



## Dehumanization in Javanese metaphorical insults

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### Abstract

This study employs a descriptive-analytical qualitative method to investigate the utilization of metaphorical insults in the Javanese language through the perspective of social semantics with regard to dehumanization. Metaphorical insults that compare humans with non-humans have metaphorical implications. The research aims to understand the emotional connotations of insults that associate humans with non-human entities, such as anger, hatred, or even closeness. The findings demonstrate that insults referencing animals are often employed as curses, based on the nature of the animal in question. Additionally, the study reveals that insults referencing inanimate objects are rooted in their functions, values, or negative qualities. Furthermore, the study posits that metaphorical insults referencing plants or plant parts tend to be based on the perceived value or qualities of the plant, the change of a certain plant's form, as well as disproportionate juxtaposition. These insults referencing plants can be considered as a new form of dehumanization. The study concludes that metaphorical insults constitute a soft form of symbolic violence in Javanese society, perpetuated through language as a cultural and social practice wherein one individual exerts dominance over another.

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### Introduction

Dehumanization is frequently manifested in the Javanese language as a form of communicative disorder through the use of metaphorical insults, which serve as expressions of symbolic violence. Insults are emotionally charged statements consisting of harsh words or insinuations that are directed at a person and often take the form of metaphorical expressions (Hughes, 2006).

These metaphorical insults associate human beings with non-human entities such as inanimate objects, plants, and animals. These statements should not be taken literally, but rather should be understood in terms of the metaphorical qualities they carry that can be classified as second-layer meanings (Kovecses, 2010). As such, metaphorical insults are considered a form of symbolic violence. When human beings are associated with non-human entities, it constitutes an act of dehumanization (Over, 2021).

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Previous research on invectives or insults has covered various trends, including linguistic, socio-cultural, psychological, and insults using the term related to climate change. Relevant studies utilizing a linguistic perspective have employed various approaches such as the semantic-pragmatic approach applied in works by Karsana et al. (2015), Fasya and Suhendar (2013), and Kristiano and Ardi (2018); the translation science approach shown in the works by Vitasari (2013), Ameri and Ghazizadeh (2014), and Anggraini and Himawati (2017); and the corpus approach as demonstrated by the work of Pamungkas et al. (2022). Related studies utilizing a socio-cultural approach have been conducted by Nicolau and Sukanto (2014), Sajarwa (2021), and Dewaele (2004), while relevant studies utilizing a psychological approach have been carried out by Anderson et al. (2010) and Stephens and Robertson (2020). Additionally, research on insults in the form of sarcasm and humor with regard to climate change and global warming has been conducted by Eslen-Ziya (2022). The results of these studies suggest that while general forms of insults have been studied, the examination of metaphorical insults, particularly from the perspective of social semantics with regard to dehumanization, has yet to be undertaken. Moreover, studies with a social semantic perspective are able to reveal the meaning and social function of cursing in society in order to provide a more comprehensive analysis (Kroeger, 2019).

This research differs from previous studies in both its material and formal objects of analysis. Specifically, it focuses on the examination of metaphorical insults and employs a social semantic perspective related to dehumanization. The study of metaphorical insults is grounded in the understanding that metaphors are a product of mental construction based on the principle of analogy, which involves conceptualizing one element in relation to another and transferring meaning from concrete to abstract concepts (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). The study of dehumanization is based on the notion that it is a behavior or process that degrades a person, defined as the view or treatment of others as if they lack the cognitive capabilities of human beings. In other words, as articulated by Haslam and Loughnan (2014), dehumanization is “the denial of full humanness in others and the cruelty and suffering that accompanies it.”

The analysis of metaphorical insults is based on the notion that language is a social phenomenon that is influenced by a variety of factors, including both linguistic and non-linguistic factors such as social and situational factors (Wijana, 2006). Language serves as a means of conveying a person’s concepts, ideas,

and expressions to others, and one of its forms is insults. As a form of symbolic violence, the expression of metaphorical insults not only serves as a means of releasing emotions in unpleasant situations (Allan & Burridge, 2006), but also has a pragmatic function of strengthening closeness or intimacy. Due to this, metaphorical insults fall under the category of dehumanization. This perspective led to the formulation of two research questions. First: What forms and meanings of metaphorical insults exist in the Javanese language? Second: What is the reasoning behind the use of these metaphorical insults?

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## Literature Review

### *Dehumanization*

Dehumanization, as described by Over (2021), is closely linked to the concept of human essence. This encompasses actions that demean or devalue individuals, categorizing them as subhuman. Smith (2011) also supports this viewpoint, noting that dehumanizing treatment includes actions that fail to acknowledge the inherent value of human beings. Research by Harris and Fiske (2006, 2011) suggests that dehumanization is closely tied to an individual’s mental state and can result in the perception of certain groups, such as the homeless and drug addicts, as “incomplete humans.” However, Haslam and Loughnan (2014) argue that dehumanization can also be linked to distinct human attributes that set humans apart from other species, such as morality, rationality, and maturity. Additionally, dehumanization can also be perpetuated through the exercise of power, as demonstrated by Gwinn et al. (2013) who found that rulers can significantly influence interpersonal perceptions. Overall, dehumanization is primarily studied within the field of psychology rather than social science.

Dehumanization is a complex phenomenon that experts have categorized into four distinct types: associating humans with non-humans, perceiving humans inappropriately, regression of values, and abuse of power. The first type, associating humans with non-humans, includes actions that liken individuals to animals or inanimate objects. This can be seen in the historical treatment of African Americans as subhuman, likened to apes (Over, 2021), or in the portrayal of people as pests, such as during the Holocaust or in the massacre of the Tutsis in Rwanda (Harris & Fiske, 2011). The second type, perceiving humans inappropriately,

involves the dehumanization of certain groups through harmful stereotypes and prejudices. This can be seen in the treatment of illegal immigrants as criminals or terrorists (Haslam & Stratemeyer, 2016). The third type, regression of values, can be observed in the field of education. Freire (2007) argues that dehumanized education is characterized by a lack of freedom and critical thinking, turning students into robotic and uncritical individuals, as opposed to Humanistic education that empowers students to think and act freely. The fourth type, abuse of power, can be observed in instances where those in power use their authority to dehumanize marginalized groups (Gwinn et al., 2013). Overall, these four types of dehumanization demonstrate the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon, which can manifest in various forms and across different contexts.

### *Insults*

The use of insults or invectives can be understood as a form of emotional release or expression of dissatisfaction with a particular situation. Insults serve not only as a means of expressing hatred or as a release from negative experiences (Hughes, 2006), but it is also a linguistic phenomenon that exists within society. Resorting to insults is a behavior that is exhibited by individuals across various social groups and classes, including both the lower and upper middle class. This is closely related to the field of sociolinguistics, which views language as a social behavior employed in communication (Mayasari & Muzaki, 2019). The use of insults can also be examined through the lens of gender (Nicolau & Sukanto, 2014) and social class (Sajarwa, 2021). Furthermore, psychological research on insults has revealed that it can serve as an emotion generator, leading to physical responses such as an increased heart rate and pain (Stephens & Robertson, 2020). This highlights the complexity of cursing and its impact on the individual and society.

There are three key characteristics that are used to determine whether an utterance constitutes an insult. Firstly, the use of language that is considered taboo within a society. Secondly, the utterance is not meant to be taken literally but instead carries a metaphorical meaning. Thirdly, the utterance is used as a means of expressing a strong emotion (Anderson et al., 2010). Cursing also serves pragmatic functions such as giving compliments, expressing wonder, and building closeness or intimacy. Insults can be understood as a means of expressing emotions that serve both personal and social functions (Heriyanto, 2020). Moreover, using the SWAD (Swear Words Abusiveness Dataset) corpus data can predict the

level of violence in a given utterance (Pamungkas et al., 2022).

### *Metaphor*

Metaphor is a linguistic style that involves the transfer of meaning from one concept to another, also known as conceptual metaphor. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), conceptual metaphor is a product of mental construction based on the principle of analogy, which involves understanding one concept in terms of another. The concept that is often metaphorized is the concept of emotion. Emotion is an abstract concept, which is analogized into another more concrete concept (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). This perspective is supported by Kövecses (2006) and Lyra et al. (2016) who posit that metaphor comprises of a source domain and a target domain, where the target domain is more abstract than the source domain. Evans and Green (2006) also emphasize that the source domain and target domain cannot be interchangeable as the relationship between them is unidirectional. Additionally, Kövecses (2006) links metaphors to culture, noting that culture plays a significant role in shaping metaphors. Yu (2010) further argues that lexical choices in metaphor are influenced by human socio-cultural experiences. Thus, metaphors are not simply linguistic expressions, but also a reflection of the socio-cultural beliefs and practices that surround them.

Lakoff and Johnson (2003) have classified metaphors into three distinct categories: structural metaphors, orientational metaphors, and ontological metaphors. Structural metaphors involve the transfer of meaning from one concept to another based on systematic correlations between daily life experiences. Orientational metaphors, on the other hand, pertain to the orientation of human experience and its relationship with cultural influences (Kovecses, 2010). These metaphors are based on spatial orientation, which emerges from physical experiences in organizing directions in life and are integrated in the human mind to concretize abstract concepts (Gibbs, 2006). Finally, ontological metaphors involve conceptualizing abstract thoughts, experiences, processes, and other abstract things as having physical properties. In other words, ontological metaphors make abstract nouns into concrete nouns as stated by Nirmala (2014) and Musolff (2006). This highlights the different ways in which concepts can be transferred through metaphor and how these different types of metaphors are based on different aspects of human experience and culture.

## Verbal Violence

Verbal violence, also known as verbal abuse, is a form of behavior in which an abuser uses words or manipulative tactics to exert dominance and control over the victim, instilling doubt and insecurity (Bosch, 2007). This form of violence is often difficult to detect as it can be perpetrated unconsciously and is often a precursor to physical violence. Verbal violence is typically characterized by communication patterns that include insults or harassing language (Rasyid, 2013). In the field of feminist psychology, verbal violence is considered a form of psychological violence (Gamble, 2010). The purpose of verbal violence is to threaten, demean, order, hurt, mock, hide the truth, criticize, and show indifference. And although language can be used to insult, insults or verbal violence are against the principles of good and polite communication.

The use of language in verbal violence can be classified into several categories. One category is the use of swear words associated with animals, such as “dog” and “swine,” or the specifically Indonesian insult words “*cebong*” (literally “tadpole”) and “*kampret*” (literally “microbat,” although it can also be translated as “shucks”). Another category is the use of swear words and insults that have negative connotations, such as “bastard” and “idiot,” as well as words with sexual elements. Additionally, insults also serve to create a more harmonious relationship between familiar participants. For example, in the Javanese cultural context, cursing can be used to show familiarity. They are usually used to address people who already have a close relationship with others (Angelica & Purnomo, 2024). In contrast, there are derogatory terms used in place of pleasant or neutral ones to emphasize the negative meaning of what is being said, as explored by Yun (2010) and Putra (2015). Ek et al. (2013) also added that verbal violence can be categorized into three types: yelling, cursing, and giving negative nicknames or labels.

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## Methodology

The current study conducts an analysis of the utilization of metaphorical insults in the Javanese language, which possess both literal and metaphorical qualities. Both literal and metaphorical insults are used to express annoyance or similar feelings as a reaction to something the speaker sees, feels, or hears. As previously demonstrated by Wijana (2006), metaphorical insults in the Javanese culture may associate individuals with

objects, animals, supernatural entities, and professions. The choice to use these metaphorical insults is based on their prevalence in both written and spoken forms within Javanese society. The utilization of these metaphorical insults is not limited to a specific age group and is commonly employed by both adults and teenagers as a means of expressing a wide range of emotions, including anger, annoyance, disappointment, regret, humiliation, and surprise, both personally and socially.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the usage of metaphorical insults in the Javanese language, this study employs a qualitative method, specifically an analytically descriptive approach (Neumen, 2003). According to Creswell and Guetterman (2011), a qualitative research method is research that explores information from objects/participants at large by asking questions that are general in nature, and data collection is realized through the description of the text subjectively (Creswell & Guetterman, 2011). In this study, the qualitative method is used to identify the meaning of insults as well as its dehumanizing form to determine its category. The descriptive aspect of this method is utilized to identify the various forms of metaphorical insults used within Javanese society, following the approach outlined by Nassaji (2015) of describing a phenomenon and its characteristics. The analytical aspect, which is based on the descriptive data collected, is employed to uncover the meaning behind these metaphorical insults and to explain the reasons for their usage. This combination of descriptive and analytical approaches, as outlined by Spradley (2007), is directed towards describing the cultural characteristics present in individuals or groups within a cultural community.

The present research utilizes two types of data, namely, written and oral data, to investigate the usage of Javanese metaphorical insults. The written data, in the form of Javanese story manuscripts, range from those published in the 1930s to the present day. These manuscripts, which consist of short stories called *cerita cekak* (*cerkak*), were obtained from a local newspaper named *Kedaulatan Rakyat* and the online version (2022; 2018; 2022). The use of short stories published in 1930 and later years as the written data aims to ensure that the insults are used from the past until present. It also serves to encompass the diversity of writing in both old and contemporary forms of the Javanese language. The oral data, obtained through observations and interviews, were employed to ensure and see the continued usage of Javanese metaphorical insults in contemporary daily life. The interviews were conducted with both male and female informants who represent two main Javanese

dialects: the Jogja Javanese and the Solo Javanese dialects (Appendix). The interview is conducted by two methods. The first method is a direct interview, that is an interview conducted by meeting the interviewees when they are doing their social activities that involve many people (community service, celebrations, etc.). The second method is an interview by listening and recording the use of insults without a formal interview and only by listening to interactions in the community. These dialects are considered to be the standard Javanese language spoken in the Surakarta (Solo) and Yogyakarta areas, respectively (Sumarsono, 2014).

The data for this article were collected through a multi-method approach, including written material mapping, observation, and informant interviews. The written material mapping involved recording and documenting the usage of metaphorical insults, identifying the forms of these insults, and categorizing them based on the types of metaphorical referents. The identification of metaphorical cursing referents is important to reveal what types of referents are used by Javanese people (Sudarmaningtyas, 2020). Each data point was subsequently assigned a numerical code according to its metaphorical category. The observation component of the study involved participating in public activities where metaphorical insults are commonly used, such as *gotong-royong* (communal labor activities), traditional ceremonies, and community meetings. In addition, a sample of male and female informants from various professional backgrounds and age groups were interviewed to confirm the existence and ongoing use of metaphorical insults as recorded in the previous observations.

The data collected from observations and interviews were analyzed through a three-stage process. The first stage of analysis involved classifying the data based on their metaphorical references, namely, animals, objects, and plants. This first stage aims to find out the references that appear in insults. The second stage of analysis will uncover the meaning of these metaphorical insults. This stage aims to reveal the meaning and socio-cultural function of the use of insults in society. This discussion is presented in the discussion section. The third stage of analysis examined the underlying motives and reasoning behind the usage of the metaphorical insults in their various forms and contexts. The last stage aims to explain that insults are used to express annoyance and displeasure. Insults are also used to show the intimacy of the relationship, which Bourdieu describes as symbolic violence and wisdom. In addition, this analysis also aims to understand the peculiarities of metaphorical insults in Javanese. The results of this analysis provide insights into the questions posed in the present study.

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## Results

Metaphorical insults are a means of expressing emotions such as anger or hatred towards others through the use of comparisons to non-human entities such as animals, objects, or plants. The following data comprise three metaphorical insult referent categories that have been identified in this study, namely, animal (animate), objects (inanimate), and plant (animate) referents. The separation between animate and inanimate is because they both have different functions of insults. The animate one is taken based on its nature, while the inanimate one is taken based on its function. The classification of metaphorical insults into the following three tables was derived from written and oral data. This classification aims to discover the references and functions of metaphorical insults in society.

Metaphorical insults, which are characterized by the use of animal names as references, can be found in various language compositions. Table 1 illustrates the prevalence of this phenomenon, specifically in regard to the use of animal names to denote certain traits of the second person. These traits include: the tendency to abandon responsibilities as seen in data (1), irresponsibility in data (6), and stealing in data (7). Additionally, Table 1 also demonstrates that the use of animal names as second-person comparators is influenced by the context in which the language is being used. For example, in the context of family relationships (father and child) as seen in data (4) and (6), traveling context in data (5), friendship context in data (1), (2), (3), (9), (10), (11), and (12), as well as the context of hatred as seen in data (7) and (8).

Table 1 also demonstrates that the utilization of animal names in metaphorical insults is not solely used to express anger. On the contrary, the use of animal names can also serve to establish an atmosphere of intimacy or closeness. This can be observed in data (3) and (10) where intimacy is implied in the context of casual conversation, in data (4) for the context of working together, in data (9) for the context of dining together, and in data (12) for the context of friendship. Therefore, it can be inferred that the use of animal references in metaphorical insults should not be solely viewed as a form of symbolic violence, but also as a cultural mechanism for creating or reinforcing social bonds.

**Table 1** Javanese Metaphorical Insults with Animals as Referents

| No. | Referent                           | Example  | Source        |
|-----|------------------------------------|--|---------------|
| 1   | <i>Asu</i> (dog)                   | “ <i>Asu tĕnan kowe! Takparani bola-bali ora tau ana.</i> ”<br>(“You’re such a <b>dog!</b> I came by so many times, but you were never there.”)        | Informant 6   |
| 2   | <i>Munyak</i> (monkey)             | “ <i>Ooo munyak! Diĕntĕni malah ninggal.</i> ”<br>(“You <b>monkey!</b> I waited [for you] but you left instead.”)                                      | Informant 1   |
| 3   | <i>Wĕdhus</i> (goat)               | “ <i>Wĕdhus! Lunga ora omong.</i> ”<br>(“ <b>Goat!</b> [You] left without a word.”)  | Informant 4   |
| 4   | <i>Kirik</i> (puppy)               | “ <i>Kirik! Kon njupuk wĕdang, malah dolan.</i> ”<br>(“ <b>Puppy!</b> [I] told you to get a drink but you [went to] play around instead.”)             | Informant 8   |
| 5   | <i>Bangsas</i> (chinch)            | “ <i>Pancen bangsas, mĕnggok ora rĕting.</i> ”<br>(“Such a <b>chinch!</b> Turning without making a sign.”)   | Informant 3   |
| 6   | <i>Bĕdhĕs</i> (infant/baby monkey) | “ <i>Bĕdhĕs! Durung rampung umbah-ubah, minggat.</i> ”<br>(“ <b>Infant!</b> The laundry isn’t yet done but he’s left.”)                                | Informant 8   |
| 7   | <i>Cĕlĕng</i> (boar)               | “ <i>Cĕlĕng! Cah kuwi jĕbulĕ nyolongan ta?!</i> ”<br>(“ <b>Boar!</b> Turns out that kid likes to steal, huh?!”)”)                                      | Informant 2   |
| 8   | <i>Baya</i> (crocodile)            | “ <i>Pancen baya, sĕnĕnganĕ golĕk prĕkara.</i> ”<br>(“Such a <b>crocodile,</b> always looking for trouble.”)   | Short story 2 |
| 9   | <i>Kĕthĕk</i> (ape)                | “ <i>Wah kowĕ kĕthĕk tĕnan! Sakmana okĕhĕ dipangan dhĕwĕ.</i> ”<br>(“Wow you’re such an <b>ape!</b> That much [food] and you ate it all by yourself.”) | Informant 5   |
| 10  | <i>Kamprĕt</i> (microbat)          | “ <i>Aku ki ra mudhĕng, ngĕrti kata kuwi saka kowĕ, kamprĕt.</i> ”<br>(“I had no idea. I learnt that word from you, <b>microbat.</b> ”)”)              | Short story 4 |
| 11  | <i>Gĕnjik</i> (shoat/baby boar)    | “ <i>Oo gĕnjik! Isa-isane kowĕ ngarani aku pelit.</i> ”<br>(“Such a <b>shoat!</b> How dare you think of me as stingy.”)                                | Informant 2   |
| 12  | <i>Jangkrik</i> (cricket)          | “ <i>Jangkrik! Yĕn lagi mangan lali kancanĕ.</i> ”<br>(“ <b>Cricket!</b> When [you] eat [you] forget about [your] friends.”)                           | Informant 1   |

Javanese metaphorical insults may utilize inanimate objects as referents in addition to animals. The second person is equated with these objects, which can range from household appliances, professions, food, body parts, supernatural entities, excrement, and musical instruments. As shown in Table 2, the association of objects with the second person is often based on their function; for example, data (15) references the function of a trumpet, data (16) references the function of the face, data (17) references the function of the ear, and data (20) references the function of the brain. In data (20), the emphasized word is “utek”, not “encer”. It shows that someone can insult others with words related to body parts references (Wijana, 2012). Therefore, in this context, instead of saying “smart”, one says “utek e”. In data (19), the word “gondhes” means actually *gondrong ndeso* ‘village man with long hair’. A person who insults using this word will emphasize that the long hair for man has improper meaning. Additionally, the association of the second person with objects that do not have a function is also evident, as demonstrated in data (18) which references cloth that does not function. Data (20) and (21) also shows that brain and eyes, as body parts referents, do not have function to think and see. However, even though the insults take reference from body parts, they are still categorized as inanimate (Wijana, 2012).

Table 2 also illustrates the use of supernatural entities as referents in Javanese metaphorical insults, specifically entities that are deemed to be scary. For example, data (22) references a supernatural entity that is considered scary in its form, and data (23) references one whose sound of voice is considered scary. Additionally, there are also associations with objects in the form of food or drinks, as demonstrated in data (24) which references drinks that are popular among lower classes or are of low price, and data (25) which references a cheap food made from soybean pulp. Furthermore, there is also an association with dirty, unappealing object, as seen in data (14). Additionally, Table 2 also illustrates the association of the second person with professions that are considered low, such as in data (13) which references the profession of bullock cart drivers, and in data (19) which references a thief. Overall, the use of objects as referents in Javanese metaphorical insults is based on the qualities of the objects, namely, their undesirable, cheap, scary, unappealing, or dysfunctional nature.

**Table 2** Javanese Metaphorical Insults with (Inanimate) Objects as Referents

| No. | Referent   | Example  | Source        |
|-----|--|--|---------------|
| 13  | <i>Bajingan</i> (bullock cart driver)  | “ <i>Kamangka wis takbantu nggo mbayar utang, lha kok pitku digadhèkaké. Dhasar bajingan!</i> ”<br>“I actually helped pay [his] debt, but [he] dared pawn my motorcycle. What a <b>bullock cart driver!</b> ”) | Informant 4   |
| 14  | <i>tèlèk</i> (animal excrement)  | “ <i>Tèlèk! jaré mung tèlung dina, nganti séminggu durung disaur.</i> ”<br>(“ <b>Shit!</b> He said three days, but it’s been a week [and he] hasn’t paid back.”)   | Informant 6   |
| 15  | <i>Slomprèt</i> (trumpet)  | “ <i>Dicèluk, èthok-èthoke ora krungu. Slomprèt!</i> ”<br>(“I called out [but he] pretended not to hear. <b>Trumpet!</b> ”)  | Informant 9   |
| 16  | <i>Rai gèdhèg</i> (literally “bamboo mat face”; shameless)                   | “ <i>Dhasar rai gèdhèg, wis konangan, isih ngguya-ngguyu.</i> ”<br>(“Such a <b>bamboo mat face</b> , caught red-handed [and yet he] kept giggling.”)   | Short story   |
| 17  | <i>Kuping manci</i> (literally “ear of pan,” or pot handle; hard of hearing) | “ <i>Kuping manci! Wis dibèngoki malah tèrus ora mandhèg.</i> ”<br>(“ <b>Pot ear!</b> Got shouted at, yet he kept going and wouldn’t stop.”)   | Informant 3   |
| 18  | <i>Gombal</i> (literally “used cloth”; sweet talk, hooley)                   | “ <i>Kowé ki gombal. Janji tèka jam 5 nganti jam 7.</i> ”<br>(“You’re a <b>used cloth</b> . [You] promised to come at 5 [but did not come] until 7 o’clock.”)  | Informant 9   |
| 19  | <i>Gondhès</i> (thief)   | “ <i>Janji mangkat jam 3, jam 5 lagi tangi. Gondhès!</i> ”<br>(“You promised to leave at 3, but only woke up at 5 o’clock. <b>Thief!</b> ”)  | Informant 2   |
| 20  | <i>Utèk èncèr</i> (literally “diluted brain”; thinking clearly)              | “ <i>Nèk èsok adus grujuk, utèke bèn èncèr.</i> ”<br>(“In the morning, take a big shower so your <b>brain gets diluted.</b> ”)   | Informant 5   |
| 21  | <i>Mata picèk</i> (blind eye)  | “ <i>Matané picèk, Ana wong lungguh ditabrak.</i> ”<br>(“ <b>Blind [eye]</b> , he hit someone who was merely sitting around.”)   | Short story 1 |
| 22  | <i>Mak Lampir</i> (the name of a famous fictitious witch)                    | <i>Ngguyuné kaya Mak Lampir.</i><br>(Her laughter is like <b>Mak Lampir</b> ’s.)   | Short story 4 |
| 23  | <i>Iblis</i> (demon)   | “ <i>O iblis, sènèngané tèbar pésona.</i> ”<br>(“Such a <b>demon</b> [who] loves to spread [his] charm.”)  | Short story 2 |
| 24  | <i>Bajigur</i> (a kind of warm drink)  | “ <i>Bajigur! Krupuk sakplastik dièntèkné.</i> ”<br>(“ <b>Bajigur!</b> He finished a whole plastic bag full of crackers.”)   | Informant 4   |
| 25  | <i>Gèmbus</i> (tempeh made from soybean pulp)                                | “ <i>Gèmbus! Omongmu ora isa dipèrcaya.</i> ”<br>(“ <b>Gembus!</b> Your words can’t be trusted.”)  | Proverb       |

In the Javanese language, metaphorical insults often employ plants or plant-related imagery as a means of referencing the person being addressed. This utilization of plant-based imagery is based on various factors, including the perceived value, taste, or odor of the plant in question, as well as its physical characteristics, such as shape and form. As demonstrated in Table 3, this can manifest in a variety of ways, such as the association of the second person with a type of fruit with an unpleasant taste, namely, in data (27) which refers to a fruit with a sour taste, and in data (29) which refers to a plant with a bitter taste. There are also associations with types of plants that are cheap or low in value, namely, in data (26) which refers to plants that are cheap or are usually consumed by the lower classes, as well as in data (28) which refers to low-quality tobacco. There is also an association with a type of fragrant-smelling leaf, but it is associated with a trait that is considered weak, as shown in data (30) which refers to the pleasant-smelling basil. In addition, there is also the association with a plant that experiences a change in form, namely, in data (31) which refers to the change of soybeans into tempeh.

There is also an association with a type of fruit with an emphasis on shape and texture, namely, in data (32) which refers to the small and easily broken cucumber juxtaposed with the larger, hard, and thorny durian.

The data presented in Tables 1–3 include certain terminology that is specific to old Javanese, and upon confirmation with informants, it was revealed that some of them were not familiar with these terms. Furthermore, it should be noted that the metaphorical insults discussed above are not universally employed by all individuals of different social classes, genders, or age groups. Additionally, it is apparent that some speakers utilize similar sounding words as a means of softening the impact of the insults, such as the substitution of “*asu*” (dog) with “*asem*” (a sour fruit such as tamarind) and “*bajingan*” (bullock cart driver) with “*bajigur*” (a type of warm drink). This phenomenon is primarily observed among the younger generation.

**Table 3** Javanese Metaphorical Insults with Plants as Referents

| No. | Referent   | Example   | Source           |
|-----|--|---|------------------|
| 26  | <i>Tela</i> (cassava)  | “ <i>O tela! Takon malah disènèni.</i> ”<br>(“Such <b>cassava!</b> [I was merely] asking but got scolded.”)   | Informant 9      |
| 27  | <i>Asēm</i> (any sour fruit)   | “ <i>Asēm ki! Sésuk nèk aku mrono takpamèri gènti.</i> ”<br>(“ <b>Asem!</b> When I go there it’ll be my turn to show off.”)   | Informant 8      |
| 28  | <i>Sēmprul</i> (low quality tobacco)   | “ <i>Isa-isane wingi bar bayaran, saiki ngomong ora duwé dhuwit. Sēmprul!</i> ”<br>(“How is it possible that yesterday he made payment, and today he said he had no money. <b>Sēmprul!</b> ”) | Informant 1      |
| 29  | <i>Gambir</i> Blitar<br>(gambier/uncaria from Blitar,<br>East Java)  | “ <i>Lha ngajakuku bakso, aku sing kon mbayari. Gambir Blitar!</i> ”<br>(“Huh, you brought me to go buy meatball soup, then I get asked to pay. <b>Blitar gambier!</b> ”)                     | Proverb          |
| 30  | ( <i>Lanang kemangi</i> ) (“ <i>kemangi</i> ” literally<br>means “basil”; “ <i>lanang kemangi</i> ” refers<br>to a cowardly man)                             | “ <i>Lanang kemangi! Kon mangkat dhéwé ora wani.</i> ”<br>“ <b>Basil man!</b> Told to go alone but not guts to do so.   | Proverb          |
| 31  | <i>Esuk dhele sore tempe</i> (literally<br>“soybean in the morning, tempeh in<br>the afternoon”; used to refer to a person<br>who cannot make up their mind) | “ <i>Munafik tēnan! Esuk dhélé soré témpé.</i> ”<br>(“Such a hypocrite! <b>Soybean in the morning, tempeh in the afternoon.</b> ”)  | Informant 7      |
| 32  | <i>Timun mungsuh duren</i> (literally<br>“cucumber versus durian”; a lowly<br>person who challenges someone powerful)  | “ <i>Pardi kok mungsuh Pak Lurah, kaya timun mungsuh duren.</i> ”<br>(“Pardi taking on <i>Pak Lurah</i> (the village chief) is like a cucumber taking on a durian.”)                          | Short story<br>3 |

## Discussion

The following discussion explains the meaning and socio-cultural function and motives and reasoning behind the usage of the metaphorical insults. This analysis is in accordance with the sequence of analysis presented in the method (analysis of stage 2 and 3). The tables presented above demonstrate that metaphorical insults are not only employed as a means of expressing curses or venting emotions, but also as a means of displaying the closeness of interlocutors (Tsaqilla & Yusra, 2022) and have specific contexts (Anderson et al., 2010). As illustrated in the first table, metaphorical slurs that utilize animals as referents tend to base the insult on the inherent nature of the animal. Metaphorical insults that utilize objects as referents are employed based on the functions, values, and the intimidating qualities of the objects. On the other hand, metaphorical slurs that refer to plants or plant parts tend to be used based on the plants’ values, tastes, changes in form, and their disproportionate juxtaposition. As metaphorical insults are spontaneous expressions, the qualities, functions, values, and intimidating nature of the referents of the insults are not always aligned with the meaning of the accompanying sentences. For instance, in data (1), the metaphorical insult “*asu*” (dog), which has connotations of dirtiness or uncleanness, is not followed by an event or statement that implies dirtiness or uncleanness.

As previously stated in the second table, the use of metaphorical insults that reference animals tend to draw upon the inherent characteristics and associations of said animals. This form of insult can be considered a form of dehumanization as it goes against the fundamental nature of humanity (Over, 2021). In the context of Javanese culture, animals such as the dog in data (1) and puppy in data (4), referred to as “*asu*” and “*kirik*,” respectively, are commonly used as insults due to their negative connotations and associations, particularly in a Muslim society where dogs are often viewed as unclean. Additionally, animals such as the monkey, infant/baby monkey, and ape, referred to as “*munyuk*,” “*bedhes*,” and “*kethek*” respectively in data (2), (6), and (9) are associated with greed, while the goat, referred to as “*wedhus*” in data (3), is associated with a silent disposition. Furthermore, animals such as the boar and shoat, referred to as “*celeng*” and “*genjik*” respectively in data (7) and (11), are considered dirty and disgusting, while the crocodile, referred to as “*boyo*” in data (8), is associated with chaos due to its shocking nature when attacking its prey or opponent. Finally, the microbat, referred to as “*kampret*” in data (10), is associated with being quiet.

In the next category shown in table three, the Javanese metaphorical insults use objects as referents based on their functions. For example, in data (15) the term “*slompret*” (trumpet) is used as an insult for its irregular and disturbing sound. In data (16) the term “*gedheg*” (bamboo mat) in “*rai gedheg*” (bamboo mat face)

refers to a person with a lack of shame, while “*kuping manci*” (pot ear) in data (17) refers to individuals with poor hearing abilities. Furthermore, in data (18) “*gombal*” (used cloth) is used to refer to something that holds no value, and in data (21) “*matane picek*” (blind eyes) refers to individuals with poor vision, and thus used as insult toward those who cause accidents. Additionally, metaphorical insults that use objects as referents based on their values, such as the professions “*bajingan*” (bullock cart driver) in data (13) and “*gondhes*” (thief) in data (19), refer to qualities that are associated with actions that violate norms. These metaphorical insults utilize these qualities to highlight individuals whose actions are not in alignment with societal values (Haslam & Stratemeyer, 2016). Furthermore, in data (14) “*telek*” (animal excrement) is used to refer to things that are considered worthless. Additionally, in data (22) and (23), respectively, “Mak Lampir” and “*iblis*” (demon) are supernatural entities that are associated with tempting and frightening human attitudes or actions. Lastly, “*bajigur*” (a kind of warm drink) and “*gembus*” (tempeh made from soybean pulp) are used as insults due to their association with cheapness.

Plants or parts of plants may be utilized as referents in Javanese metaphorical insults based on their values. For example, in data (26) and (28) the terms “*telo*” (cassava), considered a lowly plant or food, and “*semprul*” (low-quality tobacco) are used to refer to actions or attitudes that are considered negative or not in line with societal norms. Additionally, in data (25) “*lanang kemangi*” is used to refer to timid men, thus the use of this plant serves as a form of dehumanization that targets an individual’s mental state (Harris & Fiske, 2011). These insults can be understood as a form of cultural construction, as suggested by (Kovacs, 2010).

Furthermore, metaphorical slurs may also use plants or parts of plants as referents based on their taste, such as in data (27) with “*asem*” (any sour fruit) and in data (29) with the bitter-tasting “*gambir* Blitar,” both used to refer to unpleasant attitudes or actions. It is also worth noting that the terms “*asem*” and “*bajigur*” are considered softer forms of the swear words “*asu*” (dog) and “*bajingan*” (bullock cart driver), respectively (Saptomo & Wahyono, 2001). Additionally, in data (31) “*esok dhele sore tempe*” (soybean in the morning, tempeh in the afternoon) is used to refer to an individual who is indecisive. Finally, data (32) “*timun mungsuh duren*” (cucumber versus durian) is a form of insult that highlights the juxtaposition of unbalanced qualities.

Humans can be associated with plants or parts of plants in two ways — positively and negatively. Positively, when naming a child, for example, “*jati*” (teak), with the expectation that the child will have the strength and fortitude of a teak tree. On the other hand, negatively, when using plants as metaphorical insults, where people are compared to plants in terms of values, tastes, or forms that are associated with undesirable qualities. This is a unique form of dehumanization that uses plants as metaphors. This discovery is different from previous studies on dehumanization, such as (Over, 2021) who associates humans with animals, (Harris & Fiske, 2011) who associate humans with pests, (Haslam & Stratemeyer, 2016) who propose dehumanization as a form of inhumane treatment, and (Gwinn et al., 2013) who suggest dehumanization as a form of mistreatment of helpless people. Additionally, dehumanization studies are mostly studied from a psychological viewpoint. However, by studying dehumanization from a social science perspective, we can not only reveal metaphorical insults as a form of symbolic violence but also how members of an ethnic community construct their social relations. This is a form of cultural continuity (Santoso et al., 2024).

Metaphorical insults can be understood as a form of symbolic violence as they involve associating individuals with animals, objects, or plants. Symbolic violence, as defined by (Bourdieu, 2010) and (Dwijatmiko, 2010), is a form of invisible or soft violence that is repeated in everyday life. Heitmeyer and Hagan (2005) argue that symbolic violence is a form of cultural expression through language, specifically in the content of language. In this context, language should not only be viewed as a means of communication but also as a cultural symbol, where certain individuals hold power over others (Bourdieu, 2010).

The act of dehumanization involves reducing the value and humanity of an individual to the level of non-human entities, which can lead to negative consequences such as discrimination, prejudice, and violence. To mitigate the effects of dehumanization, it is important to promote self-awareness and humanization. As Kuntowijoyo (2013) suggests, humanization is the process of humanizing humans, which involves eliminating materialism, dependence, violence, and hatred. This can be achieved by fostering brotherhood and viewing humans in a holistic manner, eliminating hatred, and eliminating forms of violence. Moreover, due to the fact that Javanese people, both adults and children, continue to produce metaphorical insults, the understanding of human essence needs to be incorporated into education (Freire, 2007).

Knowledge of human essence can help to shape the goals of education at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, fostering a deeper understanding and respect for human dignity and value. This can lead to a more inclusive, empathetic and harmonious society. Insults cannot be eliminated from a language and society. However, it can be reduced. When a person obtains more education, it will reduce dehumanizing behavior so that relationships between individuals in Javanese culture do not need to be or go through dehumanization. On the one hand, insults show familiarity, however on the other hand, such show discomfort. Furthermore, the existence of cursing also shows a subordinate relationship between the person who insults and the one who is insulted, and in this condition, the person who insults will feel superior.

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### Conclusion and Recommendation

The primary discovery of this study is the utilization of metaphorical insults in Javanese culture that utilize plants or plant parts as referents. The characterization of individuals as plants based on their perceived value, taste, or shape represents a novel form of dehumanization that employs plants as metaphorical imagery. Overall, these metaphorical insults also serve as a subtle form of symbolic violence within Javanese society. As a language practice and cultural symbol, these insults allow for the domination of one individual over another. This practice has become ingrained in certain individuals through their life experiences, resulting in the utilization of these insults not only as a means of expressing annoyance or emotion, but also as a means of displaying social closeness or intimacy.

The utilization of metaphorical insults in Javanese culture serves not only as a means of releasing annoyance, but also as a means of constructing and maintaining social relationships. In Javanese society, the maintenance of social relationships, particularly among individuals of equal social class, is achieved through a variety of means, both verbal and non-verbal. Such non-verbal forms include traditional ceremonies, *sonjo* or home visits, and *gotong royong* (communal labor activities), while verbal forms include the use of insults, which is often expressed as a form of intimacy. As such, metaphorical cursing can be viewed as a form of social capital that functions as a bonding agent within Javanese society.

The findings presented above are based on a limited dataset, comprising literature, observations, and oral interviews with a small number of informants.

Expanding the data to include metaphorical insults used on social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook would likely result in a more extensive, varied, and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This presents opportunities for further research to examine and analyze Javanese metaphorical insults within the context of social media usage.

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### Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest.

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### Appendix Informant List

| No | Name               | Age | Male (M)/Female (F) | Profession          | Domicile            |
|----|--------------------|-----|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1  | Seno Suparjo       | 53  | M                   | Teacher             | Sleman (Yogyakarta) |
| 2  | Arwan Raharjo      | 47  | M                   | Farmer              | Sleman (Yogyakarta) |
| 3  | Febri Irianto      | 35  | M                   | Private Employee    | Bantul (Yogyakarta) |
| 4  | Yayuk Eko          | 32  | F                   | Housewife           | Bantul (Yogyakarta) |
| 5  | Slamet             | 65  | M                   | Farmer              | Klaten (Solo)       |
| 6  | Nanang Suprayogi   | 41  | M                   | Government Employee | Klaten (Solo)       |
| 7  | Agus Santosa       | 34  | M                   | Teacher             | Klaten (Solo)       |
| 8  | Samiyem            | 56  | F                   | Housewife           | Klaten (Solo)       |
| 9  | Victor Adi Pradana | 17  | M                   | Student             | Klaten (Solo)       |