

METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS OF BANANA NAMES IN JAVANESE LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Plant naming in Javanese culture is not merely descriptive but is laden with metaphorical meaning that reflects cultural values and collective cognition. This study aims to uncover the cognitive processes behind the use of metaphors in the names of banana varieties (*gêdhang*) in the Javanese language. The research method employed is descriptive qualitative, with data collected through documentation of the Javanese dictionary, observation, and interviews with local informants. Data analysis was conducted using a referential approach and a reflective-introspective method to identify the source domains, target domains, and conceptual structure of the metaphors. The results show that the metaphors in banana names take the form of idiomatic phrases, with loci based on construction attributes. Source domains include place, beauty, small things, position, and spirit beings, while target domains involve flavor, color, texture, seeds, and the number of fruits. The discussion highlights how language reflects local wisdom and cultural values, and how metaphors function conceptually in organizing human experiences. This study enriches conceptual metaphor theory and opens avenues for further exploration in other ethnobotanical lexicons.

Keywords: *metaphorical, locus, source, target, domain*

Introduction

Language is fundamental to human existence, functioning both as a medium for articulating complex philosophical ideas and as a cultural artifact that embodies collective and individual values (Chaer, 2007; Karpinska & Liepiņa, 2022; Parera, 2004; Stanojević et al., 2023; Ullmann, 1970). In Javanese tradition, this centrality of language is captured in the proverb *ajining dhiri dumunung ing lathi, ajining raga dumunung ing busana*, which emphasizes that dignity is reflected in one's speech while outward appearance is judged by clothing (Kartikasari & Laksono, 2022).

Such a proverb illustrates how language serves not merely as a communication tool but also as a marker of identity and social refinement. It positions speech as a direct reflection of personal integrity, highlighting the cultural importance of linguistic behavior in shaping social relations and status.

Among Indonesia's regional languages, Javanese holds a particularly significant place, spoken by millions across the archipelago. Mastery of the language plays a vital role in

safeguarding linguistic diversity and preserving traditional knowledge, folklore, and local wisdom that form part of Java's heritage (Subroto et al., 2007).

A distinct feature of Javanese communication lies in its preference for indirectness. Ideas and experiences are often conveyed not through literal expressions but through parables, symbols, and metaphors. This tendency reflects deep cultural values of subtlety, harmony, and respect (Kinanti et al., 2019; Kurnia, 2013, 2016).

Through this indirect style, the Javanese language encodes social norms and spiritual worldviews. Linguistic forms act as vessels that carry and transmit cultural philosophies, ensuring that values and beliefs are continuously reinforced across generations.

The use of metaphor extends beyond everyday conversation into the naming of plants. Many Javanese plant names are metaphorical, shaped by environmental observation and social interpretation. Such naming practices not only describe flora but also inscribe cultural meanings into natural elements.

Bananas provide a clear example of this symbolic system. Varieties such as *gedhang raja* (*Musa acuminata*) symbolize fertility and abundance, whereas *kêmbang kêrtas* (*Bougainvillea spectabilis*) carries philosophical associations of resilience and impermanence. These metaphors reveal a worldview where nature is interwoven with spiritual, social, and philosophical dimensions.

The symbolic significance of plants also permeates ritual and religious life. Many plants used in ceremonies bear names that carry cultural weight, their meanings shaped by centuries of tradition. This underscores the inseparability of language, nature, and spirituality in Javanese society.

Theoretical perspectives on metaphor help explain these practices. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors shape cognition by mapping abstract ideas onto concrete experiences. Similarly, Łozowski (2023) and Nirmala (2014) describe how observed qualities of one domain are transferred to another, producing meaningful cultural parallels.

While prior research has explored Javanese metaphors in domains such as animals (Wijana, 2020), proverbs (Kurnia, 2016), metaphors in Lumajang (Rahayu, 2002), the Tengger society's use of animal names as metaphors in Javanese phrases (Handayani, 2019), and food (Hendrokumoro, Wijana, Mashumah, 2023), plant-based metaphors, especially those related to banana varieties, remain underexplored. This study therefore investigates how Javanese speakers conceptualize banana names metaphorically, contributing to a deeper understanding of the cultural, cognitive, and linguistic significance embedded in Javanese naming traditions.

Literature Review

Recent studies on metaphor have moved beyond treating it merely as a rhetorical device and have emphasized its role as a cognitive and cultural mechanism that shapes how communities conceptualize their world. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 2020) remains foundational, but contemporary research highlights the ethnolinguistic dimensions of metaphor, where naming practices in local languages reveal how cultural groups encode values, beliefs, and worldviews into linguistic forms. Scholars such as El Refaie (2019), Cosăceanu (2017), Ricoer (2012), (Kovesces, 2010), and Kovesces (2010) stress that metaphor operates not only at the conceptual and linguistic levels but also within broader cultural frames that preserve collective

memory. In this regard, ethnolinguistic naming, especially of plants, food, and animals, has gained increasing scholarly attention as it demonstrates how language reflects ecological knowledge, social hierarchy, and ritual practices (Arimi, 2015; Evans, Vyvyan & Green, 2006; Hendrokumoro et al., 2023; Krisnawati, 2014; Lakoff & Johnson, 2020; Martani et al., 2019; Musyayyab & Arimi, 2022; Wijana, 2015, 2016, 2018). For instance, plant names in Javanese culture are not arbitrary labels but metaphorical constructs that connect the natural environment with human cognition and spirituality, illustrating the interplay between metaphor, identity, and cultural continuity. While prior research has examined animal metaphors, food-related naming, and proverbs in Javanese, the metaphorical basis of plant naming, particularly bananas, remains underexplored, marking a crucial gap that this study seeks to address within the intersection of metaphor theory and ethnolinguistics.

Method

This study is qualitative descriptive research as it seeks to elucidate the metaphor of different banana (*gêdhang*) kinds in Javanese language. Data constitutes the subject of investigation or the reality that is the focal point of inquiry (Abdussamad, 2021; R. Santosa, 2014). This study's data include metaphorical terms associated with the Javanese banana plant. The data source for this research is the Javanese dictionary (*Bausastra Jawa*) (Poerwadarminta, 1939). The number of data on the metaphor of the name of banana in Javanese found is 9 data in the Javanese dictionary (*Bausastra Jawa*). To ensure the validity of the findings, this study applied triangulation techniques (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Moleong, 2009). Triangulation of sources was conducted by comparing the dictionary data with interview results from informants of different professional backgrounds, ensuring that metaphorical interpretations were not limited to a single perspective. Methodological triangulation was also employed by combining textual analysis of the *Bausastra Jawa* (Poerwadarminta, 1939) dictionary with in-depth interviews, while theoretical triangulation was achieved by interpreting the data using both ethnolinguistic and cognitive metaphor frameworks. Researcher triangulation was applied through reflective-introspective analysis, allowing the researcher to critically evaluate and cross-check the consistency of interpretations. These strategies enhance the trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability of the research findings.

The interviewees were a Javanese language lecturer at Bangun Nusantara University (his name is R. Adi Deswijaya, S.S., M.Hum, 54 years old, native Javanese), a Javanese language teacher at State Senior High School 1 Kartasura (his name is Ikhsan Mahendra, S.S., Gr., M.A, 34 years old, native Javanese), a Biology lecturer at Bangun Nusantara University (his name is Prof. Suwarto, 65 years old, native Javanese), and a pharmacist who works at Dr. Sardjito General Hospital, Traditional Health Service Unit Tawangmangu (her name is Apt. Awal P Kusumadewi, M.Sc, 52 years old, native Javanese). The selection of four informants was based on purposive sampling, prioritizing expertise, native competence in Javanese, and relevance to the research focus. The Javanese language lecturer and teacher provided linguistic and pedagogical perspectives on metaphor usage and cultural embedding. The biology lecturer contributed insights into the botanical aspects and ecological associations of banana varieties, while the pharmacist added a perspective on ethnomedicinal and ritual practices involving bananas. By involving informants from different but complementary

professions, the study captures a more holistic understanding of the metaphorical naming of bananas in Javanese culture. Although the number of informants was limited to four, their diverse expertise and native fluency ensured sufficient depth, richness, and representativeness of data for qualitative analysis.

The methods employed in data collection include auditory observation, note-taking, and interviewing techniques (Kusumastuti, Adhi ; Khoiron, 2019; R. Santosa, 2014; Sudaryanto, 1993). This data collection comprises all texts or words featuring metaphorical expressions. The recording method is employed to document all collected data. The interview strategy involved correspondents, resource individuals from indigenous Javanese communities, pharmacist, and biologists to gather data. Metaphors are categorized into source domains, the basis of similarity between the source and target domains, and sociocultural influences in Javanese banana plant metaphors.

The employed data analysis method is a referential approach, with its defining instrument being a referent, specifically the reality signified by language (Mahsun, 2017; Sudaryanto, 1993; A. B. Wahyudi, 2013). The analysis was conducted at multiple stages. (1) identification of the source domain and target domain in the metaphor; (2) analysis of the conceptualization of metaphors; and (3) characterization of the speaker's thinking based on the conceptualization of metaphors. A reflective-introspective data analysis method is employed to comprehend the culture and psyche of speakers. This reflective-introspective approach seeks to enhance the role of researchers as both data providers and custodians of data validity (Sudaryanto, 1993).

Result and Discussion

Result

Gêdhang ambon (Musa paradisiaca)



Picture 1. *Gêdhang ambon (Musa paradisiaca)* (Aeni, 2022).

Linguistic forms of *gêdhang ambon* is idiomatic phrase, the metaphorical locus is a construction attribute, the source domain is the place, and the target domain is the banana flavor. *Gêdhang ambon (Musa paradisiaca)* is another variety of the *Musa paradisiaca* species, which is known in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia. The ripe fruit has a sweet and delicate taste, making this banana suitable as a snack or dessert. *Gêdhang ambon* has been widely used in Indonesian cooking recipes to be used in making compote which is a dish made from bananas, coconut milk and sugar as well as fried bananas which are fried bananas. *Gêdhang ambon* have a unique shape long and slightly curved with a thin layer that is yellow when ripe. These bananas also have a soft and sweet flavor that many people in this region love. These mangoes are also versatile, because for those of you who have tried to follow my writing carefully, you know that raw or green mangoes are just as useful as ripe mangoes. In addition to

being promoted for its culinary value, *Gêdhang ambon* is a fruit that grows in tropical and subtropical countries and is an important plant in many communities (Aeni, 2022; Firda Ekayanti et al., 2023; Heyne, 1987; Muslihudin, 2010c; Poerwadarminta, 1939; Purnomo, 2013; I. B. Santosa, 2017).

Gêdhang ayu (Musa acuminata)



Picture 2. *Gêdhang ayu (Musa acuminata)* (Fleming, 2010).

The expression *gêdhang ayu* is an idiomatic form in Javanese where the metaphorical locus lies in the attribute “beautiful” (*ayu*), with the source domain of beauty mapped onto the target domain of the banana’s appearance, particularly its bright yellow skin. Although *gêdhang ayu* belongs to the *Musa acuminata* species, the cultural salience of its name does not rest on botanical classification but on aesthetic and evaluative associations embedded in Javanese worldview. The metaphor highlights how external qualities such as color and form are linguistically conceptualized through human-centered attributes of attractiveness. This pattern is consistent with other metaphorical namings in Javanese, where plants are often described using human qualities (e.g., *gêdhang raja* “royal banana” for fertility and abundance). Similar cross-cultural parallels appear in metaphor studies beyond Javanese, for instance, in English and Chinese, fruits are also described through human attributes like beauty, nobility, or strength, underscoring a broader ethnolinguistic tendency to anthropomorphize nature through metaphor. Thus, *gêdhang ayu* illustrates how plant naming functions as a cultural semiotic practice that blends linguistic categorization with social values (Fleming, 2010; Heyne, 1987; Muslihudin, 2010a; Poerwadarminta, 1939; Purnomo, 2013; I. B. Santosa, 2017; Socfindo, 2019).

Gêdhang kluthuk (Musa balbisiana)



Picture 3. *Gêdhang kluthuk (Musa balbisiana)* (Bradley et al., 2025).

Linguistic forms of *gêdhang kluthuk* is idiomatic phrase, the metaphorical locus is a construction attribute, the source domain is small things, and the target domain is the banana seeds. *Gêdhang kluthuk (Musa balbisiana)* is a species of banana native to Southeast Asia and is an important ancestral variety of modern bananas. This banana is

one of the wild ancestors of cultivated bananas, especially in the development of the common banana cultivar, *Moses spp.* (including the Cavendish variety). *Musa balbisiana* plant usually produces small, inedible, hard and seed-containing fruits. These bananas are often not consumed directly, but they are very important in breeding programs to improve disease resistance and the quality of bananas. *Musa balbisiana* plays an important role in the genetic pool for banana cultivation, contributing to the hybrid varieties used around the world. This species of banana can be found in the wild in tropical forests and is known for its toughness, especially its resistance to certain banana diseases such as Panama disease (Bradley et al., 2025; Heyne, 1987; Muslihudin, 2010b; Poerwadarminta, 1939; Purnomo, 2013; I. B. Santosa, 2017; Santoso, 2025).

Gêdhang karèt (Musa acuminata)



Picture 4. *Gêdhang karèt (Musa acuminata)* (Fleming, 2010).

Linguistic forms of *gêdhang karèt* is idiomatic phrase, the metaphorical locus is a construction attribute, the source domain is the thing, and the target domain is the sticky. *Gêdhang karèt (Musa acuminata)*, or zebra banana, is a unique variety of banana known for its ornamental appearance. The plant has striking foliage, with dark green leaves dotted with purple or reddish stripes, so it looks like a zebra. This variety is not commonly grown for fruit production, but rather for ornamental purposes in the garden or as an indoor plant. The banana plant has an aesthetic appeal, making it popular in tropical and subtropical regions. This banana can grow in warm climates with enough sunlight, similar to other banana species (Fleming, 2010; Heyne, 1987; Muslihudin, 2010a; Poerwadarminta, 1939; Purnomo, 2013; I. B. Santosa, 2017; Socfindo, 2019).

Gêdhang raja (Musa paradisiaca)



Picture 5. *Gêdhang raja (Musa paradisiaca)* (Aeni, 2022).

Linguistic forms of *gêdhang raja* is idiomatic phrase, the metaphorical locus is a construction attribute, the source domain is the position, and the target domain is the banana flavour. *Gêdhang raja (Musa paradisiaca)* refers to a group of bananas that are classified as large-sized bananas and have a slightly sweet taste. This banana is the

result of a cross between *Musa acuminata* which produces dessert bananas and *Musa balbisiana* which is a wild banana. In many areas of Southeast Asia such as Indonesia, *gêdhang raja* is considered very useful. These bananas are used both when they are young and still green to cook, as well as when they are ripe to be eaten fresh. Fruits that are still green are usually eaten to cook with other starchy foods such as fried and boiled or mashed into pasta or soup; It is usually eaten by boiling, frying, and mashing into pasta. Ripe fruit is sweet and creamy in taste, and is suitable for consumption directly while still raw or used in special recipes to make desserts such as compote. This plant has a very erect growth habit, rather large, and has large thick leaves and a very striking appearance, and is therefore used in the agricultural and horticultural sectors (Aeni, 2022; Firda Ekayanti et al., 2023; Heyne, 1987; Muslihudin, 2010c; Poerwadarminta, 1939; Purnomo, 2013; I. B. Santosa, 2017).

Gêdhang raja sèwu (Musa paradisiaca)



Picture 6. *Gêdhang raja sèwu (Musa paradisiaca)* (Sulistya, 2021).

Linguistic forms of *gêdhang raja sèwu* is idiomatic phrase, the metaphorical locus is a construction attribute, the source domain is the position, and the target domain is something a lot and have many fruits in a bunch. A unique characteristic appears in the *gêdhang sèwu (Musa chiliocarpa)* banana that grows in Southeast Asia, including in parts of Indonesia. This species has other distinctive features that distinguish it from other banana species as described below. *Musa chiliocarpa* has smaller fruits than the majority of other bananas and the fruit is red or purple when unripe, but it can be consumed. *Gêdhang sèwu* is generally consumed when ripe and tastes sweet, but this type is not as popular as the Cavendish banana type. *Musa chiliocarpa* plant is very tolerant and cultivated in traditional farming systems. Some regions use bananas to prepare food by frying or even used to make deserts. The plant also has a contribution to local biodiversity; Its unique appearance enhances the beauty of gardens and farms. *Gêdhang sèwu* is known for its Indonesian implications where apart from being a common dish, this banana can also be used as a ceremonial food used in the preparation of dishes or offerings (Heyne, 1987; Poerwadarminta, 1939; Purnomo, 2013; I. B. Santosa, 2017; Sulistya, 2021; D. Wahyudi et al., 2023).

Gêdhang sèwu (Musa chiliocarpa)



Picture 7. *Gêdhang sèwu (Musa chiliocarpa)* (Nazaruddin, 2018).

Linguistic forms of *gêdhang sèwu* is idiomatic phrase, the metaphorical locus is a construction attribute, the source domain is something a lot, and the target domain is bananas that have many fruits in one bunch. A unique characteristic appears in the *gêdhang sèwu (Musa chiliocarpa)* banana that grows in Southeast Asia, including in parts of Indonesia. This species has other distinctive features that distinguish it from other banana species as described below. *Musa chiliocarpa* has smaller fruits than the majority of other bananas and the fruit is red or purple when unripe, but it can be consumed. *Gêdhang sèwu* is generally consumed when ripe and tastes sweet, but this type is not as popular as the Cavendish banana type. *Musa chiliocarpa* plant is very tolerant and cultivated in traditional farming systems. Some regions use bananas to prepare food by frying or even used to make deserts. The plant also has a contribution to local biodiversity; its unique appearance enhances the beauty of gardens and farms. *Gêdhang sèwu* is known for its Indonesian implications where apart from being a common dish, this banana can also be used as a ceremonial food used in the preparation of dishes or offerings (Heyne, 1987; Nazaruddin, 2018; Poerwadarminta, 1939; Purnomo, 2013; I. B. Santosa, 2017; D. Wahyudi et al., 2023).

Gêdhang wulan (Musa acuminata)



Picture 8. *Gêdhang wulan (Musa acuminata)* (Fleming, 2010).

Linguistic forms of *gêdhang wulan* is idiomatic phrase, the metaphorical locus is a construction attribute, the source domain is the position, and the target domain is the banana flavour. *Gêdhang wulan (Musa acuminata)* is a banana variety belonging to the species *Musa acuminata*, which is one of the main cultivated banana species. This variety is very popular in Indonesia and other Southeast Asian regions due to its sweet and flavorful fruits. *Gêdhang wulan* is often known for its slightly smaller size compared to other bananas, with a creamy texture and a soft, creamy sweetness when ripe. These bananas are usually enjoyed fresh, eaten as a snack, or used in traditional

desserts and dishes. One common use of *gêdhang wulan* is in compote (a dessert made from bananas cooked with coconut milk and sweetened with palm sugar) or as an ingredient for fried bananas. Sometimes it is also used in savory dishes when it is still green. This banana variety is also valued for its relatively hardy crop, which thrives in tropical climates and contributes to the local agricultural system. This fruit is not only valued for its taste, but also for its cultural significance, which is often used in local ceremonies or offerings species (Fleming, 2010; Heyne, 1987; Muslihudin, 2010a; Poerwadarminta, 1939; Purnomo, 2013; I. B. Santosa, 2017; Socfindo, 2019).

Gêdhang gêndruwo (Musa Acuminta Red Dacca)



Picture 9. *Gêdhang gêndruwo (Musa Acuminta Red Dacca)* (Hadi, 2017).

Linguistic forms of *gêdhang gêndruwo* is idiomatic phrase, the metaphorical locus is a construction attribute, the source domain is spirit creatures, and the target domain is the banana colour. *Gêdhang gêndruwo (Musa acuminata Red Dacca)* is a banana variety commonly known as Red Dacca or Red Banana. This variety of *Musa acuminata* is known for its reddish or reddish-purple skin when ripe, which distinguishes it from the more common yellow bananas. The name *gêndruwo* refers to a mythical figure in Javanese culture, which may evoke a reddish hue in bananas or their somewhat exotic nature. *Red dacca* bananas are medium in size and have a sweet and slightly tangy flavor with a rich, creamy texture when ripe. The flesh of this banana is often described as soft and lighter in color, ranging from pale white to slightly pink. In terms of nutrition, these bananas are also rich in potassium, fiber, and vitamins, which offer a variety of health benefits (Hadi, 2017; Heyne, 1987; Poerwadarminta, 1939; Purnomo, 2013; I. B. Santosa, 2017)

Discussion

The linguistic metaphor surrounding the naming of banana varieties in Javanese culture reveals a rich integration of metaphor, idiomatic expression, and cultural symbolism. The use of idiomatic phrases such as *gêdhang ambon*, *gêdhang ayu*, *gêdhang kluthuk*, *gêdhang karèt*, *gêdhang raja*, *gêdhang raja sèwu*, *gêdhang sèwu*, and *gêdhang wulan* demonstrates how language encodes both physical and sensory characteristics of banana cultivars through metaphorical construction. In each case, the metaphorical domain lies in the construction attribute, indicating that the metaphor emerges from a perceived attribute or quality associated with the banana, mapped from a culturally familiar source domain to the banana's target domain. For instance, in *gêdhang ambon*, the source domain is place, evoking the city of Ambon, which metaphorically signifies a unique or distinctive flavor, associating geographical origin with a sensory trait. Similarly, *gêdhang ayu* uses the source domain beauty to refer to the color of the banana, reflecting cultural values that associate attractiveness with

aesthetic and gustatory appeal. *Gêdhang kluthuk*, with its metaphor grounded in small things, refers to the seeds of the banana, emphasizing its inedible, wild characteristics. This aligns with the biological reality of *Musa balbisiana*, a species known for its hard-seeded fruit. In contrast, *gêdhang karèt* uses the metaphor of sticky things to describe a banana with potential adhesive or rubber, like properties, possibly referencing its texture or usage in local practices.

Metaphors related to position such as in *gêdhang raja* and *gêdhang wulan* link hierarchical or celestial imagery to flavor or status of the banana, suggesting these cultivars are prized or special. *Gêdhang raja sèwu* and *gêdhang sèwu* extend this metaphorical pattern by associating abundance or multitude with banana clusters, reflecting not only the physical appearance but also symbolic wealth or fertility. This metaphorical mapping reflects the deep cultural embeddedness of bananas in the Javanese and broader Indonesian context. Each variety is not only a botanical specimen but also a semiotic object, imbued with symbolic, functional, and, sometimes spiritual significance. The idiomatic phrases used serve as linguistic vehicles that transmit local knowledge, taste expectations, and socio-cultural attitudes toward food, plants, and their roles in daily and ceremonial life. The analysis shows how metaphor operates cognitively and culturally, structuring understanding of banana varieties in a way that is both accessible and meaningful to speakers of the language. These naming conventions exemplify Lakoff & Johnson (1980, 1999, 2020) conceptual metaphor theory, where abstract or unfamiliar experiences (e.g., banana taste, color, texture) are understood via familiar domains (e.g., beauty, royalty, stickiness, multiplicity). Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of how plant naming practices in local cultures are shaped by metaphorical cognition, ecological familiarity, and socio-cultural symbolism. It invites further research into other ethnobotanical lexicons to uncover similar linguistic and cognitive patterns in the naming of food plants and their embedded meanings in regional traditions.

Conclusion

Based on the previous explanation, it can be concluded that the cognitive process in metaphorical expressions is triggered by the conceptualization carried out to show the correspondence between the concepts of source and target. The linguistic form of the metaphor of the name banana in Javanese is an idiomatic phrase. The metaphorical linguistic form in the name of a banana in Javanese can be categorized as an idiomatic phrase because it has a meaning that cannot be interpreted literally from its constituent elements. The metaphorical locus The attribute of the name of a banana in Javanese is a construction attribute. In Javanese, banana names often have construction patterns that are not only descriptive, but also metaphorical. This structure connects the attributes of bananas to a broader meaning. The source domain of the name banana in Javanese is a place, beautiful, something small, a thing, a position, something many, a spirit creature. Meanwhile, the target domain of bananas in Javanese is banana taste, banana color, sticky, banana seeds, and has many fruits in one bunch. The relationship between the source and target domains in Javanese banana names shows that the naming of bananas is not only based on their physical characteristics, but also involves metaphorical concepts from Javanese culture.

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