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Javanese Plant Metaphors for Ritual Offerings

Abstract

The production of utterances involves cognitive, physiological, and physical processes. This research focuses on the cognitive aspect, specifically the mental mechanisms underlying the creation of metaphorical terms associated with Javanese plants used in ritual offerings. The study aims to shed light on how metaphorical expressions in the traditional Javanese language emerge. The data, comprising metaphorical terms related to ritual plants, were purposively selected from Javanese lexical sources. The research employs observation and intuition as primary approaches, with analytical methods including matching, distributional, and reflective-introspective techniques. The findings reveal that the generation of metaphorical expressions relies heavily on cognitive association processes, linking the source domain (e.g. plant characteristics or functions) with the target domain (cultural or spiritual concepts). This association demonstrates how metaphor functions as a cognitive tool to conceptualise abstract ideas through tangible elements within Javanese cultural practices. Ultimately, the study illuminates how cultural cognition is reflected in linguistic expressions, particularly in the symbolic use of plants in ritual contexts.
Keywords: plant; metaphor; Javanese; ritual offering; social factor

1 Introduction

Language significantly influences human existence, as it is inseparably connected to every individual. Through language, philosophers have expressed their thoughts and shared the results of their reflections (Chaer, 2007; Karpinska & Liepiņa, 2022; Parera, 2004; Stanojević et al., 2023; Ullmann, 1970). Without language, human understanding of philosophical concepts would be impossible. The relationship between philosophy and language is comparable to inseparable lovebirds or two sides of the same coin, each complementing the other. The Javanese proverb *ajining dhiri dumunung ing lathi, ajining raga dumunung ing busana* highlights that a person's worth is determined by their language, while their appearance is judged by their clothing (Kartikasari & Laksono, 2022; Wagiati et al., 2023). This suggests that language represents both the dignity of an individual and the cultural sophistication of a nation. As such, the language people use must reflect kindness and respect, as it mirrors their contributions to society, the nation, and the state.

The research on metaphors in Javanese plants for ritual gifts is justified by the philosophy of the aforementioned Javanese adage. The Javanese language is a regional language spoken in Indonesia, an archipelagic nation consisting of various islands, including Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Papua, Nusa Tenggara, and Java. Each island is home to various ethnic groups, each with its own distinct culture. Culture is generally understood as encompassing knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, customs, habits, and skills acquired through social interaction (Martini, 2017). It can also refer to traditional heritage such as regional dances, musical instruments, traditional weapons, and languages. Among the regional languages in Indonesia, Javanese has the largest number of speakers. It is among the most extensively spoken regional languages, boasting millions of speakers. Learning Javanese helps preserve linguistic diversity, essential for cultural richness and contributes to the global understanding of human languages and their evolution.

More than just a tool for communication, Javanese carries cultural identity, traditional wisdom, and values passed down through generations (Subroto et al., 2007). By studying the language, individuals contribute to the preservation of Java's cultural heritage, including its literature, folklore, and arts.

In Javanese society, local wisdom is reflected in the language used to express thoughts and emotions. Communication is often indirect, delivered with care, using symbols, codes, intermediaries, and a sense of respect for the listener to avoid offending. Occasionally, life events or circumstances elude complete verbal expression, requiring metaphors or parables, which usually arise from extensive observation and life experience. These phenomena represent various aspects of human nature, attitudes, conditions, norms, values, principles, and behavioral rules in life (Kinanti et al., 2019; Kurnia, 2013, 2016). The naming process in Javanese is rooted in observation of the environment and social interactions. This wisdom is seen in the way animals, plants, objects, and people are named, with plant names often used metaphorically to depict situations or provide descriptions.

The tradition of naming plants in Javanese culture originates from a deep connection with the natural world, where plants are not only valued for their physical properties but also for their symbolic meanings. Over time, the names given to plants have come to reflect their perceived roles in both everyday life and spiritual practices. In the context of ritual offerings, plants are often imbued with metaphorical significance, and their names carry layered meanings that resonate with Javanese cosmology.

For instance, various banana trees such as '*gedhang raja*' (*Musa acuminate*) used in offerings, symbolizes fertility and abundance, its name echoing these qualities. Similarly, '*kêmbang kêrtas*' (*Bougainvillea spectabilis*) represents deep symbolic and philosophical significance. Its use in ritual offerings reflects the Javanese worldview, which blends animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, along with a strong reverence for nature and the cosmos. The metaphorical naming of these plants for ritual use is not merely linguistic; it reflects centuries of cultural observation, where the qualities of each plant are seen as directly influencing the outcomes of the rituals, they are part of. This practice highlights how language, nature, and spirituality are intricately woven together in Javanese tradition.

For centuries, plants have held a significant role in Javanese culture, valued not only for their medicinal and culinary uses but also for their inclusion in cultural rituals. The indirect nature of communication in Javanese society gives rise to a rich use of metaphor in the language, which extends to the naming of plants. This aligns with the perspective of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who argue that metaphors mirror real-life experiences, thoughts, and emotions. Altakhaineh and Zibin (2024), Łozowski (2023), and Nirmala (2014) further explain that metaphors function by drawing comparisons, making analogies, or transferring perceived traits from one domain to another. In their view, metaphors consist of two key components: target domain and source domain. The symbolic significance inherent in the names of plants utilised in Javanese ceremonial offerings necessitates thorough examination, as they embody the impact of Javanese cultural values on the nomenclature process. The cultural heritage of the Javanese populace significantly influences the metaphorical and symbolic connotations of these ritual-giving plants.

Based on the explanation above, Javanese ritual offering plant metaphors can be questioned. The widespread use of metaphorical expressions in the context of ritual offerings allows for the development of several research questions that this brief paper aims to address. These problems concern the following three issues: 1. the various source domains exploited to create Javanese ritual offering plant metaphors; 2. the similarity basis through which Javanese rituals involving the giving of plants serve as a symbol for the space between the two domains; and 3. the various social factors that underlie the existence of these Javanese ritual offering plant metaphors. These issues are the basis for the researchers' investigation into Javanese ritual offering plant metaphors.

As indicated by the large number of scholars who have studied language, the examination of the Javanese language through metaphor studies is compelling and warrants additional exploration. Several previous studies have addressed Javanese metaphors: Wijana (2020) examined metaphorical representations of the physical attributes of turtle doves in Javanese language and society; Kurnia (2016) researched animal metaphors in Javanese proverbs; Rahayu (2002) researched metaphor in the Javanese community in Lumajang Regency; Hendrokumoro et al. (2023) examined metaphorical representations in Javanese food names; and Handayani (2019) researched animal name metaphors in Javanese expressions in Tengger society. While Hidayah et al. (2024) examined plant metaphors generally, this study uniquely explores ritual-specific plants in

Javanese offerings, emphasising their symbolic role in maintaining harmony between spiritual and natural realms. Similar to previous metaphor studies with focused datasets, the representativeness of the examples lies not in quantity but in the diversity of conceptual mappings they reveal.

Further examination is warranted based on prior research completed on Javanese metaphors. This study focuses on the Javanese language within the context of plant metaphors used in ritual offerings to identify: various source domains; the similarity basis between the source and target domains; and the various social factors that underlie the existence of Javanese plant metaphors for ritual offerings.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Java Ritual Offerings

In Javanese culture, ritual offerings, or *sesajen*, play a vital role in maintaining harmony between the human, spiritual, and natural realms. Among the symbolic elements within these offerings are plants, which hold profound metaphorical significance. The intricate use of plant metaphors reflects Javanese cosmology, where nature is deeply intertwined with spiritual practices. Plants, such as banana leaves, betel, and coconut, are not merely physical objects but carry layered meanings, often linked to fertility, life, and protection. These metaphors provide insights into the Javanese worldview, wherein the use of specific flora is believed to bridge the material and spiritual worlds, inviting blessings or averting misfortune (Geertz, 1976).

The metaphorical use of plants in Javanese offerings underscores the community's reverence for nature and highlights a cultural framework that promotes balance and well-being through ritual practices (Agustina & Syaifudin, 2021; Marselina, 2013; Susanti & Lestari, 2021; Wahyuni et al., 2020). In Javanese culture, ritual offerings involving plants are deeply rooted in traditional beliefs, animism, and syncretism with Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic influences. These offerings, known as *sesaji* or *sajen*, are made to honour spirits, ancestors, deities, and natural forces, often as a form of gratitude or a request for protection and blessings. Plants play a significant role in these rituals, symbolising life, fertility, and a connection to nature.

2.2 Metaphors

Metaphors are understood as cognitive processes that link one concept to another through language. Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 2020) and Engstrøm (1999) argue that metaphors are not merely stylistic devices but conceptual tools that organise thought by associating abstract domains with more concrete experiences. This process requires mental operations in which the lexicon and semantic memory interact. Semantic memory, as explained by Altakhaineh and Zibin (2024), Dąbrowska (2023), Parera (2004), and Wijana (2015), stores knowledge of words, ideas, and world information, and is activated when people communicate. The associative and hierarchical structure of memory allows humans to relate physical attributes of one entity to abstract ideas, forming the basis of metaphorical thinking.

Research shows that the mind plays an active role in metaphorical construction by linking perceptual experiences with cultural interpretations. For instance, Wijana (2020) illustrates how Javanese society uses the physical qualities of turtle doves as metaphors to convey symbolic meanings of fortune, harmony, and desirability. The appreciation of turtle doves is not only practical but also cultural, demonstrating how the observation of physical traits becomes a foundation for metaphorical conceptualisation. This example underlines the cultural embeddedness of metaphors and their role in everyday reasoning.

Psycholinguistic perspectives reinforce this view by showing that metaphors are understood through processes such as comparison, similarity recognition, and trait transfer (Caspi, 2018; Ferenczy, 1997; Hanh, 2025; Hendrokumoro et al., 2023; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Since the human mind is grounded in bodily experience, perception, and social interaction, imagination becomes crucial in constructing abstract thought. Through imagination, people can transcend direct reality and conceptualise entities that are not immediately perceptible. Thus, metaphors function as a bridge between embodied experience and abstract reasoning (Arimi, 2015; Kövecses, 2010; Musyayyab & Arimi, 2022).

Conceptual metaphors are dynamic because they evolve alongside cultural practices, emotions, and lived experiences. They can take various linguistic forms – ranging from single morphemes to full phrases (Rahardian & Nirmala, 2018; Wijana, 2023) – and draw from diverse source domains such as humans, animals, plants, and celestial objects. While many source domains are universal, culture-specific contexts shape the interpretation and symbolic value of these metaphors. As Demjen (2011) and Kövecses (2015) point out, conceptual metaphors reflect cognitive interpretations of reality and are often preferred over literal expressions because they embed emotional and cultural nuance.

Structurally, metaphors consist of two main components: the source domain, typically concrete, and the target domain, typically abstract (Engstrøm, 1999; Hidayah & Arimi, 2025; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 2020). The effectiveness of a metaphor depends on identifying the shared attributes that justify the mapping between source and target. Conceptualisation is grounded in embodied experience, where sensory perceptions and emotions provide the raw material for abstract reasoning. In this sense, metaphorical expressions embody not just literal meaning but also cognitive and cultural dimensions (Hidayah & Arimi, 2025; Nirmala, 2014, 2016; Rahardian & Nirmala, 2018). Thus, metaphors represent a fundamental mechanism by which humans conceptualise, interpret, and communicate reality.

3 Methodological Approach

First, a non-participant observation approach is used for data collection, supplemented by recording techniques. Additionally, an intuitive technique is employed as a complementary approach to data implementation. According to Noor (2015), conceptual metaphor researchers – such as Kövecses (2010), Krisnawati (2014), and Lakoff and Johnson (2020) – often utilise the intuitive technique. This strategy relies on the internalized experience of the researcher. The metaphorical plant terms used in ritual offerings were identified from the Javanese dictionary, *Bausastra Jawa* (Balai Bahasa Yogyakarta, 2011; Poerwadarminta, 1939).

The researchers employed two sampling methods: random and purposive. The random approach was used to select the source material, while a purposive strategy was utilised to select specific metaphorical terms. To validate the data, the researchers conducted interviews with native Javanese speakers. For the analysis process, a referential technique is used to demonstrate and contrast the meanings present in both the source and target domains of the metaphorical expressions under study. Furthermore, a reflective-introspective technique is applied to demonstrate the role of cognitive processes in speech production. Finally, the researchers employ the abductive inference method developed by Hanh (2025) and Krippendorff (2004) to demonstrate how the correspondence between the source and target concepts is produced, as well as to identify the metaphorical foundation that specifies the link between them.

4 Findings and Discussion

The use of metaphorical terms indicates a conceptualisation process where one notion is explained through another. This study examines the cognitive processes involved in generating metaphorical language, specifically how these processes are revealed through the mapping between source and target domains in Javanese ritual offering plant metaphors. These processes are identified through both theoretical research and empirical data analysis.

The central focus of this investigation is the cognitive mechanism triggered when an individual generates a metaphorical phrase by correlating a stored concept with a new entity. By analysing the investigated metaphorical terms, the researchers can demonstrate how this conceptualisation occurs. This is achieved through the researcher's intuition as a native speaker of the language, supported by the abductive inference technique, the reflective-introspective approach, and the referential method. Furthermore, cognitive processes within these metaphors are manifested through the mapping of physiological experiences, qualities, characteristics, functions, and abilities from the source domain to the target domain. Consequently, these metaphorical expressions serve as a primary vehicle for demonstrating underlying cognitive processes.

4.1 Conceptualization Based on Experiences Perceived by the Body

The speaker's conceptualisation illustrates the correlation between source and target domains, as evidenced by embodied experiences perceived and retained in the mind. This encompasses sensory perceptions – including visual, gustatory, tactile, auditory, and olfactory stimuli – as well as interoceptive sensations occurring within the body. Consequently, the term "body experience" may refer to the holistic sensations experienced by the organism. An illustrative example is provided below.

(1) Sêdap *malêm* (*Epiphyllum oxipetalum*) (Heyne, 1987)



Sêdap malêm (*Epiphyllum oxipetalum*) is a species of cactus native to Central America but commonly found in tropical regions such as Indonesia. It is renowned for its striking, fragrant flowers that bloom only at night, earning it the moniker "Queen of the Night" (Heyne, 1987). In Javanese culture, *sêdap malêm* holds significant symbolic importance (Jaskot & Ganoshenko, 2015; Purnomo, 2013; Santosa, 2017), often associated with beauty and mystery due to its short-lived yet spectacular bloom. This ephemeral flowering is symbolic of the fleeting nature of life and beauty, aligning with the Javanese philosophical understanding of impermanence. Consequently, it serves as a fitting flower for offerings in spiritual contexts focused on reflection, meditation, or honouring ancestors. Furthermore, the plant's night-blooming habit contributes to a mystical atmosphere; in Javanese tradition, the night is perceived as a time of potent spiritual energy. This makes the flower particularly suitable for evening or nocturnal rituals, such as *ruwatan* (cleansing ceremonies) or *tahlilan* (prayers for the deceased).

As illustrated in Example (1), the cognitive process involves a mapping where the term *sêdap* does not refer to the pleasant aroma of food, but rather to the fragrance of flowers. Similarly, *malêm* does not denote the time of night itself, but is instead based on the phenomenon of nocturnal blooming. Consequently, in the metaphor *sêdap malêm* (*Epiphyllum oxipetalum*), the source domain consists of food aromas and the concept of night, while the target domain comprises floral fragrance and nocturnal flowering. The conceptual link between these domains is established through the shared sensory experience of pleasant scents and the specific timing of the bloom.

(2) *Kelapa* (*Cocos nucifera*) (Socfindo, 2025)



Kelapa (*Cocos nucifera*) holds profound symbolic significance in Javanese ritual practice, serving as a metaphor for wholeness and origin. Due to its rounded shape and internal unity, the coconut functions as a source domain that reflects completeness and the beginning of life. This physical and perceptual attribute is culturally extended to the concept of cosmic unity, positioning the coconut as a microcosm of the universe

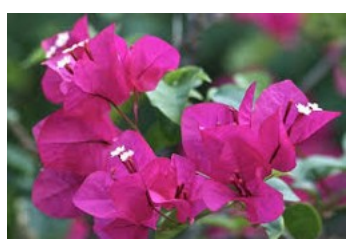
and a representation of vitality. Consequently, in ceremonial offerings, it is frequently employed not merely as a material object of devotion but as a sacred symbol embodying the interconnectedness of the natural, human, and spiritual realms. Through this mapping, the coconut becomes a powerful cultural metaphor that bridges the tangible natural world with abstract cosmological concepts (Heyne, 1987; Jaskot & Ganoshenko, 2015; Purnomo, 2013; Socfindo, 2025).

As illustrated in Example (2), the Javanese metaphorical conceptualisation of *kelapa* (*Cocos nucifera*) employs the coconut as a source domain, where its rounded form, unified structure, and life-sustaining water symbolise completeness and vitality. These tangible features are projected onto a target domain encompassing wholeness, origin, and cosmic unity, thereby transforming the coconut into a representation of the life source and the universe itself. Through this mapping, the coconut becomes a ritual metaphor that links the physical characteristics of nature with abstract cosmological ideas. In ceremonial contexts, its use in large offerings underscores its role as a sacred symbol, embodying the interconnectedness of humanity, nature, and the divine.

4.2 Conceptualization Based on Characteristics

The conceptualisation of the source domain, which establishes the correspondence with the target concept, is manifested through its inherent qualities. In this study, these characteristics are defined as semantic features – attributes that can be visually perceived or experienced through the senses. The following example illustrates how shared features facilitate the conceptual mapping between a source and a target concept.

(3) *Kêmbang kêrtas* (*Bougainvillea spectabilis*) (Heyne, 1987)



Kêmbang kêrtas (*Bougainvillea spectabilis*) is a flowering plant species indigenous to South America, extensively cultivated in tropical and subtropical locations globally for its vivid bracts and ability to thrive in harsh conditions (Heyne, 1987). Widely known for its paper-like bracts that resemble colourful petals, it is a common garden plant in various parts of Indonesia, including Java. In Javanese, "kêmbang" means flower and "kêrtas" means "paper"; thus, *kêmbang kêrtas* translates to "paper flower", a fitting description of the species.

In Javanese culture, *kêmbang kêrtas*, though not traditionally a primary flower used in ritual offerings, can still hold symbolic and practical value in certain ceremonial contexts (Jaskot & Ganoshenko, 2015; Purnomo, 2013; Santosa, 2017). Its vibrant bracts and hardy nature complement the spiritual elements of Javanese rituals, where its bold appearance symbolises resilience, beauty, and endurance. While not as deeply embedded in spiritual symbolism as jasmine, *kêmbang kêrtas* may be used in offerings to represent strength and vibrancy, especially in rituals aimed at invoking blessings of protection or success. Furthermore, the bright colours of the plant can enhance the visual beauty of an offering or *sesaji*, reflecting respect and devotion to the spirits or deities being honoured. Its toughness and longevity make it appropriate for events such as *selamatan* (communal feasts) or *nyadran* (rituals for honouring ancestors), where it can serve as a decorative element representing perseverance.

The examples of plant terms in Figure (3) can be categorised as metaphorical because the expressions incorporate characteristics of an entity such as paper. The bracts of *Bougainvillea* do not literally refer to paper, but their texture and appearance resemble it. In this metaphor, the target domain is the fragile flowers, whereas the source domain is paper. The relationship between these domains is established through the shared attribute of being thin and delicate.

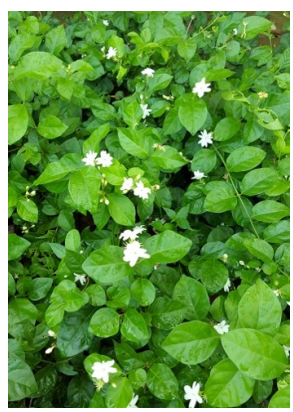
(4) *Sirih* (*Piper betle*) (Muslihudin, 2010)



Sirih, or betel leaf (*Piper betle*), carries deep cultural meaning in Javanese tradition, serving as a symbol of bond and unity. As the source domain, the betel leaf represents togetherness and mutual connection, rooted in its role in traditional chewing practices and social exchanges. This physical and social function is extended into a target domain of respect and social harmony, where it embodies interpersonal ties, courtesy, and collective values. In ritual practice, *sirih* plays a central role in marriage ceremonies and brotherhood rites, functioning as a metaphorical representation of binding relationships and social cohesion. Through this mapping, the betel leaf functions not only as a material object but also as a cultural metaphor that sustains harmony and solidarity within the community (Heyne, 1987; Jaskot & Ganoshenko, 2015; Muslihudin, 2010).

As illustrated by the plant examples in Example (4), *sirih* (betel leaf) functions as the source domain in Javanese metaphorical conceptualisation, where its role in chewing practices and communal exchanges symbolises bond and unity. These tangible and social characteristics are projected onto a target domain of respect and social harmony, signifying interpersonal ties, courtesy, and collective solidarity. The association between the source and target is realised through the metaphor of social bonding, where the offering and sharing of *sirih* becomes a cultural expression of togetherness. Within ritual contexts, especially in marriage ceremonies and acts of brotherhood, *sirih* serves as a metaphorical medium that strengthens relationships and preserves communal harmony.

(5) *Melati* (*Jasminum sambac*) (Socfindo, 2024)



Melati, or jasmine (*Jasminum sambac*), is a culturally significant flower in Javanese tradition, revered as a symbol of purity and sanctity. As the source domain, jasmine embodies these qualities through its white colour, delicate fragrance, and inherent association with sacredness. These perceptual qualities are extended into a target domain of spiritual devotion and sincerity, symbolising inner virtues such as honesty, faithfulness, and sacred intent. Through this metaphorical association, jasmine becomes a cultural emblem

of moral and spiritual values. In ritual practice, it is frequently used in religious ceremonies, weddings, and funerary rites, where its presence reinforces ideas of holiness, respect, and the eternal bond between humans and the divine (Heyne, 1987; Jaskot & Ganoshenko, 2015; Marliah, 2023; Purnomo, 2013; Socfindo, 2024).

As illustrated by the plant examples in Example (5), *melati* (jasmine, *Jasminum sambac*) functions as the source domain in Javanese metaphorical conceptualisation, where its white petals, gentle fragrance, and fragile form symbolise purity and sanctity. These perceptual qualities are projected onto a target domain of spiritual devotion and sincerity, representing inner faithfulness and sacred intent. The association between the source and target is realised through the metaphor of holiness, in which the physical traits of jasmine embody moral and spiritual values. Within ritual contexts, jasmine is employed in religious ceremonies, weddings, and funerary rites, where it metaphorically expresses reverence, eternal bonds, and the sacred connection between human life and the divine.

4.3 Conceptualization Based on Position

By conceptualising the source domain through its inherent characteristics, the correspondence between the source and target concepts can be demonstrated. The following example serves as an illustration of this mapping.

(6) *Gêdhang raja* (*Musa paradisiaca*) (Heyne, 1987)



Musa paradisiaca, commonly referred to as *gêdhang raja*, is a species of banana extensively cultivated in tropical regions worldwide. While often grouped with sweet bananas, this variety is distinguished by its specific texture and high starch content (Heyne, 1987), making it a versatile staple. In Javanese tradition, *gêdhang raja* holds significant cultural and spiritual value and is frequently used in ritual offerings. It is regarded as an auspicious fruit, symbolising prosperity, fertility, and a connection with ancestral spirits.

Furthermore, *gêdhang raja* is a required element in Javanese wedding gifts (Purnomo, 2013; Santosa, 2017). According to Rosa (2021), wedding foods are often expected to be both sweet and sticky. This explains why this variety is preferred, as it possesses a superior sweetness compared to other bananas due to its high sugar concentration when peeled. Beyond its flavour, *gêdhang raja* carries connotations of magnificence and optimism. Consequently, it is essential for Javanese wedding presents to include this fruit to symbolise grandeur, pleasure, and good hope.

The examples of plant terms in Example (6) can be classified as metaphorical because the expressions incorporate the conceptual status of the banana's flavour. The term "gêdhang raja" is composed of "gêdhang" (banana) and "raja" (king). Although "king" typically denotes a person of tremendous authority, in this context, it is used to signify that this variety possesses the sweetest taste among all bananas. Thus, the source domain is the concept of royalty/authority, which is mapped onto the target domain of superlative sweetness.

This conceptualisation illustrates the correlation between conventional language and new metaphorical expressions, demonstrating how speakers form metaphors through cognitive processes. Once such terms are widely utilised within a community, they achieve the status of public linguistic property.

The following table and diagram provide a visual mapping of the conceptual mappings of six plants that hold symbolic importance in Javanese ritual practice. These plants are not merely physical objects but function as source domains in metaphorical thinking, where their observable traits are projected onto abstract target domains to create culturally significant meanings. By analysing their metaphorical targets,

conceptual meanings, and ritual functions, the table illustrates how plants serve as mediators between the natural world and spiritual or social realities.

Table 1. Conceptual Metaphor of Javanese Plants for Offerings.

Plant (Source Domain)	Metaphorical Target	Conceptual Meaning	Ritual Function
Gêdhang raja (*Musa paradisiaca*)	Authority, sweetness	Prosperity, grandeur, continuity	Bridal gift, symbol of abundance
Sêdap malêm (*Epiphyllum oxipetalum*)	Mystery, impermanence	Beauty, spirituality, transience of life	Purification ritual, nightly *tahlil* ritual
Kêmbang kêrtas (*Bougainvillea spectabilis*)	Fragility, resilience	Endurance, aesthetic vibrancy	Decoration of offerings, prayer of steadfastness
Sirih (*Piper betle*)	Bond, unity	Respect, social harmony	Marriage ceremony, brotherhood
Kelapa (*Cocos nucifera*)	Wholeness, origin	Cosmic unity, life source	Large offerings, symbols of the universe
Melati (*Jasminum sambac*)	Purity, sanctity	Spiritual devotion, sincerity	Religious ceremonies, deaths, weddings

Table 1 presents the conceptual mapping of selected Javanese ritual plants. Each plant functions as a source domain whose perceptual or physical attributes (e.g., sweetness, fragility, or purity) are projected onto a metaphorical target domain such as authority, unity, or sanctity. These mappings generate conceptual meanings that reflect cultural values – prosperity, resilience, harmony, or cosmic unity – and are actualised in specific ritual functions ranging from marriage ceremonies and purification rituals to funerary practices. Through this process, plants become more than material objects; they serve as cultural metaphors that link embodied experience with abstract cosmological and spiritual concepts in Javanese ritual life.

The diagram 1 illustrates the conceptual mapping of Javanese plant metaphors by showing how six ritual plants serve as source domains whose perceptual traits are projected onto abstract cultural meanings and ritual functions. Each green node represents a concept – whether plant, trait, cultural association, abstract meaning, or ritual practice – while the connecting lines indicate the metaphorical associations that link them. For instance, *gêdhang raja* (*Musa paradisiaca*) is associated with sweetness and grandeur, which map onto ideas of authority and prosperity, and are realised in wedding rituals as a symbol of fertility and continuity. Similarly, *sêdap malêm* (*Epiphyllum oxipetalum*) conveys mystery and impermanence, which extend to spiritual reflection and appear in purification and ancestor rituals. *Kêmbang kêrtas* (*Bougainvillea spectabilis*) reflects fragility and resilience, leading to endurance and vibrancy, and functions as a decorative ritual element. *Sirih* (betel leaf) embodies bond and unity, mapped to respect and social harmony, and is ritually enacted in marriage ceremonies and brotherhood rites. *Kelapa* (*Cocos nucifera*) signifies wholeness and origin, extending to cosmic unity and life source, and is used in major offerings as a universal symbol. Finally, *melati* (*Jasminum sambac*) represents purity and sanctity, linked to spiritual devotion and sincerity, and is essential in religious rituals, weddings, and funerary practices.

Overall, the diagram demonstrates how the physical traits of plants (concrete source domains) are transformed into abstract cultural concepts (target domains) and ultimately realised in ritual functions. This mapping underscores the role of metaphor as a cultural and cognitive mechanism that connects the natural world with the spiritual, social, and cosmological dimensions of Javanese life.

While acknowledging that the empirical dataset is relatively limited in size, it remains sufficiently representative to capture the core conceptual structures underlying plant metaphors in ritual offerings. The

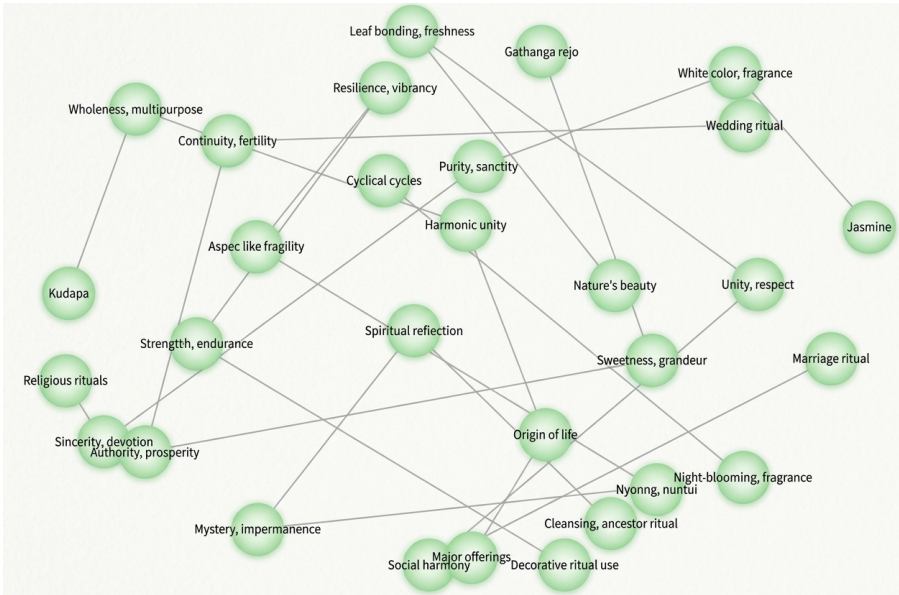


Figure 1. Diagram: Conceptual Mapping of Javanese Plant Metaphors for Ritual Offerings.

examples cover diverse domains – including fertility, protection, purity, and strength – which are central symbolic values in Javanese ritual practices. These findings provide a robust foundation for illustrating the main conceptual patterns within the framework of metaphor theory. Future research involving broader datasets and comparative cross-cultural material would further enrich and complement the findings presented here.

5 Conclusions

The cognitive process in metaphorical expressions is initiated through the conceptualisation of connections between source and target domains. Developing metaphorical language involves understanding the physiological occurrences, attributes, and relational positions of both domains to articulate experiences perceived, felt, or contemplated by individuals within a society. This process relies on an associative strategy that activates semantic memory related to embodied experiences. By drawing upon these stored sensory and emotional patterns, individuals facilitate mental mapping between abstract concepts (targets) and more concrete or familiar experiences (sources).

By activating neural pathways linked to sensory and emotional experiences, metaphorical thinking allows speakers to render intangible ideas more accessible and relatable. This cognitive mechanism not only shapes individual linguistic choices but also reflects broader cultural patterns, as metaphorical associations are often rooted in shared social experiences and embodied cognition. Thus, metaphor serves as a bridge between internal thought and external communication, revealing how humans structure meaning through bodily and contextual frameworks.

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