



## EXPLORING JAVANESE CHILDRENS' PLAY SONGS: AN ECOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstrak

Lagu tradisional berperan penting dalam mentransmisikan nilai budaya, moral, dan kearifan ekologis antar generasi. Dalam konteks masyarakat Jawa, tembang dolanan anak, khususnya *Lir-ilir* dan *Gundhul-gundhul Pacul*, tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sarana hiburan, tetapi juga sebagai refleksi pandangan hidup dan hubungan manusia dengan alam. Di tengah dominasi media digital dan globalisasi budaya, pesan-pesan ekologis yang terkandung di dalamnya beresiko untuk jarang diperhatikan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menelaah nilai-nilai ekologis dan kultural dalam dua lagu dolanan anak-anak Jawa tersebut melalui pendekatan analisis wacana ekolinguistik Stibbe (2015, 2021). Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa *Lir-ilir* mengandung pesan tentang pembaruan, pertumbuhan, dan keharmonisan lingkungan, sedangkan *Gundhul-gundhul Pacul* menonjolkan nilai kerendahan hati, tanggung jawab, serta keseimbangan sosial dan ekologis. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa lagu dolanan anak-anak Jawa menyimpan kearifan ekologis yang relevan dengan konteks lingkungan masa kini. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya lagu tradisional sebagai sumber belajar dan media ekolinguistik untuk menumbuhkan kesadaran lingkungan serta memperkuat identitas budaya generasi muda.

**.Kata kunci:** Ekolinguistik; tembang dolanan; nilai ekologis; analisis wacana; pendidikan lingkungan; kearifan lingkungan

### Abstract

Traditional songs have long served as a medium for cultural transmission, carrying moral lessons and ecological wisdom across generations. In Javanese society, children's play songs such as *Lir-ilir* and *Gundhul-gundhul Pacul* are not merely entertainment but repositories of cultural values that reflect the community's worldview. However, in an era where globalized media and technology dominate children's learning environments, the ecological and moral messages embedded in these traditional songs risk being overlooked. This study aims to explore the ecological and cultural values conveyed in these two Javanese children's play songs through an ecolinguistic discourse analysis approach mainly using Stibbe's (2015, 2021). The analysis reveals that *Lir-ilir* highlights themes of renewal, growth, and environmental harmony, while *Gundhul-gundhul Pacul* emphasizes humility, responsibility, and respect for social and natural balance. These findings suggest that Javanese children's songs encapsulate ecological wisdom rooted in local culture, which remains highly relevant to today's environmental challenges. The study highlights the potential of traditional songs as



pedagogical and ecolinguistic resources to foster environmental awareness and cultural identity among younger generations.

**Keywords:** Ecolinguistic, Javanese children's songs, ecological values, discourse analysis, environmental wisdom

## INTRODUCTION

Ecolinguistic is an emerging field of study which examines how language influences our perceptions of the natural world and, conversely, how the environment perceptions affect our language. Ecolinguistic seeks to understand language and raise awareness of the relationship between discursive practices and ecological consciousness (Steffensen & Fill, 2014). Through his instrumental paper (Halliday, 1990) set up an idea that's worth to be considered among linguists, which is the role of language in the contemporary environmental issues. Ecolinguistic spots language as a key to understanding our relationship with the environment. The ways in which we articulate, represent, and conceptualize the natural world play a crucial role in shaping our perceptions, guiding our values, and informing our actions. It creates a premise that the ecological crisis we have today is strongly related with the language crisis which forms the role of humans in the broader ecosystem (Ashraf et al., 2025). Therefore, language is important in ecological restoration and management, focusing on how terminology affects decision-making (Robertson & Hull, 2003). Every human-kind should be aware about the responsibility to protect the nature by recognising the interconnectedness of all living things. Ecolinguistic assesses how people use language to form narratives relate to physical environment. The assessment can be vary, but generally it strongly depend on the ecological philosophy (ecosophy) which the analyst's believes (Stibbe, 2021). The ecosophy here refers to a set of value or worldview on how human should interact with the nature. In ecolinguistic, ecosophy helps us judge whether the stories, metaphors, and discourses in language are 'beneficial' to ecological well-being, 'destructive' to it, or 'ambivalent' (neutral; positive in some ways but negative to the others (Stibbe, 2021). Within this framework, linguistic analysis can be extended to traditional cultural texts that reflect human and nature relationships. Javanese children's play songs, for instance, offer valuable linguistic data through which ecological meanings and cultural worldviews are communicated.

Javanese children's play songs, known locally as *tembang dolanan* (play song), hold a unique place in the cultural heritage of Java. These traditional songs are more than mere entertainment; they serve as tools used to transmit cultural values, social norms, and ecological knowledge across generations (Lepofsky et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2024). Through playful melodies and poetic lyrics, children learn about their community, environment, and traditions in a way that is both engaging and memorable. As ecolinguistic explores the relationship between language, society, and the environment, it offers valuable insights into the ecological narratives embedded within traditional oral traditions like *tembang dolanan*. These songs often incorporating ecological lexicons which depict elements of nature, local wisdom, and cultural practices, showcasing the close bond between Javanese people and their environment. Understanding these linguistic patterns provides a window into how ecological awareness and cultural identity are constructed and maintained through language.

Despite the big amount of research done in examining Javanese culture, a comprehensive ecolinguistic analysis toward Javanese childrens' play song is barely discovered. Previous studies on Javanese songs has frequently focus on exploring from the ethnolinguistics or





semiotics perspective (Mukti & Waningyun, 2025), but it has little comprehensive ecolinguistic framework to methodically examine the interaction between humans and nature that is present in those songs. There are several works about folksongs on analysed from ecolinguistic perspective in other languages, such as Pagu language (Perangin-Angin & Dewi, 2020), Hawaiian (Indriyanto, 2021), and Madurese (Sudarto & Khotimah, 2024), but not yet in Javanese language. Therefore, the current study aims to meet this gap by addressing two research problems as follows; (1) How do Javanese play songs represent the relationship between humans and the natural environment from an ecolinguistic perspective and, (2) How do these ecological narratives reflect or shape Javanese cultural perceptions, attitudes, and values towards the environment.

This study examines Javanese children's play songs to uncover the ecological and cultural values they convey. By analysing the linguistic choices and thematic content of these songs, the research aims to explore how nature and culture are represented, and what these representations reveal about Javanese perspectives on the environment. This exploration not only contributes to preserving the cultural tradition but also highlights the potential of these songs as tools for environmental education and cultural preservation. In this paper, we selected two popular Javanese children play songs as the data and we analyse it using descriptive qualitative method to reframe narrative offered and promoted by the data in relation with ecological solution opportunities.

Ecolinguistic explores the ways in which language mediates and shapes how people think about and engage with physical spaces, nonhuman animals, and the environment in general (Micalay-Hurtado & Poole, 2022). It is normatively orientated towards preserving relationships which sustain life. More specifically, an ecolinguistic framework investigates the role of language in the climate crisis and ecological downfall while also contributing to the formation of more ecologically sustainable societies. It is 'critical' in nature as it evaluates the mainstream language practices that mediate relationships of the physical world and all of its inhabitants. Accordingly, ecolinguistic aims to reveal and challenge any type of discourse which contributes to continued ecological degradation while promoting language use which stimulates ecological well-being and sustainability (Micalay-Hurtado & Poole, 2022; Stibbe, 2015).

The roots of ecolinguistic can be traced to Halliday's (1990) seminal lecture *New Ways of Meaning: The Challenge to Applied Linguistics*, which called for linguists to address ecological problems caused by language patterns that promote overconsumption and exploitation. Halliday's challenge inspired later scholars such as Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001), who defined ecolinguistic as the study of language in its ecological context, emphasizing the interconnection between linguistic, cultural, and environmental systems. Goatly (2022) further expanded this view by examining metaphor and ideology in ecological discourse, showing how language can naturalize environmentally harmful practices or, conversely, support sustainable thinking. Bang and Døør (2007) later introduced the concept of *ecological language awareness*, emphasizing the ethical responsibility of language users to reflect on the ecological implications of their communication. Mutually, these perspectives position ecolinguistic as a discipline that bridges linguistic analysis with ecological ethics, encouraging critical reflection on the role of language in sustaining or undermining life.

The current study is grounded in the theoretical perspective of ecolinguistic, particularly the framework proposed by (Stibbe, 2015, 2021). As Stibbe (2015) argues, language does not simply describe reality, but it also constructs the "stories we live by" which means the





recurring patterns of meaning that guide people's perceptions, values, and behaviors toward the ecosystem. These stories influence how societies understand what it means to live well, what counts as progress, and what kinds of relationships are possible between humans, nature, and other living beings.

Within this field, Stibbe's (2015, 2021) framework is particularly influential for its focus on *stories we live by* which is a systematic way of uncovering the deep narratives that shape human relationships with the environment. He believes that discourses can be beneficial, destructive, or ambivalent in their ecological orientation. Beneficial discourses nurture care, empathy, and respect for life; destructive discourses reinforce ideologies of domination, materialism, or detachment; and ambivalent discourses express mixed or contradictory ecological values. This evaluative dimension allows ecolinguistic to assess whether the meanings encoded in texts contribute to or undermine the wellbeing of life on Earth (Stibbe, 2021). To systematically analyze these discourses, Stibbe identifies nine types of stories we live by, that construct the way we think about the world as depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** The stories we live by (Stibbe, 2021)

<b>Form of story</b> (cognitive, i.e., in people's minds)		<b>Manifestation</b> (linguistic, i.e., appearance in texts)
ideology	a story of how the world is and should be which is shared by members of a group	discourses, i.e., clusters of linguistic features characteristically used by the group
framing	a story that uses a frame (a packet of knowledge about an area of life) to structure another area of life	trigger words which bring a frame to mind
metaphor (a type of framing)	a story that uses a frame to structure a distinct and clearly different area of life	trigger words which bring a clearly distinct frame to mind
evaluation	a story about whether an area of life is good or bad	appraisal patterns, i.e., patterns of language which represent an area of life positively or negatively
identity	a story about what it means to be a particular kind of person	forms of language which define the characteristics of certain kinds of people
conviction	a story about whether a particular description of the world is true, uncertain or false	facticity patterns, i.e., patterns of language which represent descriptions of the world as true, uncertain or false
erasure	a story that an area of life is unimportant or unworthy of consideration	patterns of linguistic features which fail to represent a particular area of life at all, or which background or distort it
salience	a story that an area of life is important and worthy of consideration	patterns of language which give prominence to an area of life
narrative	a structure which involves a sequence of logically connected events	narrative text, i.e., a specific oral telling, written work, or other expressive form which recounts a series of temporally and logically connected events

Each of these story types provides a different lens for revealing the ecological worldview embedded in texts. Not all, however, are equally applicable to every kind of discourse. For poetic or symbolic genres such as folksongs, where figurative and moral language predominates, *metaphor*, *evaluation*, and *identity* are particularly relevant. These three stories enable an exploration of how traditional songs express moral and ecological values in culturally specific ways.







## Metaphor

Metaphor, as the first story used here, is essential because it shapes how people conceptualize their relationship with the environment. In a simple comprehension, metaphor is a way of understanding one thing by describing it as if it were another (Stibbe, 2021). As Lakoff (2010) demonstrated, metaphors are not mere linguistic ornaments but fundamental to human cognition. In ecolinguistic, metaphors can sustain either life-affirming or life-denying worldviews (Goatly, 2022; Stibbe, 2015). For example, metaphors of *nature as resource* promote utilitarian attitudes, while metaphors of *nature as family* encourage empathy and care. In Javanese folksongs, especially, we are going to see later how the songs' lyrics use metaphors which position nature not as an object of control, but as a moral teacher and a mirror for human conduct.

## Evaluation

Evaluation is central to ecolinguistic inquiry because it reveals the moral stance encoded in discourse (Steffensen & Fill, 2014; Stibbe, 2021). It concerns the linguistic representation of values of what is believed to be good, bad, right, or wrong. In Javanese play songs, evaluative expressions often contrast virtues such as humility, diligence, and sincerity with vices such as arrogance or greed. These moral evaluations are not only ethical but also ecological, as they encourage moderation and respect for natural cycles. The *proverbs-in-song* format of Javanese oral literature allows these evaluations to be transmitted across generations, maintaining local ecological wisdom (*kearifan lokal*) that aligns human behavior with environmental harmony.

## Identity

Identity examines how language constructs the relationship between humans, other beings, and the natural world. In ecolinguistic, identity extends beyond social or cultural categories to include ecological self-concepts on how humans define themselves in relation to the world beyond (Alexander & Stibbe, 2014; Stibbe, 2015).

In Javanese philosophical thought, humans are often conceptualized as part of a cosmic order governed by *rukun* (harmony) and *sumeleh* (acceptance). Folksongs such as *Lir- Ilir* implicitly construct a human identity grounded in humility and introspection, positioning humans as caretakers rather than dominators of nature. This worldview aligns with what Stibbe (2021) would classify as *beneficial discourse*, since it fosters a sense of belonging and responsibility within the ecological community.

## Ecolinguistic Evaluation

After analyzing the three selected story types, the discourses identified in each song are evaluated according to Stibbe's (2021) models of beneficial, ambivalent, and destructive discourses. This evaluative step moves the analysis from linguistic description to ethical interpretation, addressing whether the songs promote ecological harmony or involuntarily reproduce anthropocentric values. Given the spiritual and agrarian context of Javanese play songs, it is expected that most of the discourses will be *beneficial* where they support harmony between humans, nature, and the divine, although some *ambivalences* may appear, particularly where spiritual metaphors place humans at the moral center of creation.

In the current study, Stibbe's ecolinguistic framework provides both the analytical tools and the ethical orientation. By focusing on *metaphor*, *evaluation*, and *identity*, and





interpreting them through the categories of *beneficial*, *ambivalent*, and *destructive* discourses, this research aims to reveal the implicit ecological wisdom embedded in the Javanese play songs. The analysis highlights how these traditional texts articulate an indigenous ecological philosophy that views moral virtue, social harmony, and environmental balance as inseparable. In doing so, this study not only applies Stibbe's theoretical model to a local cultural context but also contributes to the broader conversation on how traditional narratives can inspire more sustainable ways of living in the modern world.

## METHODOLOGY

This study will adopt a qualitative descriptive-interpretative research approach. This methodology is particularly suitable for in-depth analysis of linguistic data and its cultural interpretations, prioritizing meaning and context over statistical generalization. To ensure the relevance and accuracy, the authors have several criteria to select specific language datasets, namely; (1) the familiarity of the Javanese community and (2) the availability of the song lyrics, audios and the translations in accessible platforms. Following the criteria, the authors then selected the songs that met the current studies' ecological perspective standards. Two widely-known Javanese children's play song as depicted in Table 1 were selected since they are the most popular play songs among Javanese youth.

Table 1. Javanese children's play songs

Code	Song Title	Song Description
#1	<i>Ilir-ilir</i>	<i>Ilir-ilir</i> captures the life of people in Javanese rural area along with the agrarian panoramic and social scene that reflect the society's custom and habit. The song is also widely interpreted as a spiritual advice to human on how to drive their life.
#2	<i>Gundhul-gundhul pacul</i>	<i>Gundhul-gundhul pacul</i> has pentatonic melody typical of Javanese folk music. It sounds playful and fun as children's songs. Even so, the song actually carries deep philosophical and cultural meanings, especially related to leadership and humility in Javanese culture.

Both songs are selected for their cultural prominence, metaphorical richness, and ecological resonance which capture moral and environmental wisdom deeply rooted in Javanese philosophy. Lyrics of the selected play songs is collected from reliable sources, including academic publications, books, and reputable online databases. This aligns with standard documentation methods for linguistic research. Nuanced translation into the working language (e.g., English) is crucial to capture the full semantic, cultural, and ecological meanings, including metaphors and idiomatic expressions.

The research employs critical eco-linguistic design which is the combination of eco-linguistic as the sociological-empirical approach and critical discourse analysis as the critical approach. We mainly use Stibbe's (2021) framework of constructive and destructive ecological discourse to categorize the ecological narratives embedded in the song lyrics.





## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Song#1

Lir-ilir is basically a lullaby created by Raden Mas Said a.k.a Sunan Kalijaga (one of “nine saints” of Javanese Islam), in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The song is still widely sang by Javanese children up to this day and somehow often used as a play song. The lyric is rich in meaning and involve advices for young people. This song tells about someone who asked a boy to get a starfruit tree to wash the clothes since he/she is going to wear in attending an invitation. Looking from ecolinguistic perspective, this song depicts a strong connection between people and their environment to some extent as we look into each sentence of the lyrics coupled with the English free translations.

(1) Lir-ilir, lir-ilir

*Wake up, wake up*

(2) Tandure wis sumilir

*The seeds are blossoming*

(3) Tak ijo royo-royo tak senggo penganten anyar

*So rich and green, just like newlyweds*

Line (1) to (3) depict an atmosphere of rural Javanese rice field where most of Javanese people lived close by as farmers. The setting shows the phase where the seeds begin to grow as green leaves and sway gently in the breeze, looking fresh and pleasant, metaphorized as happy newlyweds. The imagery of lush greenery evokes both fertility and purity. The metaphor used in here connects the earth's regenerative cycles with human emotion of love, care, and new beginnings. The evaluation is positive, seeing natural beauty as sacred and celebrating growth and readiness for moral and ecological responsibility. The identity shaped here is that humans are positioned as participants, not masters, in maintaining ecological rhythms. This ideology is beneficial, as it encourages the relationship between environmental awareness/ gratitude and human happiness.

From another perspective, the disappearance or the minimal spotlight on rural life is lamentable since the society often glorify the life in the city while life in the village is seemingly underrated. Young people, especially in Indonesia, feels better to live in houses/ environment that is close to big building as it seems as more attractive and promising. These opening lines romantizing the peace and natural closeness to humans' life.

(4) Cah angon-cah angon penekno blimbing kuwi

*Shepherd boy, shepherd boy, please climb up that starfruit tree*

(5) Lunyu-lunyu yo penekno kanggo mbasuh dhodhot-iro

*It is slippery, but please climb it, (you need the fruit) to wash (your) clothes*

The environment is again emphasized by line (4) and (5) where the singer asked a shepherd boy to grab some starfruits to wash *dhodhot* (fabrics used as clothes by wrapping it on the body; mostly used in special occasions) despite of the slippery tree trunk. In the old rural Javanese environment, people use starfruits as soap to wash stubborn stains. Especially when it comes to *dhodhot* which is tailored in such a way using natural fabric colouring, so





the maintenance should be extra to prevent colour-fading and tearing fabric. In modern day, it is found that starfruit naturally contains *saponin* and *citric acid* that is used in detergents. This emphasize the closeness between human with the nature since human can strongly depends on plants to get their business done. As mentioned by Abida et al., (2023) that Javanese folksongs frequently utilize ecological terms that represent local flora, fauna, and natural phenomena, reflecting the community's deep-rooted connection to their environment.

Metaphorically, the shepherd (*cah angon*) represents innocence, simplicity, and closeness to nature. *Cah angon* is identified as a mindful steward who lives simply and harmoniously with the environment. While the act of climbing the starfruit tree (*blimbing*) reflects the search for spiritual or moral elevation. In Javanese and Islamic symbolism, the starfruit's five ridges might signify the *Pancasila* or the five pillars of faith. Combined, both lines imply the perseverance in maintaining purity and morality, appreciating endurance and effort amid difficulty to clean oneself from sin and impurity. These two lines, again, are beneficial as they calls for awareness and balance of personal and environmental restoration.

(6) Dhodhot-iro, dhodhot-iro, kumitir bedah ing pinggir  
*Your clothing, your clothing is torn at the edges*

(7) Dondomono jlumatono kanggo sebo mengko sore  
*Sew it mend it to go to the (king's) court this evening*

Further, in line (6) and (7), the singer asked someone to sew the *dhodhot* which is teared on the side since he/ she is going to wear it to an evening invitation. *Dhodhot* is a traditional Javanese attire which represents dignity and morality, while the torn edges reflects a fragment of human virtue that is broken. Line (7) shows the support to the person addressed to become a responsible agent who needs to do a proactive steps of fixing the moral imperfection and restore balance rather than merely lamenting loss.

In another view, these two lines shows that the former society who live in such situation in the past prefer to fix things rather than get rid of it and buy the new ones, even for an immediate important event. From ecolinguistic lens, this correlates to the current fashion industry where people tend to have numbers of clothes more than they actually need. The fashion industry contributes substantially to marine chemical pollution: it is estimated to be responsible for about 20-25% of industrial water pollution globally, with large volumes of hazardous chemicals and dyes leaking into rivers and oceans from dyeing and finishing processes (Bailey et al., 2022). Moreover, this also draw a bead on people behaviour today which consume things just for fun and buy things they will forget after (impulsive buying). By the advance of technology and obsession for economic growth, the society today is 'forced' to trade more often with less warning that the more goods they buy, the greater environmental impact. Therefore, these two lines are beneficial in embodying the regenerative principle of both moral and ecological imbalance.

(8) Mumpung padhang rembulane, mumpung jembar kalangane  
*While the moon is bright, while many people gather,*

(9) Yo surako... surak hore...





*Let's cheer together. Cheers! Hooray!*

The last two lines (8) and (9) portray the sociocultural narrative of Javanese by conveying the Javanese social custom's tendency to conduct important event outdoor to let people gather and celebrate together. This custom indicate a willingness to embrace inclusivity as people love to connect with their surroundings and fully interact with their neighbours or people in their community. To respond, the ecolinguistic perspective highlights that there is something to do with human interaction. Again, as the advancement of technology and the raising of frugal-living trends, people are required to do things with technology which make them having less interactions with real people. Face-to-face human interaction remains significant to maintain physical and mental health .

The use of specific ecological vocabulary in the song (*angon, dhodhot, blimbing, sebo*) serves as a medium for cultural expression and preservation of local wisdom regarding environmental stewardship {Citation}(Fernandez, 2008). This song particularly shows the position of human as an organism which is equal to other living creatures on earth, as a part of the ecosystem, not the central of the world.

## Song #2

The themes in Javanese folksong often revolve around agricultural practices and rituals, which emphasize gratitude towards nature and the divine(Tiani & Suryadi, 2021) (Tiani, 2020; Fernandez, 2008). One of which is called *Gundhul-Gundhul Pacul*, which is more into a play song. This song highlight the agrarian identity of the Javanese living in rural Java area. There are several repetition used in the lyrics makes the song relatively easy to recall, even for children or those who try to learn this song for the first time. The song describe a simple scenery of a boy carrying a rice basket which then make it fell over the ground. This song has a fast and cheerful beat, while many Javanese experts think that it is a story about a regret.

(1) Gundhul-gundhul pacul-cul gembelengan

*A little boy with no hair*

(2) Nyunggi-nyunggi wakul-kul gembelengan

*Carrying a rice basket on his head*

Sentence (1) and (2) convey a typical Javanese scenery in the old days where people carrying food above their head. The agrarian lexicon and language choices (e.g.: *pacul, wakul, nyunggi*) anchor the text in a material relationship with the land and agricultural labor. Both sentences indicate a rural Javanese worldview in which agricultural practice and social humility are closely linked. *Pacul* is an agrarian tool used by farmers to dig the soil which is commonly seen in rice fields. *Pacul* is somehow symbolizes farm-activity and role of a person who have a close relationship with earth. Next, the word *wakul* here means a rice basket which is made from woven bamboo. Javanese society is strongly close to bamboo in the old days. They used bamboo for many kind of usage, from cooking utensils until construction materials. There is even a Javanese local wisdom called *Ngelmu Pring* (bamboo philosophy) which is tremendously embraced by Javanese society. Bamboo is a 'superplant', since it can release 35 percent of oxygen and is a very useful plant in greening unproductive or degraded lands. Bamboo is better and stronger to be used in the long run since it promotes





industrial sustainability. Bamboo trend nowadays has emerged as the solution of climate change. This highlights the relevancy between Javanese local wisdom and the modern science world. From an ecolinguistic perspective, the first two sentences of the song primarily tell a beneficial story (Stibbe, 2015) since it promotes mutual responsibility and the ethical stewardship of people who occupy leadership or caretaking roles. The words and narrative actions in the song that mock vanity and praise modesty are interpreted as promoting social behaviours that correspond to ecological reference (stewardship, restraint, care for common goods).

- (3) Wakul ngglimpang segane dadi sak ratan  
*The rice basket fell down, the rice was all over the ground*

- (4) Wakul ngglimpang segane dadi sak ratan.  
*The rice basket fell down, the rice was all over the ground.*

Further, A destructive storyline is also present in the song as shown in line (3) which is exactly resemble to line (4). The lines are more into metaphor that aims to deliver life message, implied caution against arrogance and careless dominion, an attitude that, if generalized, would justify over-extraction or exploitative behaviour toward both people and the environment. The fact that rice is the staple food of Indonesian, especially Javanese, strengthen the word 'rice' into something valuable for humans. The song sends a message that if someone with a big responsibility and honour is careless in taking his steps, the whole thing that matters to him will fall down and go in waste. Besides, this song promotes ecological awareness and sustainable practices by involving several cultural and social practices of Javanese. The whole song acts as a narrative tool, conveying the community's values and ecological knowledge, thus reinforcing cultural identity and continuity (Ari et al., 2024).

Textually, the song's repetitive structure and mnemonic devices function to establish the normative message across generations, making its moral-ecological lessons durable in oral culture. Repetition and melody are known mechanisms for pedagogy in oral cultures (Sugiyama, 2024). These strategies ensure that critical ecological information is accurately retained and passed down through generations in oral cultures.

## Discussion

### *Implications for Human-Environment Relationships*

The analysis of Javanese play songs from an ecolinguistic perspective provides clear answers to both research questions mentioned prior in this paper. The identified linguistic features, including specific lexical choices related to flora and fauna, metaphors, and particular grammatical patterns, reveal how Javanese play songs are designed to constructs and conveys ecological meanings. The study will synthesize these features to present a cohesive picture of the human-environment relationship as portrayed in the songs.

Taken together, both songs form a coherent ecological narrative deeply rooted in Javanese philosophy. All employ agrarian metaphors, which are; soil, planting, searching, awakening, that link moral growth with ecological awareness. These metaphors reinforce what Halliday (1990) and Stibbe (2015) identify as *stories that help*: linguistic patterns that sustain life rather than destroy it. Evaluative meanings across the songs consistently reward humility, patience, and awareness while condemning arrogance, greed, and negligence. Such evaluations encode moral ecologies where personal virtue aligns with environmental



harmony. Similarly, identity constructions in both songs emphasize humans as *caretakers*, *seekers*, or *participants* in the larger ecosystem rather than as dominators. Minor ambivalence appears in the songs' spiritual anthropocentrism which spots humans remain the moral focal point, but the overall orientation remains *beneficial*. These findings resonate with Fill and Mühlhäusler's (2001) argument that traditional oral forms preserve ecological wisdom through metaphorical and moral language.

In a contemporary context dominated by destructive discourses of materialism and environmental neglect, these Javanese play songs act as counter-narratives. They transmit ecological ethics through aesthetic and symbolic language, embodying what Stibbe (2021) describes as *life-sustaining stories*. The songs remind listeners that moral integrity, social harmony, and environmental care are interdependent. By promoting humility and renewal, they resist the discourses of domination and detachment that characterize modern ecological crises. Therefore, both songs carry multiple meanings and purposes, not only to transmit cultural values but also respect toward the environment (Abdullah et al., 2021).

The discussion presented in the previous sub-section shows both Javanese children play songs have a beneficial ecological philosophy (ecosophy). Both songs were popular among Javanese society long time before the industrial revolution where people at that time have closer connection and dependence to nature than the people today. While the contemporary world is only beginning to embrace environmental awareness and the ethos of slow living, Javanese ancestral traditions have long embodied principles of ecological harmony and cultural integration. Evidence of this can be seen in traditional Javanese folklore songs, which articulate a deep, respectful relationship between humans and nature. This deep relationship is embedded in Javanese ecosophy such as *Memayu Hayuning Bawana* literally means "to beautify and maintain the world", which emphasizes ecological and social balance through respect for nature as a living entity rather than something to exploit.

Unlike the imperialist worldview that assigns value to the environment only when it is converted into exploitable resources, or the romanticist idealization of nature as sacred, Javanese ancestors adopted a more utilitarian approach. They perceived nature as inherently valuable, requiring neither transformation nor commodification. This perspective aligns with a stewardship model, in which nature is managed responsibly for the collective good. It is, again, in line with the Javanese philosophical and cosmological traditions (e.g. the 19th century *Serat Centhini*), environmental preservation is viewed as an expression of *Manunggaling kawula lan Gusti* (a union of humanity and the divine), framing conservation as both a spiritual and communal duty. Such a worldview quite diverges from today's dominant industrial paradigm, which often prioritizes human gain at the expense of ecological balance especially in urban cities. In sum, The current study highlight the role of Javanese children play songs to the attitude of Javanese society today, especially in non-urban cities. This implies the significance of maintaining the existence of the play songs along with the story they relates to.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined *Lir-Ilir* and *Gundhul-Gundhul Pacul* using an ecolinguistic framework and found that both songs convey strong ecological meanings through agrarian lexicon, metaphors, and moral evaluations. The songs reflect a worldview in which humans live in harmony with their environment, emphasizing humility, stewardship, and social





responsibility. These narratives align with Javanese ecosophy, *Memayu Hayuning Bawana*, which positions ecological care as both a cultural and spiritual duty. In contrast with modern consumerist and extractive discourses, these play songs function as counter-narratives that sustain ecological awareness and transmit local wisdom across generations. The findings highlight that Javanese children's songs serve not only as cultural heritage but also as tools for reinforcing ecological attitudes, particularly in rural communities. Their continued preservation is therefore essential for maintaining both cultural identity and environmentally mindful values.

## SUGGESTION

Future studies may explore a broader range of Javanese folksongs or songs from other Indonesian ethnic groups to compare ecological narratives across regions. Further research could also incorporate multimodal analysis (melody, performance context, gestures) to understand how ecological values are communicated beyond verbal language. Additionally, quantitative or corpus-based approaches could map ecological lexicon across larger oral traditions, while sociolinguistic studies may investigate how younger generations interpret these songs in an increasingly urbanized and digital environment. Such extensions would deepen our understanding of the role of traditional arts in shaping contemporary ecological consciousness.

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