

# Elaborating Cultural Meanings behind the Use of Metaphors in Javanese Traditional Songs

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## Abstract

Language style is the beauty of language. Many literary works, in the form of poetry, rhymes, and other genres, including songs, use language styles to beautify word arrangement and convey meaning, as in traditional Javanese songs. However, limited understanding of metaphorical language in Javanese songs, particularly those used in Islamic da'wah, hinders insight into their cultural significance and the depth of their messages, necessitating an in-depth analysis of selected works to uncover the layers of meaning conveyed by these metaphors. As in this research, the analysis of metaphorical language styles is discussed in depth by limiting the number of songs analyzed. Researchers analyzed five selected songs, which are Javanese cultural heritage, that Sunan Kalijaga and Sunan Giri popularized as a form of Islamic da'wah 'preaching'. The songs analyzed in this study include *Kidung Wahyu Kalaseba*, *Padang Mbulan*, *Lir Ilir*, *Cublak-cublak Suweng*, and *Gambang Suling*—analysis of Michael C. Halley's version of the metaphor used in this study. The researcher used descriptive qualitative analysis to complete the discussion by collecting the lyrics of the song being analyzed, examining their meaning, drawing on several literature reviews from previous studies, and analyzing the meaning. The results of this research show that there are four Being metaphors, three Substance metaphors, two Cosmos metaphors, two Human metaphors, one Animate metaphor, two Living metaphors, one Terrestrial metaphor, one Object metaphor, and one Energetic metaphor.

**Keywords:** metaphor; Javanese traditional song; Javanese society; culture; sociolinguistics

## INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool used by humans to express what is in their minds (Namira, 2022). The function of language is as a means of communication, whether carried out orally or in writing, conveyed to other people (Andriani, 2023). According to Mailan (2022), to achieve the goal of conveying good information, humans need language as the most effective tool for conveying messages, thoughts, feelings or ideas. According to Chaer (2014), language is a system which consists of a system, symbols, sounds, characteristics that are arbitrary, meaningful, conversional, unique, universal, productive, and function as a tool to convey the meaning conveyed by the speaker. To achieve this goal, good language skills are also needed, therefore what is conveyed will be conveyed correctly (Rahmatillah, 2023). This means that language can be used as a complement in conveying a meaning conveyed by someone. These words have different forms. The various types of speech are songs, fairy tales, poems, chants, pantuns, and narratives from someone. There are various types of forms of speech. Therefore, humans can easily find various language styles (stylistic).

Komaruddin (2016) states that language style is a feature or characteristic in the presentation, construction or organization of the presentation of an essay. According to Keraf (2019) language style is the way humans use that language. Thus, this language style can enable someone to



assess the character and personality of the person who uses this language style. By using language styles, literature becomes more interesting and makes readers or viewers read or study it (Namira, 2022). Language style is the characteristic or character of a particular language that a person has as a language user, the use of language in an essay or how an author expresses something that will be conveyed (Nurul 2024). According to Tarigan (2013), language style is a form of rhetoric, namely the use of words in speaking and writing which aims to influence listeners and readers. This language style is a beauty in literature. This language style can also be found in literary works that have meaning.

Literature works have a very important role in reflecting the conditions of society in the social order that occurs in the world, so that the existence of these literature works can help awaken people's contemplative feelings towards social life (Andriani, 2023). The language used in literature has certain characteristics because it uses various types of language styles where each word has a beautiful meaning in a literary work. The role of meaning contained in literature works have many influences (Namira, 2022). Therefore, every reader who needs to understand this literature work must understand the science of meaning in order to understand its meaning correctly.

Metaphor is a type of language style that is widely known and used in creating literary works, both written and spoken, such as in songs and in the form of poetry. Halley (1980) divided types of metaphor into nine types based on semantic fields. These semantic fields include: Being metaphor, Substance metaphor, Human metaphor, Animate metaphor, Living metaphor, Cosmos metaphor, Terrestrial metaphor, Object metaphor and Energetic metaphor. Metaphors can be found in songs. Namira (2022) emphasizes the existence of metaphors in songs which are a form of expressing the songwriter's feelings about something that can touch the heart and is experienced in the songwriter's real life that is expressed in written form using a beautiful language style. Therefore, the meaning is conveyed.

Songs are found in many regions and were created by authors from that region to convey a certain purpose. As is the case in the Javanese-Islamic songs spread by Sunan Kalijaga as a form of *da'wah* 'preaching' (Sakdullah, 2014). Sunan Kalijaga composed *wayang* stories and used songs. The message was easily accepted by the people at that time (Salam, 1960). Some of the songs popularized by *Sunan Kalijaga* and *Sunan Giri* for *da'wah* 'preaching' are *Kidung Wahyu Kalaseba*, *Padang Mbulan*, *Lir Ilir*, *Cublak-cublak Suweng*, and *Gambang Suling*.

Some studies analyze about Javanese songs. Pradita (2020) analyzes the arrangement of the song *Kidung Wahyu Kalaseba*. It discusses the instrumental music used for creating better arrangements. It does not discuss the metaphor. The researcher found some studies analyzing the use of metaphor, in contrast it does not about the Javanese song, including *Kidung Wahyu Kalaseba*. There are many studies analyzing about the use of metaphor in songs, including Javanese song, but the researcher has not found about it in the song of *Sunan Kalijaga* and *Sunan Giri*'s songs. Meanwhile, knowing the use of metaphor and its meaning is important for maintaining the preservation of Javanese culture and as a way of maintaining the language. Therefore, this study is a novelty in discussing the use of metaphor and its meaning. This study analyzes the metaphorical language style and meaning contained in the song by using the theory of nine metaphor classification by Michael C. Halley. The researcher sets a limitation for this

research, namely choosing five Javanese songs for in-depth analysis, including: *Kidung Wahyu Kalaseba*, *Padang Mbulan*, *Lir Ilir*, *Cublak-cublak Suweng*, and *Gambang Suling*.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This researcher begins with collecting the lyrics in the Javanese traditional songs. To make this study has more focus in the discussion, the researcher gives a limitation to the songs used by *Sunan Kalijaga and Sunan Giri*, including *Kidung Wahyu Kalaseba*, *Padang Mbulan*, *Lir Ilir*, *Cublak-cublak Suweng*, and *Gambang Suling*. The data is collected by the researcher from some sources including some previous research.

The researcher continues by understanding the meaning of the songs as a Javanese native speaker who continuously speaks Javanese and teaches Javanese subject in a primary school in Yogyakarta whose grammar is used for schools in the Javanese school. Underlining some metaphors in the traditional Javanese songs to mark and discuss is the step used by the researcher to continue in analyzing the songs.

The researcher carries out two methods, namely explaining the expressions of metaphorical language styles and the meaning of metaphorical language styles using theory by Michael C. Halley. The types of metaphors classified by Michael C. Halley include: Being metaphor, Substance metaphor, Human metaphor, Animate metaphor, Living metaphor, Cosmos metaphor, Terrestrial metaphor, Object metaphor and Energetic metaphor. The researcher continues by revealing the meaning of the language style contained in the lyrics of the Javanese traditional songs.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

According to Namira (2022), the existence of metaphors expresses the songwriter's feelings about something that can be felt deeply by the listeners and shows the songwriter's real life that is expressed in written form using a beautiful language style. After conducting research in the lyrics of the Javanese traditional songs popularized by *Sunan Kalijaga and Sunan Giri*, there are various types of metaphors the researchers found based on the classification of metaphors according to Michael C. Halley includes Being metaphor, Substance metaphor, Human metaphor, Animate metaphor, Living metaphor, Cosmos metaphor, Terrestrial metaphor, Object metaphor and Energetic metaphor.

### Analysis of the Being Metaphor

According to Halley, quoted in Namira (2022), the being metaphor is a metaphor that includes abstract things such as love, sadness, happiness, and other similar things. This metaphor uses an abstract concept, even though it exists, the reader cannot experience it through the five senses.

Based on the research that has been carried out, the researcher indicates the types of expressions of Being metaphor in the song *Kidung Wahyu Kalaseba* as follows.

Data [1]

*Kelawan mekak howo, howo kang dur angkoro*

'I will fight against the nature of evil desires, the evil desire of anger leads astray'

(*Kidung Wahyu Kalaseba* Song Lyric)

The word which contains the being metaphor finds in [Data 1] is the word *mekak* 'fight' which describes the condition of a servant who has the desire to fight against himself. Behind this lyric, there is a hope to not be shackled by desire. It is completely symbolized in the phrase *hawa kang dur angkara* 'the evil desire of anger leads astray' which means the lust might make people disobey God. This describes the songwriter in a worrying condition if people cannot control their desires.

[Data 2]

*Senadyan setan gentayangan tansah gawe rubeda*

'Even though the devil continues to haunt people in consistently doing evil'

(*Kidung Wahyu Kalaseba* Song Lyric)

Based on [Data 2], the researcher discovers a word that is included in the Being metaphor, namely the word *gentayangan* 'haunt' which means the songwriter believes the devil is a bully who always persuades people. Another word in this sentence which shows the Being metaphor is the word *rubeda* 'something different' which has a connotation meaning devil which always persuades people to do evil. In this situation, this lyric describes the condition of the songwriter who is consciously afraid of devil's temptations and it needs to be opposed.

[Data 3]

*Hingga pupusing jaman*

'Until the end of time'

(*Kidung Wahyu Kalaseba* Song Lyric)

Words which contain the Being metaphor are shown in [Data 3] with the word *pupusing* 'the end' and the word *jaman* 'time'. The two words in [Data 3] indicate a series of processes, actions, or circumstances that will last until the end of time. The phrase *hingga pupusing jaman* 'until the end of time' in the song's lyrics can be interpreted as devil's temptation that will never stop until time is over. This indicates a worrying condition.

[Data 4]

*Tinambarang sih kawelasan, ingkang paring kamulyan*

'With the love, that spreads glory'

(*Kidung Wahyu Kalaseba* Song Lyric)

In [Data 4], there is a word shows the Being metaphor, namely the word *kawelasan* 'love' which means affection for all servants from God. Another word that shows the Being metaphor is *kamulyan* or 'glory' which means glory will be obtained. The overall meaning of this sentence means that God will give love and glory to all His servants if they obey His commands. This indicates a happy condition that makes the listener aware they have the opportunity to receive God's love.

### Analysis of the Substance Metaphor

According to Halley in Namira (2022), a substance metaphor that expresses stylistics is a metaphor that includes types of gas and their predictions. This is confirmed to provide moisture, pressure, odor, and so on. The metaphorical expression of this type of substance has a space

that can be digested by the human senses. Based on the research conducted, researchers found types of stylistic expressions of substance metaphors in the lyrics of the song *Padang Mbulan*.

[Data 1]

*Langite padang, sumebyar lintang*  
(*Padang Mbulan* Song Lyric)

In this lyric, there is a phrase *langite* 'its sky' which shows one of God's creations. This is followed by the next sentence *sumebyar lintang* 'scattered stars' which means that in the sky there are many stars that make it bright. The state of the scattering of stars in large numbers can be seen by the people sense of sight, namely the eyes.

[Data 2]

*Rame-rame ing kene suka-suka*  
(*Padang Mbulan* Song Lyric)

There is a word which can be mentioned as Substance metaphor, it is *rame-rame* 'crowd' which means there is situation that is crowded. This situation can be described in this song as many people are together playing when it shows bright moon. The crowded can be interpreted as the voices of people which can be heard by one of the human senses namely the ears.

[Data 3]

*Yok surak o surak iyo!*  
'Cheer up!'  
(*Lir Ilir* Song Lyric)

This [Data 3] shows there is Substance metaphor in the word *surak* 'cheer up' which means the people are feeling happy and celebrate their happiness through their loud voices. The people which are playing together when the moon brights brightly. This can be heard by the people sense. Its people sense is the ear.

### Analysis of the Cosmos Metaphor

The cosmos metaphor stylistic expression is a type of stylistic expression metaphors that include cosmic objects such as the earth, sun, sky, and others. The concept of the cosmos has great distances as part of the horizon, though thus, cosmic objects have space and place so that they are still observed by human senses. Based on the research conducted, researchers discovered types of stylistic expressions

[Data 1]

*Padang mbulan*  
'The bright moon'  
(*Padang Mbulan* Song Lyric)

In [Data 1], the researcher found a word that shows the Cosmos metaphor, namely the word *mbulan* 'moon'. This word is part of the cosmos metaphor because the moon is a part of the cosmic universe. The meaning contained in the phrase *padang mbulan* 'bright moon' is to remind people that there is a very beautiful atmosphere created by God to be grateful for, one of which

is the atmosphere when the moon is bright. That situation can be used for playing together with people around them.

[Data 2]

*Langite padang, sumebyar lintang*

(*Padang Mbulan* Song Lyric)

This [Data 2] in the word of *langite* 'its sky' that is classified as the cosmos metaphor describes the condition of the sky that can brighten the world. The word *lintang* 'star' openly explains a movement that is spreading. The meaning of these lyric has been explained in the [Data 1] in the term of Substance metaphor that explain it is the good time to do activities outside together.

#### **Analysis of the Human metaphor:**

Halley in Namira (2022) explains about the Human metaphor. It means a metaphor that is related to the living creatures which have the ability to think smartly and critically using the people's mind.

[Data 1]

*Cah angon cah angon penekna blimbing kuwi*

'Shepherd boy shepherd boy climb the starfruit'

(*Lir Ilir* Song Lyric)

The song lyric in the [Data 1] proves there is a word of Human metaphor *penekna* 'climb'. That word means the shepherd boy in that song should climb the tree of starfruit, not the starfruit itself because it is a fruit which cannot be climbed. This is what people or humans can do.

[Data 2]

*Tak ijo royo-royo tak sengggo temanten anyar*

'It has turned green like a newlywed'

(*Lir Ilir* Song Lyric)

This [Data 2] proves there is a Human metaphor in the *temanten anyar* 'newlywed' that has meaning for conveying the image of green in the word *tak ijo royo-royo* 'it has turned green', that is a fresh color like a newly married bride. Therefore, it can be mentioned as Human metaphor.

#### **Analysis of the Animate Metaphor**

Halley in Namira (2022) explains the stylistic expression Animate metaphor as a symbolic metaphor fauna that has the ability to run, walk, fly, jump, and so on other fauna creatures.

[Data 1]

*Mambu ketundung gudel*

'Like the smell of a released calf'

(*Cublak-cublak Suweng* Song Lyric)

[Data 1] shows there is Animate metaphor in the word *gudel* 'calf' which has meaning an animal which is expressed as smelling like the smell of a released calf. *Gudel* 'calf' in Java commonly depicted as a stupid person. This describes a stupid person who is obsessed with seeking wealth

with worldly desires. Because he is lulled by wealth, this stupid person is described as a toothless old man who is confused and anxious in the next lyric of *Lir Ilir* song.

### Analysis of the Living Metaphor

*Tandure wis sumilir*

‘The plants have bloomed’

(*Lir Ilir* Song Lyric)

In this song lyric, the researcher found there is a Living metaphor in the word *sumilir* ‘bloomed’ which has meaning the plants have grown beautifully. These plants are symbolized as something grows in ourselves to grow up then of course humans will get happiness like happy newlyweds.

[Data 2]

*Sir sir, pong dhele kopong*

‘Conscience, empty soybeans have nothing’

(*Cublak-cublak Suweng* Song Lyric)

In the [Data 2], the researcher found there is a Living metaphor in the word *dhele* ‘soybeans’ that is symbolized as a plant in this song lyric which describes an emptiness. Therefore, humans need to sharpen an empty conscience to achieve eternal peace. This practice is carried out through efforts to maintain harmony with other creatures; fellow humans and the universe, which is oriented towards the hereafter. This meaning is implied in the last lyric fragment which reads *sir sir, pong dhele kopong* ‘conscience, empty soybeans have nothing’.

### Analysis of the Terrestrial Metaphor

Halley in Namira (2022) stated that terrestrial metaphorical language expressions are a type of metaphorical expression whose objects are integrated with the earth, such as rivers, seas, mountains, etc. This type of metaphorical expression relates to something falling due to influence Earth's gravity.

Based on the research conducted, researchers discovered types of stylistic expressions terrestrial metaphorical language in the song lyrics.

[Data 1]

*Unine mung nrenyuhake*

‘The sound makes us touched’

(*Gambang Suling* Song Lyric)

The researcher found there is a terrestrial metaphor in the word *nrenyuhake* ‘touched’ as a word which can touch human’s body. The meaning contained in the lyrics of this song is related to admiration for traditional musical instruments, which is depicted through the lyrics.

### Analysis of the Object Metaphor

Halley in Namira (2022) states that the stylistic expression object metaphor is a related metaphor with inanimate and visible objects. Based on the research conducted, researchers discovered types of stylistic expressions object metaphor language in song lyrics.



[Data 1]

*Gambang suling ngumandang suarane*

'The sound of the flute resounded'

(*Gambang Suling* Song Lyric)

The Object metaphor can be found by the researcher in the word *suling* 'flute as an instrument to play music. In this sentence of the lyric, it tells us the flute is resounded. The word *ngumandang* 'resounded' is used for people who will state something orally in a good tone. In this lyric, there is a meaning the songwriter's feelings and opinions about his preferences towards *suling* 'flute.

### Analysis of the Energetic Metaphor

Halley in Namira 2022 states that the expression of the energetic metaphor style is a related metaphor with things that have powers with predictions of movement, space, and place such as fire, light, and wind. Based on the research conducted, researchers discovered types of stylistic expressions energetic metaphorical language.

[Data 1]

*Rembulane e sing awe-awe*

'Waving moon'

(*Padang Mbulan* Song Lyric)

In [Data 1], there is an energetic metaphor, namely in the word awe-awe 'waving hands' which implies the message that the moon outside is shining brightly. The word awe-awe is an action carried out by one part of the human body, namely the hand, by waving it. The meaning behind the lyrics of this song is to inform and encourage local people not to sleep in the afternoon and to do activities outside the home, especially when the moon is shining very brightly.

### CONCLUSION

Stylistics are beautiful language used to add certain effects to sentences, either by comparing or by other means. In short, the use of certain language styles can change the style contained in the sentence and create certain connotations.

In this research, metaphorical language styles were found in traditional Javanese songs which were widely used by *Sunan Kalijaga* and *Sunan Giri* as a means of spreading the religion of Islam. Researchers found nine types of metaphors based on Michael C. Halley. These findings include: four Being metaphor findings, three Substance metaphor findings, two Cosmos metaphor findings, two Human metaphor findings, 1 Animate metaphor finding, two Living metaphor findings, one Terrestrial metaphor finding, one Object metaphor finding, and one Energetic metaphor finding.

Every lyric in these traditional songs has a deep meaning. For example, in the song *Kidung Wahyu Kalaseba*, it has the meaning of self-purification to prepare to face God when the time comes. The meaning of the song *Lir Ilir* is that humans must wake up from adversity and distance themselves from the lazy nature that exists within themselves. In this song, the human self is symbolized as a plant that is blooming and green in color. In the song *Padang Mbulan*, the meaning of friendship and solidarity is implied. In the song *Cublak-cublak Suweng*, the key to



human happiness lies in harmony between the visible and the invisible, namely worldly and spiritual matters. This harmony is what will save humans from the anxiety of life. Meanwhile, in the song *Gambang Suling*, it means the songwriter's admiration for one of the musical instruments, namely the flute.

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