Javanese culture.

3.4. Relevance to Ecolinguistics and Education

From an ecolinguistic standpoint, the results affirm that the relationship between humans and nature in Javanese thought is metaphorically framed rather than literal. Nature becomes a pedagogical and moral landscape, teaching people to behave harmoniously and respectfully. As Stibbe (2015) explains, language constructs the *stories we live by* in this case, proverbs function as cultural narratives that sustain ecological awareness.

This research highlights that revitalizing local proverbs in education can strengthen environmental ethics and character building among students. By integrating Javanese proverbs into the curriculum, educators can link linguistic knowledge with ecological and cultural understanding, thus promoting sustainability in both thought and practice.

The findings of this study demonstrate that flora and fauna metaphors in Javanese proverbs function not merely as stylistic devices, but as culturally and ecologically meaningful linguistic strategies. The dominance of structural metaphors in fauna-based proverbs suggests that animals are frequently used to conceptualize social behavior, power relations, and criticism [31], [32]. This finding supports Lakoff and Johnson's view that structural metaphors allow abstract social experiences to be understood through more concrete and familiar domains. Similar patterns have been reported in previous studies on metaphor use in traditional expressions, where animals are often associated with human social roles and moral judgment. However, unlike earlier studies that focused primarily on semantic interpretation, this research extends the discussion by situating these metaphors within an ecolinguistic framework, highlighting their ecological grounding and cultural continuity [33]-[35].

Ontological metaphors, which appear more frequently in flora-based proverbs, reflect how plants are conceptualized as stable entities symbolizing moral endurance, patience, and spiritual reflection. This finding aligns with previous research on agrarian cultures, where plant imagery is closely linked to ethical values and life philosophy [36], [37]. Nevertheless, this study goes beyond earlier descriptive accounts by showing that flora metaphors also encode an ecological worldview that emphasizes balance, sustainability, and interdependence between humans and nature. In this sense, Javanese proverbs resonate with Stibbe's ecolinguistic notion of "beneficial stories," where language promotes values that support ecological harmony rather than domination.

Oriental metaphors, although less frequent, play a significant role in guiding value orientation and behavioral norms. Their presence across both flora and fauna domains indicates that spatial concepts such as direction, order, and position are culturally meaningful tools for moral instruction [38], [39], [40]. Previous studies have often treated orientational metaphors as secondary or peripheral, but the findings of this research suggest that they function as integrative mechanisms linking physical experience, cultural norms, and ecological awareness.

This highlights a gap in earlier research that tended to prioritize metaphor classification over functional interpretation.

Compared to prior studies on Javanese [41] proverbs that largely emphasized linguistic form or moral content, this study provides a more critical contribution by explicitly linking metaphor usage to ecological consciousness. Nature in Javanese proverbs is not portrayed as an exploitable resource, but as a moral reference and a living partner in human existence. This perspective challenges anthropocentric interpretations commonly found in proverb studies and reinforces ecolinguistics' emphasis on ethical relationships between language, culture, and the environment.

This study introduces a critical and transformative dimension to the analysis of Javanese proverbs by shifting the analytical focus from descriptive cataloguing of linguistic structures or generic moral teachings to a deep, systemic examination of their underlying ecological worldview. It establishes a novel conceptual bridge between traditional metaphor analysis and contemporary ecolinguistic theory, specifically the ecosophy of ecological harmony [42], [43]. The core novelty lies in its systematic revelation that these proverbs operate on a principle of bio-cultural partnership, where natural elements (e.g., mountains, rivers, animals, plants) are not merely symbolic backdrops or resources for human allegory but are positioned as active, sentient subjects and ethical benchmarks for human conduct. This directly challenges and expands upon the predominantly anthropocentric frameworks that have dominated prior proverb scholarship, positioning Javanese paremiology as a repository of non-Western ecological philosophy that intrinsically critiques exploitation and advocates for relational integrity between humans and the more-than-human world [44], [45].

The findings carry significant theoretical, methodological, and practical implications. Theoretically, they provide a robust non-Western case study that strengthens the core tenets of ecolinguistics, demonstrating how language fossilizes and perpetuates sustainable worldviews, thereby challenging universalizing claims of anthropocentrism in cultural discourse. Methodologically, the study offers a replicable framework for analyzing proverbs and other formulaic speech genres in diverse languages to uncover their implicit environmental ethics, urging scholars to look beyond surface-level content [46], [47]. Practically, this research has potent applications in education for sustainable development and cultural preservation. The proverbs can serve as pedagogical tools within both local Javanese curricula and global environmental education to foster ecological consciousness by grounding abstract concepts in culturally resonant, authoritative wisdom. Furthermore, it empowers indigenous knowledge systems by validating their scientific and philosophical relevance in contemporary ecological crises, suggesting pathways for integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern sustainability policy and discourse.

Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges several inherent limitations. First, the analysis is primarily textual and hermeneutic, relying on the semantic and metaphorical interpretation of recorded proverbs, which may not fully capture the dynamic, contextual, and performative nuances of how these proverbs are actually used in live oral communication and social negotiation [48]. Second, the focus on proverbs as idealized units of wisdom presents a synchronic snapshot that may not account for historical shifts in their interpretation or the potential erosion of their associated practices in modern, urbanized Java; the lived reality of environmental attitudes among contemporary Javanese may diverge from the ideal model presented in the proverbs. Finally, while the study champions a specific ecosophy, its scope is confined to the analysis of language itself. It does not empirically measure the direct causal impact of this proverbial ecological consciousness on tangible environmental behaviors or community-based resource management practices, indicating a crucial area for future interdisciplinary research that bridges linguistic analysis with ethnographic and ecological fieldwork.

Nevertheless, the scope of this study is limited by the relatively small data set of 30 proverbs, which restricts broader generalization. While the use of tables and percentage distributions helps clarify qualitative tendencies, these figures should be understood as interpretive indicators rather than statistical claims. Future research could expand the corpus, incorporate comparative regional data, or examine how contemporary speakers reinterpret these proverbs in modern ecological discourse. Such studies would deepen the critical dialogue between traditional wisdom and present-day environmental challenges.

4. CONCLUSION

The objectives of this study to identify, classify, and interpret flora and fauna metaphors in Javanese proverbs from an ecolinguistic perspective have been achieved as reflected in the results and discussion, which show that Javanese proverbs function as cultural narratives conveying ecological and moral values that emphasize harmony between humans and nature. Fauna metaphors appear slightly more frequently than flora metaphors, and structural metaphors dominate, indicating that natural elements are used as conceptual models for social behavior and ethical reasoning, in line with Hall's representation theory and Stibbe's ecolinguistic framework. However, this study is limited by its relatively small and purposively selected corpus of 30 proverbs from a single source and by its qualitative descriptive approach, which prioritizes interpretative depth over broader generalization. The use of frequency and percentage data is intended only to support qualitative interpretation rather than to provide statistical claims. Future research is therefore recommended to expand the data sources and regional coverage, and

to employ mixed qualitative approaches such as corpus-based analysis, digital linguistic tools, or ethnographic observation of contemporary proverb use, in order to deepen understanding of ecological metaphors and strengthen the contribution of ecolinguistics to cultural preservation and environmental awareness.

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USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All aspects of the research, including data collection, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were carried out entirely by the authors without the assistance of AI-based technologies.

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