

ARTICLE

## Linguistic Symbolism and Conceptual Metaphors in Javanese Islamic Myths: A Semiotic Perspective

Muhajir<sup>1,2\*</sup> , Sumarwati<sup>2</sup> , Kundharu Saddhono<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Indonesian Language and Literature Education, Faculty of Education, Universitas Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia Semarang, Semarang 50125, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Indonesian Language and Literature Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta 57125, Indonesia

### ABSTRACT

This study explores symbolic narratives embedded in the Javanese-Islamic tradition—Soko Tatal, Goa Kreo, and Lawang Bledeg—through a cultural linguistics lens. Combining semiotics (Barthes), conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson), and hermeneutics (Gadamer), it analyzes how language functions as a medium for encoding collective spiritual, ecological, and ethical meanings. Drawing on field interviews, visual artifacts, and ritual discourse, the research reveals that each symbol operates not merely as a cultural object but as a living linguistic construct. Soko Tatal represents creative unity from fragments; Goa Kreo reflects non-human agency and environmental stewardship; Lawang Bledeg symbolizes inner restraint and sacred transition. These are cognitively structured through metaphors such as limitation is strength, nature is a spiritual partner, and lightning is controlled desire. The study further highlights the shift in language registers across generations, from performative oral forms to descriptive digital expressions, without erasing conceptual integrity. Rather than documenting myths as static folklore, this research demonstrates that symbolic narratives act as cognitive and communicative systems that adapt, survive, and reproduce meaning. The findings offer a theoretical contribution to non-Western perspectives in cultural linguistics by situating local epistemologies within global discourse. Ultimately, the study proposes a replicable analytical framework for investigating how vernacular traditions construct meaning through symbolic language, connecting symbolic representations with culturally embodied cognition.

#### \*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Muhajir, Indonesian Language and Literature Education, Faculty of Education, Universitas Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia Semarang, Semarang 50125, Indonesia; Indonesian Language and Literature Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta 57125, Indonesia; Email: [muhajir81@student.uns.ac](mailto:muhajir81@student.uns.ac)

#### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 26 May 2025 | Revised: 10 June 2025 | Accepted: 11 June 2025 | Published Online: 3 July 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i7.10207>

#### CITATION

Muhajir, Sumarwati, Saddhono, K., 2025. Linguistic Symbolism and Conceptual Metaphors in Javanese Islamic Myths: A Semiotic Perspective. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(7): 77–89. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i7.10207>

#### COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2025 by the author(s). Published by Bilingual Publishing Group. This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

**Keywords:** Semiotics; Conceptual Metaphors; Cultural Symbols; Linguistic Anthropology; Cognitive Linguistics; Ritual Discourse; Symbolic Register

## 1. Introduction

In the tradition of Javanese Islamic-Javanese society, local symbols and narratives are not just aesthetic cultural products, but rather a mechanism of value representation that plays an active role in shaping collective identity<sup>[1,2]</sup>. The folklore and myths that developed around the Great Mosque of Demak—such as the Legend of Soko Tatal, Goa Kreo, and Lawang Bledog—not only keep traces of religious history, but also reflect social constructions that are full of symbolic meaning<sup>[3–5]</sup>. Symbols such as poles made of wood chips, animals such as apes, or natural phenomena such as lightning serve as cultural texts that convey concepts of power, spirituality, as well as man’s relationship with nature and God<sup>[6–8]</sup>. In this context, folklore is not just an entertainment narrative or oral heritage, but also a linguistic device that reproduces systems of belief, ethics, and cosmology in an Islamic framework that is integrated with local traditions<sup>[9,10]</sup>. The presence of these symbols shows that the cognitive structure of society is inseparable from the cultural construction that is preserved through language. These narratives form a collective mindset that is internalized in daily social and religious practices. Therefore, folklore can be understood as a form of value articulation through a sign system that has pedagogical, ideological, and transformative functions<sup>[4,7,11,12]</sup>.

However, the study of Javanese Islamic myths has been more often focused on historical, architectural, or ritual aspects, and has not touched much on how language and symbols work systematically in shaping meaning<sup>[13–16]</sup>. In fact, through the perspective of modern linguistics, especially semiotics and cognitive linguistics, myths can be read as a system of signs that store layers of complex meanings<sup>[17–19]</sup>. Roland Barthes’ semiology allows the reading of symbols as cultural representations that are not neutral, but rather loaded with ideological content that undergoes a naturalization process<sup>[20–22]</sup>. Meanwhile, the conceptual metaphor theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson explains that language not only reflects the world, but shapes the way humans understand the world through mapping between concrete and abstract experiences. In

traditional narratives, the process of meaning does not take place explicitly, but is present in the form of symbolic structures and repetitive conceptual patterns. For example, the act of arranging wood in Soko Tatal is not only understood literally, but as a metaphor for achievement through limitation and collaboration<sup>[23–25]</sup>. With a linguistic approach, it is possible to uncover the cognitive dimension behind forms of cultural expression that have been considered purely traditional or spiritual.

Departing from this background, this research aims to reveal the symbolic meaning and metaphorical structure contained in the three main narratives surrounding the Great Mosque of Demak. The analysis is directed to identify key symbols, interpret their denotative and connotative meanings, and map how each symbol forms a conceptual metaphor relevant to the cultural context of the Javanese-Islamic society<sup>[23,26–28]</sup>. By positioning folklore as a linguistic text, this research places symbols and narratives as foundations in the formation of ongoing religious and cultural discourse. Furthermore, this study also aims to highlight the dynamics of the relationship between local narrative structures and community mindsets through the linguistic tools used. In the context of globalization and cultural homogenization, this kind of approach also provides an alternative to preserving local wealth through a solid scientific foundation<sup>[29–32]</sup>. It is hoped that the results of this study will be able to expand theoretical and methodological contributions in the realm of cultural linguistics and strengthen the position of Islamic-Javanese studies as an important part of the global anthropological linguistic discourse.

## 2. Literature Review

This literature review aims to map and explain the theoretical framework that forms the basis of analysis in this study. With a focus on folklore as a cultural text rich in religious symbolism and cognitive structures, this section outlines the main theories used to understand the dynamics of meaning in the context of Islamic-Javanese society. The approach is interdisciplinary, encompassing cultural

semiotics, conceptual metaphor theory and cultural hermeneutics, each of which makes an important contribution to uncovering symbolic meanings, thought structures and interpretation processes in local traditions. The combination of these three approaches is expected to provide a thorough and in-depth understanding of folklore texts as living and evolving cultural expressions.

## 2.1. Interdisciplinary Theoretical Framework

This research utilizes an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that combines cultural semiotics, conceptual metaphor theory, and a hermeneutic approach to text. These three theories were chosen for their methodological and epistemological suitability in analyzing cultural texts that contain religious symbolism and complex cognitive structures [22,23,33]. Folklore is understood as a text that contains a system of signs and abstract meaning mapping, with language as the main medium in the formation and preservation of cultural values. In this framework, folklore is understood not simply as a traditional form of expression, but as a cultural text containing a sign system, collective narrative, and abstract meaning mapping that develops in the consciousness of the community. Language is seen as the main medium in the formation, preservation and transformation of cultural values, where symbols and metaphors play an important role in conveying ideological, spiritual and social messages embedded in the daily lives of Javanese-Islamic communities.

## 2.2. Semiotics of Cultural Symbols

The main framework in analyzing symbolic meaning is the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes [34], which distinguishes between denotative (literal) and connotative (implicit meaning formed through cultural associations) meanings, and introduces the concept of myth as a second-level sign system, an ideological form that has become a collective consciousness. In this context, symbols such as *soko tatal*, *bulus*, and *lawang bledeg* are not only understood as material objects, but as representations of social values such as unity, spirituality, and divine power. Barthes' theory allows researchers to uncover how these objects are treated as signs within the framework of Islamic-Javanese culture, as well as how local myths reproduce belief sys-

tems in the form of narratives [22,35,36].

## 2.3. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

To understand the cognitive structure underlying the use of symbols in narratives, this study uses Lakoff & Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory [23]. In this theory, metaphor is not only considered as a language style, but as a thinking mechanism that maps concrete experiences (source domain) into abstract concepts (target domain). For example, in the *Soko Tatal* narrative, the wood splinters that are joined together to form a mosque pole are not only a symbol of togetherness, but also represent a conceptual metaphor that unity is strength. Similarly, the appearance of monkeys as faithful figures in *Goa Kreo* is understood as a metaphorical representation of nature as humanity's spiritual partner.

## 2.4. Cultural Hermeneutics

As a complement to the structural and cognitive approaches, this research also refers to the principles of cultural hermeneutics, particularly Gadamer's notion of "horizon fusion" [37,38]. In this approach, text interpretation is not objective or static, but rather a dialogical process between the interpreter's horizon of meaning and the historical-cultural horizon of the text itself. The application of hermeneutics aims to capture the social, religious and historical context behind the folklore, and avoid ahistorical or reductionist readings of symbols. Hermeneutics provides a space to understand symbols not only as formal structures, but also as dynamic expressions of an ever-changing collective consciousness in the lives of Javanese-Islamic societies.

## 2.5. Integration of Approaches

By integrating these three approaches-semiotic, conceptual, and hermeneutic-this study builds a comprehensive analytical framework in reading folklore as a culturally functional text, linguistically, ideologically, and epistemologically. This combination of theories allows researchers not only to identify symbols and meanings, but also to understand the cultural logic and conceptual structure underlying the construction of cultural values in Islamic-Javanese society. This combination of theories provides a sharp analytical tool for researchers to explore how

cultural symbols are produced, passed on, and reinterpreted by society. By understanding the relationship between language structure, conceptual metaphor and interpretive context, this research is able to reveal the cultural logic and conceptual structure underlying the construction of values in Islamic-Javanese society. In addition, this approach also enables a critical reading of how cultural meanings are shaped within dominant discourses, as well as how local communities negotiate their identities through folkloric narratives that continue to live and evolve.

### 3. Materials and Methods

This study uses an interpretive qualitative approach designed to explore symbolic meanings and metaphorical structures in Islamic-Javanese folklore centered on the Great Mosque of Demak<sup>[39,40]</sup>. This method was chosen because it is suitable for studying cultural texts that are narrative and symbolic, where meaning is not only located on the surface of language, but also hidden in deeper conceptual structures. The main focus of this research is on the linguistic construction in three folklores, namely the Legend of Soko Tatal, Goa Kreo, and Lawang Bledeg, which are analyzed as cultural texts that contain a system of signs and conceptual metaphors. This methodology allows researchers to explore how language works in the formation of collective consciousness through symbols and narratives. In addition, this approach is relevant to observing the relationship between the meaning of texts and social practices that take place from generation to generation in local communities.

Data were collected through triangulation of sources that included written narrative texts (folklore transcriptions), field observations of ritual practices related to the narrative (such as Grebeg Besar and Sesaji Rewanda), and in-depth interviews with community leaders, site keepers, and local tradition heirs. The data collection process took place during the period 2024–2025 in the main location, namely the Demak Grand Mosque area and surrounding cultural sites. All data is then categorized thematically based on the appearance of symbols, the context of use, and people's perception of the symbolic meaning. Collection is done flexibly and openly, allowing for the emergence of unexpected meanings from both oral and non-verbal narratives. The validity of the data is maintained

through member checking techniques and discussions with local linguists and cultures to ensure the accuracy of interpretation. The participants' engagement was not only informative, but also reflective, as they actively reinterpreted the symbols that had become part of their religion-cultural life.

Data analysis is carried out in three main stages. First, narrative analysis is used to identify the story structure, plot, and role of characters as the basis for finding hidden patterns of meaning. Second, the semiotic analysis of Barthes et al. (1967) was applied to deconstruct the denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings of the symbols that appear in the text<sup>[22]</sup>. This approach allows researchers to see how objects and actions in stories function as cultural signs that represent specific ideological values. Third, conceptual metaphorical analysis based on the theory of Lakoff & Johnson is used to map the relationship between the source domain (e.g.: wood, lightning, animals) and the target domain (abstract concepts such as power, unity, or divinity) contained in the narrative<sup>[23]</sup>. Each stage of analysis is done iteratively to capture conceptual depth that does not always immediately appear on the surface of the text. This process results in the identification of the metaphorical structures that make up the cognitive framework of society. With this stratified analysis strategy, this study seeks not only to interpret texts descriptively, but also to explain how these texts operate in the conceptual and symbolic realm of Javanese Islamic society.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Architectural Symbolic Representation: A Study of Soko Tatal

Soko Tatal, a mosque pillar composed of wood chips by Sunan Kalijaga, is a cultural symbol that is not only architecturally unique, but also contains a deep ideological content. In the framework of Barthes et al. semiotics, these artifacts contain a three-layered sign structure: denotatively as a physical element of the building<sup>[34]</sup>, connotatively as a form of spiritual creativity in limitations, and in the mythological realm as a collective narrative of social inclusivity and participatory power in building early Islamic civilization in Java. **Figure 1** visually shows how small pieces of wood are arranged into a single support column, forming



a stable and aesthetically pleasing structure. This pole is seen by the community not as a symbol of material inferiority, but rather as a reflection of ingenuity and collective strength (Interview with Pak Sariman, the keyman of the Great Mosque of Demak, March 7, 2025). This is visually represented by the composition of the pillars of the Great Mosque of Demak, as shown in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** Five Pillars of the Great Mosque of Demak. According to a Local Informant (Pak Sariman, March 7, 2025), the Pillars in the Photo Is Believed to Be Soko Tatal—A Post Made from Leftover Wooden Pieces by SunanKalijaga. It Symbolizes Unity amid Limitation and the Spiritual Strength of the People through Collective Effort.

Source: Researcher documentation, March 7, 2025.

Through the lens of conceptual metaphorical theory<sup>[23]</sup>, these symbols activate a series of cognitive mapping such as *unity is strength*, *diversity is wealth*, and *limitations are strategic resources*. In this perspective, Soko Tatal is not only a visual artifact but also a cognitive metaphor—a concrete object that contains and reproduces the structure of abstract thinking about solidarity and transcendence. This symbolic practice parallels the kintsugi phenomenon in Japanese culture, where cracks are repaired with gold to show that destruction is not the end, but part of meaning and value. Similarly, Soko Tatal rejects the logic of raw material hegemony or formal perfection. Rather, he asserts that the fragments that are united—in form and meaning—are more valuable than a single whole. This narrative was confirmed by local residents who called the pole a “symbol of patience, perseverance, and togetherness of the people” (Interview with Mrs. Rohani, administrator of the Kauman Taklim Council, March 7, 2025). **Figure 2** shows a replica of this pole in the mosque’s educational mu-

seum, complete with an interpretive narrative, showing that this symbol continues to be reinterpreted by current generations.



**Figure 2.** Replica of the Tatal Pillar Displayed in the Educational Museum of Masjid Agung Demak.

In Ghadamer hermeneutic approach, the meaning of Soko Tatal is not fixed but open to dialogue between cultural horizons. This pole is not only present in the physical space, but also in the interpretive space of the community. It became the epistemological locus where architectural, spiritual, and social values met. In its structure of meaning, Soko Tatal teaches that strength does not come from uniformity or luxury, but from the ability to unite differences in harmony. In the horizon of contemporary Demak society, this symbol continues to live on as a collective lesson about fragment empowerment, acceptance of the imperfect, and spirituality in cooperation. Therefore, Soko Tatal is not only part of the history of Javanese Islam, but also part of the cosmology of values that continue to shape the social and religious practices of society. In this context, Soko Tatal becomes more than just a historical artifact; it is a living symbol of Javanese Islamic-philosophy that glorifies process, not perfection.

#### 4.2. Creole Cave: Narrative Structure, Ritual Language, and Register Transformation in the Javanese-Islamic Tradition

Goa Kreo is a narrative and ritual site that plays a central role in the spiritual and linguistic heritage of the Javanese-Islamic community. Located in the Gunungpati area, Semarang, this place is associated with the story of Sunan Kalijaga who searched for teak wood for the con-

struction of the Great Mosque of Demak and was assisted by a herd of monkeys. In oral speech, it is said that Sunan Kalijaga said, “*This is the wood that must reach Demak. I’ll leave it to you until it’s gone.*” (Interview with Pak Syukur, 60 years old, April 3, 2025). This sentence reflects the structure of the direct command language that contains high pragmatic power. Imperatives such as *ojo nganti ilang* function as directive speech acts that convey spiritual authority to nonhuman entities. In a semiotic context<sup>[22]</sup>, apes are no longer just animals, but representations of nonhuman agencies entrusted through human language.

The structure of the oral narrative shows typical linguistic patterns in folklore: repetition, direct speech styles, and the incorporation of religious values into dialogue. Phrases such as “*kera iku iso nggenepi dawuhe wali*” (“the ape can carry out the guardian’s commands”) indicate a shift in human attributes to animals through metaphorical mechanisms. Within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory<sup>[23]</sup>, metaphors emerge such as nature is a spiritual partner and obedience is faith, which manifests itself in the language of community. The Rewanda Offering Tradition strengthens this structure through public linguistic practice (Figure 3). In the procession, the villagers use phrases such as “*ayo ngalap berkah, ojo regraban rude*”—an invitation that serves not only as social control, but also as a manifestation of the value of good manners within a sacred framework.



**Figure 3.** Residents Scramble for Sega Kethek (Yellow Rice and Fruit) in the Tradition of Blessings During the Rewanda Offering.

Source: Researcher Documentation, April 3, 2025.

Language in this ritual is not only a means of communication, but also a performative means that strengthens community cohesion. In the opening of the prayer, words

such as “*mugi berkah saka kera Wali lancer tekan anak putu*” (may the blessings from the monkey wali to the children and grandchildren), which places the monkey in a transgenerational spiritual structure. Replicas of teak wood carried in the procession complete this symbolic structure, accompanied by oral narratives read by village elders (Figure 4). This process creates a continuity between text, body, and space—that symbols such as apes and wood are not only present in the story, but also in the living practice of language.



**Figure 4.** A Replica of Teak Wood is Brought in the Procession, Accompanied by an Oral Narrative About the Story of Sunan Kalijaga and the Monkey Herd.

Source: Researcher Documentation, April 3, 2025.

In Gadamer (1977) hermeneutic perspective, these practices reflect a fusion of horizons between the past and the present, in which language acts as a bridge of meaning<sup>[33]</sup>. Symbols in Kreo Caves do not exist merely as material forms, but as active sign systems—brought to life, pronounced, and reinterpreted by the community through language. The interesting thing is the shift in the form and medium of conveying folklore between generations. The older generation tends to convey stories orally in the form of narrative dialogues with repetition and typical Javanese phrases (*ngendika, titip, ojo nganti ilang*), while the younger generation is more familiar with the story of Goa Kreo through digital media, procession banners, or social media captions that tend to be dense, descriptive, and emotionally neutral. This shows the transformation from ritual narrative speech to a documentary register, in which language loses some of its formality and orality. Nevertheless, despite the change in shape, the core values persist through the refeminization of symbols in the new context. The Cre-

ole Cave, with its entire symbolic network, remains a linguistic arena where cosmology, narratives, and social practices are reconstructed through adapted forms of language.

### 4.3. Lawang Bledeg: Divine Power and the Boundary between Worlds

The legend of Lawang Bledeg (Lightning Door) tells the story of Ki Ageng Selo, a spiritual figure known for his magic in catching lightning. This story, which is told orally in the Demak and Grobogan communities, presents lightning as a living entity symbolized in the form of a dragon and an old grandfather. Sayings such as “*Ki Ageng Selo iku sing nyekel bledeg nganggo tangan kosong, terus digambarake neng lawang masjid*” (‘Ki Ageng Selo caught lightning with his bare hands and carved it on the door of the mosque’) is a recurring narrative structure in the local oral tradition (Interview with Nadhif Alawi, 48 years old, March 8, 2025). In Barthes’s (1972) semiotic framework, lightning (bledeg) is the significant of nature’s destructive forces, and doors (doors) are boundary signs. The combination of the two creates a visual as well as linguistic metaphor for self-control, purification of the soul, and spiritual readiness when entering the sacred space.

The visual symbols on Lawang Bledeg—such as the red dragon, crown, and vessel—are not mere decorations. In the narrative of society, the dragon is interpreted as a representation of fire within oneself, namely anger or lust that must be conquered. One of the informants declared: “*Naga itu ya api—api dalam ati. Lawang bledeg ya kaya rem-rem sing kudu ditinggal sadurunge mlebu masjid*” (‘A dragon is like a heart’s fire; a lightning bolt is a self-brake before entering the mosque’). Thus, the door functions as a visual text that contains a religious-based moral message system. Linguistically, there is a lexical transcendence: the term *bledeg*, which in everyday usage means destructive, is raised as a symbol of spiritual filtering. This shift reflects the operation of language in the sacred domain: the transformation of literal meaning into transcendental meaning through visual and ritual media.

The existence of Lawang Bledeg does not stop at its function as a historical relic (Figure 5). In contemporary practice, the symbolic meaning of these doors is reproduced and disseminated through various mediums, which not only maintain their aesthetic value, but also expand

their educational and communicative function in the life of modern society. This reproduction occurs not passively, but through a curatorial process that is aware of the importance of continuity of meaning across generations. The transformation from an artifact to an educational instrument show that this symbol is undergoing an expansion of meaning: from static architectural elements to semiotic signs that live in social, cultural and religious discourse. This process reflects how traditional symbols are not frozen in historical museums, but undergo an active process of resignification in contemporary public spaces, including value-based education and cultural tourism.



**Figure 5.** The Original Lawang Bledeg Which is Now Stored in the Demak Grand Mosque Museum, with Carvings of Red Dragons and Lightning Symbols. Source: Researcher documentation, March 7, 2025.

The Lawang Bledeg symbol is now also used as a pedagogical tool in learning Islamic-Javanese symbolism, both through tour guides, visual explanations, and written narratives in educational museums. This shows that the door not only serves as a physical marker of the sacred boundary, but also as an interpretive portal to inclusive and reflective local Islamic values. The visual replica of Lawang Bledeg installed on the side of the mosque building is one of the concrete forms of this new function: it is no longer just a reminder of the past, but rather a meeting point between spiritual narratives, cultural aesthetics, and current educational practices (Figure 6).





**Figure 6.** The Replica of Lawang Bledeg Installed on the Side of the Demak Grand Mosque Building, is Used in Religious and Cultural Education Activities.

Source: Researcher documentation, March 7, 2025.

In the hermeneutic approach <sup>[33]</sup>, Lawang Bledeg is interpreted as a symbol of transcendental boundaries. The

community interprets it as a transitional door: from the profane to the sacred, from the mundane to the ukhrawi. The prayers recited before entering the mosque often reflect a linguistic awareness of the transformation of the status of space: “*Ya Allah, ampuni dosaku sadurunge mlebu panggonan-Mu*”—an expression that emphasizes Lawang Bledeg as a tool of spiritual purification. The shift in language registers between generations is also evident: the older generation calls it the doorang pametu (door of self-transformation), while the younger generation simplifies its meaning as a “symbolic door.” This transition indicates an important linguistic phenomenon: the shrinking of spiritual meaning in popular discourse as the medium of delivery shifts from spoken speech to formal digital or descriptive formats. Yet essential values remain, recontextualized in the spaces of education, religious tourism, and public ceremonies in the mosque environment.

The three symbols analyzed—Soko Tatal, Goa Kreo, and Lawang Bledeg—have linguistic and conceptual structures that reinforce each other. Each of them serves not only as a visual or narrative object, but also as a sign system that is active in representing cultural and spiritual values. To clarify the linguistic dimension and its symbolic meaning, **Table 1** summarizes the denotative, connotative, and conceptual metaphor meanings of the three symbols.

**Table 1.** Semiotic and Metaphorical Structures of Three Key Javanese-Islamic Symbols.

Symbol	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Conceptual Metaphors
Soko Tatal	Posts from waste wood	Spiritual creativity, collective strength	Unity is strength
Goa Kreo	Wood guard monkey	Obedience, a spiritual partner	Nature is the spiritual partner of man
Bledeg Door	Lightning carving	Purification of the soul, divine power	Lust is a controlled destructive energy

**Table 1** shows that the three symbols operate not only in the visual cultural space, but also in the linguistic and cognitive space. The pattern of meaning that emerges suggests that Javanese-Islamic society processes spiritual experience through a consistent and interrelated symbolic language device. This interpretation is not a static event, but rather takes place collectively and dynamically in everyday cultural practices.

#### 4.4. Synthesis of Meaning and Conceptual Relevance

The three narratives—Soko Tatal, Goa Kreo, and Lawang Bledeg—show the consistency of the pattern of meaning built through language systems, visual symbols, and collective narratives in Javanese Islamic society. Through Barthes et al. (1967) semiotic approach <sup>[22]</sup>, each symbol is not only present as a cultural object, but as a sign that stores an ideological and spiritual construction



that has been naturalized. In the perspective of conceptual metaphors Lakoff & Johnson (2020) <sup>[23]</sup>, these narratives show that society uses symbolic language to map concrete experiences into abstract understandings of values, faith, and ethics. The scroll wood as unity, the ape as ecological obedience, and the lightning as spiritual self-control are the result of a linguistic process that expands the function of representation into a collective frame of thought.

Furthermore, the symbols also show how language works in the context of ritual, performance, and cultural transmission <sup>[41–43]</sup>. Whether in oral speech, prayer, or public expression, language functions as a tool of reproduction of social and spiritual values. The phenomenon of register transformation—from verbal narrative to digital description, from performative expression to documentary symbols—suggests that cultural meaning is fluid, yet it is nonetheless supported by adaptive linguistic structures. A change in form does not necessarily remove value, but rather opens up space for a process of resemantization—in which the old symbol is brought to life in a new interpretation horizon. This process reflects the core of cultural linguistics, which is the understanding that the structure of language is tied to the dynamics of cultural values and representations that are carried out in social practices <sup>[44–46]</sup>.

Thus, this research reinforces the position of traditional narratives as complex linguistic texts: texts that work in the semiotic, cognitive, and social domains simultaneously. It not only contains meaning, but also regulates how it is produced, disseminated, and inherited. The implications of these findings are twofold: first, theoretically, enriching cultural linguistics approaches and cognitive linguistics through local data that are loaded with conceptual structures; Second, practically, it shows the importance of preserving traditional narratives as epistemic, linguistic, and ecological sources. These findings also broaden the linguistic horizon of global culture, which has been dominated by Indo-European studies, by bringing the Islamic-Javanese discourse as a field for the articulation of local meaning that is systematic and documented. By elevating local symbols as units of linguistic analysis, this study contributes concretely to the development of cross-cultural approaches in contemporary cultural linguistics and anthropological linguistics <sup>[47–49]</sup>.

## 5. Discussion

The findings in this study show that folk narratives centered on the symbols of Soko Tatal, Goa Kreo, and Lawang Bledog contain linguistic systems that work across levels: narrative, symbolic, and performative. The three symbols are not only present as cultural objects, but as linguistic artifacts that contain the structure of conceptual and social meaning. In Barthes et al. (1967) semiotic framework, these symbols function as modern myths, i.e. second-level sign systems that transmit collective values through naturalized forms. In contrast to Barthes's critique of the European consumptive-capitalistic myth, in the context of Javanese Islam, myths represent pedagogical and spiritual values explicitly.

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, especially conceptual metaphor theory Lakoff & Johnson <sup>[23]</sup>, the results of the study show that Javanese-Islamic society builds a framework of meaning through metaphorical mapping between domains such as limitations are strength, obedience is virtue, nature is a spiritual partner, and lightning is a lust that needs to be controlled. This pattern suggests that cultural experiences are constructed and disseminated through linguistic mechanisms. This is in line with the findings of Kövecses <sup>[50]</sup>, that cultural variation plays a significant role in the construction of conceptual metaphor, and with the view of Sharifian (2017) that cultural communities use language as a medium of channeling their collective conceptualization <sup>[44]</sup>.

Within a hermeneutic framework, these symbols serve as a meeting point between past horizons, current practices, and spiritual interpretations Gadamer <sup>[33]</sup>. Language in the form of prayers, rites, and oral narratives not only represents meaning, but also forms new horizons through a dynamic process of social interpretation. As emphasized by Duranti (1997) <sup>[48]</sup>, language is not only a means of communication, but also a cultural performative arena. The phenomenon of register shifts found in this study—the transition from verbal forms full of performative meaning to digital representations or formal narratives—does not merely indicate the erosion of value, but reflects the resemantization of symbols in new media and horizons. This supports the argument of Clegg & Palmer (1996) and Wierzbicka (2006), that language is constantly adapting to sociocultural realities, without having to lose its core mean-

ing<sup>[45,49]</sup>.

More broadly, this discussion shows that linguistic approaches to local narratives are not merely a documentary effort, but a conceptual intervention to the linguistic discourse of global culture. So far, the study of cultural linguistics has tended to focus on Indo-European languages while conceptual systems in non-Western Muslim communities such as Javanese Islam are still poorly documented<sup>[47,49]</sup>. By elevating local symbols as legitimate units of linguistic analysis, this study makes a concrete contribution to the expansion of the epistemological framework in cultural linguistics, while enriching our understanding of how language and culture operate within a distinctive configuration of spiritual, ecological, and social values.

To clarify the conceptual structure that has been discussed in the three main symbols—Soko Tatal, Goa Kreo, and Lawang Bledég—this study draws up a theoretical comparison that includes four dimensions: semiotic function, cognitive linguistic representation, hermeneutic role, and cultural-linguistic significance. This comparison not only combines the results of interpretations based on the theories of Barthes et al.<sup>[34]</sup>, Lakoff & Johnson<sup>[23]</sup>, and Gadamer<sup>[33]</sup>, but also shows the coherence of the system of meaning formed by the Islamic-Javanese society simultaneously through symbols, language, and social practices.

Figure 7 synthesizes the semiotic, conceptual, hermeneutic, and cultural-linguistic attributes of Soko Tatal, Goa Kreo, and Lawang Bledég.





Comparison of Javanese-Islamic Symbols			
Characteristic	Soko Tatal	Goa Kreo	Lawang Bledég
 Semiotic Function	Modern myth	Modern myth	Modern myth
 Cognitive Linguistic Representation	Limitation is strength	Nature is a spiritual partner	Lightning is desire to be controlled
 Hermeneutic Role	Convergence point	Convergence point	Convergence point
 Cultural Linguistic Significance	Local symbol	Local symbol	Local symbol

Figure 7. Comparative Linguistic Dimensions of Three Javanese-Islamic Symbols.

As seen in Figure 7, the three symbols show an aligned configuration, where each serves as a modern myth, an interpretive meeting point, and a local symbol expressing cultural conceptualization. “Limitation is strength”, “nature is a spiritual partner”, and “lightning is desire to be controlled” are not just metaphorical expressions, but reflections of society’s value systems structured in a collective linguistic mindset. By combining visual, conceptual, and ritual dimensions, this image strengthens the argument that traditional Islamic-Javanese narratives have a depth of meaning structure that can be explained through cross-theoretical linguistic devices.

## 6. Conclusions

This research proves that the local symbols in the Javanese-Islamic tradition—Soko Tatal, Goa Kreo, and Lawang Bledég—are linguistic constructs that work across levels: semiotic, conceptual, and social. Through the semiotic approach of Barthes et al., the conceptual metaphors of Lakoff & Johnson, and the hermeneutics of Gadamer, this study shows that language is not just a means of communication, but an arena of articulation of meaning and the reproduction of values in the body of a living culture. These three symbols, which on the surface appear to be physical elements or folk myths, are actually a system of signs that preserve the epistemological structure of the

Javanese-Islamic society: limitations are interpreted as strength (*Soko Tatal*), ecological obedience is represented through non-human entities (*Goa Kreo*), and spiritual control is packaged in visual metaphors (*Lawang Bledeg*). Language works as a bridge between concrete experience and abstract beliefs—and local narratives become the most authentic form of epistemic record of community. These findings confirm that traditional narratives are not cultural residues, but living texts that organize the relationship between humans, space, nature, and transcendence. This research contributes not only by providing a culturally grounded interpretation of local myths, but also by proposing a replicable analytical framework for linguistic-symbolic studies across non-Western epistemologies.

The theoretical implications of this study are significant for the development of inclusive and cross-civilizational cultural and cognitive linguistics. By bringing the Islamic-Javanese narrative into the space of global linguistic analysis, this article encourages a deconstruction of the dominance of Anglo-European semantic models, as well as offering an alternative framework based on non-Western collective conceptualization. On the other hand, from a practical perspective, this approach offers a paradigm of cultural heritage preservation that focuses not only on material forms (artifacts or stories), but on the linguistic and cognitive structures that accompany them—i.e., the way people think, speak, and frame meaning symbolically. Thus, the folk narrative becomes a pedagogical, spiritual, and epistemic tool that holds intergenerational values. In the context of globalization that continues to encourage the homogenization of meaning, this study shows that local languages, when read conceptually and reflectively, can be the basis for a more dialogical, contextual, and value-laden linguistic model. So, the preservation of symbols is not just a matter of archives, but a matter of how we rearrange the future through language.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, M.; methodology, M.; software, M. and S.; validation, S.; investigation, M., S., and K.S.; data curation, S.; writing—original draft preparation, S.; visualization, K.S.; writing—review and editing, K.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## Funding

This work received no external funding.

## Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

## Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

## Data Availability Statement

All the data has been added in the main text.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Universitas Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia Semarang and Universitas Negeri Semarang has fully supported this research.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

- [1] Rosenmann, A., Reese, G., Cameron, J.E., 2016. Social identities in a globalized world: Challenges and opportunities for collective action. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 11(2), 202–221.
- [2] Zubek, J., Korbak, T., Rączaszek-Leonardi, J., 2025. Models of symbol emergence in communication: a conceptual review and a guide for avoiding local minima. *Artificial Intelligence Review*. 58(2), 65.
- [3] Burr, V., Dick, P., 2017. *Social constructionism*. Springer: New York, NY, USA.
- [4] Abrahams, R.D., 2019. Toward an enactment-centered theory of folklore. In: Bascom, W.R. (ed.). *Frontiers of folklore*. Routledge: London, UK. pp. 79–120.
- [5] Kim, C.S., Chamorro, G., 2025. Socially-mediated linguistic convergence and perceptions of social proximity. *Language Cognition and Neuroscience*. 40(3), 315–327.
- [6] Fotaki, M., Altman, Y., Koning, J., et al., 2020. Spirituality, Symbolism and Storytelling in Twenty-first-Century Organizations: Understanding and

- addressing the crisis of imagination. *Organization Studies*. 41, 7–30.
- [7] Streib, H., Hood, R.W., 2016. Understanding “spirituality”—Conceptual considerations. In: Streib, H., Hood, R., Jr. (eds.). *Semantics and Psychology of Spirituality*. Springer: Cham, Switzerland. pp. 3–17.
- [8] Giordan, G., 2016. Spirituality: From a religious concept to a sociological theory. In: Jupp, P.C., Flanagan, K. (eds.). *A sociology of spirituality*. Routledge: London, UK. pp. 161–180.
- [9] Chen, B., 2024. The Kelenteng and Annual Rituals: Hokkien Community in Batavia. *Journal of World History*. 35(3), 407–437.
- [10] Palombo, C., 2020. *The Christian Clergy’s Islamic Local Government in Late Marwanid and Abbasid Egypt [Doctoral dissertation]*. Princeton University: Princeton, NJ, USA.
- [11] Callero, P.L., 2023. *The myth of individualism: How social forces shape our lives*. Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, MD, USA.
- [12] Bronner, S.J., 2016. *Folklore: the basics*. Routledge: London, UK.
- [13] Buschmann, P., Oels, A., 2019. The overlooked role of discourse in breaking carbon lock-in: The case of the German energy transition. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*. 10(3), e574.
- [14] Brooks, J.A., Shablack, H., Gendron, M., et al., 2017. The role of language in the experience and perception of emotion: A neuroimaging meta-analysis. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*. 12(2), 169–183.
- [15] Paolucci, C., Martinelli, P., Bacaro, M., 2023. Can we really free ourselves from stereotypes? A semiotic point of view on clichés and disability studies. *Semiotica*. 2023(253), 193–226.
- [16] Soica, S., Metro-Roland, M., 2024. The linguistic landscapes of nature trails: creating presence, marking absence, shaping meaning. *Social Semiotics*. 34(4), 553–575.
- [17] Gould, E., 2017. *Mythical intentions in modern literature*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, USA.
- [18] Alexiou, M., 2018. *After antiquity: Greek language, myth, and metaphor*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, USA.
- [19] Marx, E., Wittenberg, E., 2025. Temporal construal in sentence comprehension depends on linguistically encoded event structure. *Cognition*. 254, 105975.
- [20] Stratton, I., Year. Outline and assess how and why Barthes’ treated popular culture as ideological. *IDEATE: The Undergraduate Journal of Sociology*. 19 Spring, 106.
- [21] Hakoköngäs, E., Sakki, I., 2016. The naturalized nation: Anchoring, objectification and naturalized social representations of history. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*. 4(2), 646–669.
- [22] Barthes, R., Lavers, A., Smith, C., 1967. *Elements of semiology*. Cape: London, UK.
- [23] Lakoff, G., Johnson, M., 2020. Conceptual metaphor in everyday language. In: Sarasvathy, S.D., Dew, N., Venkataraman, S. (eds.). *Shaping entrepreneurship research*. Routledge: London, UK. pp. 475–504.
- [24] Pawliszko, J., 2025. Framing the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict: The Role of Metaphor, Nominalization, and Appraisal in Shaping Media Narratives. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*. 25(1), 156–175.
- [25] Gairola, V., Ranganathan, S., 2025. The Rhythms of Tradition: Understanding Dhol Sāgar and Drumming Knowledge in Garhwal Himalaya, North India. *Journal of Dharma Studies*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42240-025-00208-0>
- [26] Panahbar, E., Hesabi, A., Pirnajmuddin, H., 2016. Aesthetic Equivalence in the Translation of Rubayyat of Khayyam Using Reception Aesthetics and Conceptual Metaphor Theory. *Language and Translation Studies*. 49(1), 19–40.
- [27] Musolff, A., 2017. Metaphor and cultural cognition. In: Sharifian, F. (ed.). *Advances in Cultural Linguistics*. Springer, Singapore. pp. 325–344. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-4056-6\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-4056-6_15)
- [28] Eadon, Y.M., Wood, S.E., 2025. Combating contamination and contagion: Embodied and environmental metaphors of misinformation. *Convergence*. 31(2), 500–520.
- [29] Yudistira, R., Muta’allim, M., Nurcaya, N., et al., 2022. The role of linguistics and local wisdom on knowing harmony between religions at Tana Toraja. *Muslim Heritage*. 7(2), 409–431.
- [30] Shukla, M.S.S., Shukla, D.R.D., Yadav, D.R.V.K., 2025. Language and identity: Examining cultural marginality through linguistic perspectives. *Cuestiones de Fisioterapia*. 54(4), 5339–5353.
- [31] Pham, N.T.B., 2025. The Creative Use of Moral Megametaphors in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. 15(3), 814–824.
- [32] Healey, B., 2025. Improving narrative writing by teaching the linguistics of imagination. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*. 48(1), 95–117.
- [33] Gadamer, H.G., 1977. *Philosophical hermeneutics*. University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, USA.
- [34] Barthes, R., 1964. *Element of Semiology*. Hill and Wang: New York, NY, USA.
- [35] Dubuisson, D., 2017. *Imagining, Manufacturing,*



- and Theorizing Myth: An Overview of Key Theories of Myth and Religion. In: King, R. (ed.). *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies*. Columbia University Press: New York Chichester, West Sussex, USA. pp. 269–280.
- [36] Gomez, J., 2017. *An Analysis of Roland Barthes's Mythologies*. Macat Library: London, UK.
- [37] Heywood, D., Stronach, I., 2005. *Philosophy and Hermeneutics*. In: Somekh, B., Lewin, C. (eds.). *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*. Sage Publications: London, UK. pp. 114–120.
- [38] Pirovolakis, E., 2010. *Reading Derrida and Ricoeur: improbable encounters between deconstruction and hermeneutics*. State University of New York Press: Albany, NY, USA.
- [39] Tuffour, I., 2017. A critical overview of interpretative phenomenological analysis: A contemporary qualitative research approach. *Journal of Healthcare Communications*. 2(4), 52.
- [40] Miller, R.M., Chan, C.D., Farmer, L.B., 2018. Interpretative phenomenological analysis: A contemporary qualitative approach. *Counselor Education and Supervision*. 57(4), 240–254.
- [41] Pamungkas, O.Y., Hastangka, H., Raharjo, S.B., et al., 2023. The spirit of Islam in Javanese mantra: Syncretism and education. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*. 79(1), 8407.
- [42] Pamungkas, O.Y., Widodo, S.T., Suyitno, Endraswara, S., 2021. Javanese cosmology: Symbolic transformation of names in Javanese novels. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*. 77(4), 6593.
- [43] Suprpto, S., Widodo, S.T., Suwandi, S., et al., 2023. Reflections on Social Dimensions, Symbolic Politics, and Educational Values: A Case of Javanese Poetry. *International Journal of Social Culture and Language*. 11(2), 15–26.
- [44] Sharifian, F., 2017. Cultural linguistics. In: Sharifian, F. (ed.). *Advances in Cultural Linguistics*. Springer: Singapore. pp. 1–28.
- [45] Clegg, S.R., Palmer, G., 1996. *The politics of management knowledge*. Sage: London, UK.
- [46] Bachman, L.F., Palmer, A.S., 1996. *Language testing in practice: Designing and developing useful language tests*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.
- [47] Geeraerts, D., Dirven, R., Taylor, J.R., et al., 2006. *Cognitive linguistics: Basic readings*. Mouton de Gruyter: Berlin, Germany.
- [48] Duranti, A., 1997. Universal and culture-specific properties of greetings. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*. 7(1), 63–97.
- [49] Wierzbicka, A., 2006. *English: Meaning and culture*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.
- [50] Kövecses, Z., 2009. Metaphor, culture, and discourse: The pressure of coherence. In: Musolff, A., Zinken, J. (eds.). *Metaphor and discourse*. Palgrave Macmillan: London, UK. pp. 11–24.