

Language as cultural expression: An anthropolinguistics study of Javanese mantra in the traditional ceremony *Malam 1 Sura*

Seishaditha Aleyda Prasetya^{1*}, Ajar Pradika Ananta Tur¹, Simon Ntamwana²,
Iriana Ilgizovitch Alexandrovna³

¹Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

²Ecole Normale Supérieure du Burundi, Bujumbura, Burundi

³Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russia

*Corresponding author: sesadita@gmail.com

Citation: Prasetya, S. A., Tur, A. P. A., Ntamwana, S., & Alexandrovna, I. I. (2026). Language as cultural expression: An anthropolinguistics study of Javanese mantra in the traditional ceremony Malam 1 Sura. *NOTION: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Culture*, 8(1), 111-125. <https://doi.org/10.12928/notion.v8i1.14607>

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: 2025-09-30

Accepted: 2026-05-02

Keywords:

Macapat

Mantra Language

Malam 1 Sura Ritual

Symbolic Function

Linguistics Anthropology

ABSTRACT

The symbolic role of mantra language in Javanese ritual traditions remains understudied, particularly in the *macapat* sung during the Malam 1 Suro ceremony at the *Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat* Palace. This study examines the symbolic functions of *macapat* as ritual mantra performed by palace courtiers. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered through organizational access, observation, interviews, document and audio-visual analysis, and ethical practice. Interviews with KRT. Rintaiswara and KRT. Kusumonegoro were triangulated with information from R.Ngt. Kingkin of the Yogyakarta Cultural Office to ensure validity. Findings show that the *macapat* recited in the ceremony serves as a safety-seeking mantra whose linguistic form has evolved into a blend of Old Javanese, modern Javanese, and everyday language. The analysis identifies four symbolic functions shaping ritual communication: (a) tradition as microphysics of power, (b) language as a symbolic enactment of belief systems, (c) language as soulful resonance, and (d) language as an identity marker of Yogyakarta's governance. This research contributes to linguistic anthropology and ritual discourse studies by demonstrating how *macapat* functions not merely as verbal expression but as a symbolic medium embodying socio-cultural, spiritual, and political meanings within Javanese court practice.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country known for its diversity in ethnicity, religion, language, and culture. This plurality forms the basis for the emergence of a wide range of hereditary traditions passed down through generations (Alexandrovna, 2026). Traditional ceremonies, as part of these ritual practices, are conducted to commemorate important events, honor ancestors, and preserve cultural identity amidst modern social changes (Ntamwana & Adi, 2023). Examples include the Seren Taun ceremony expressing gratitude for rice harvests in West Java (Utami et al., 2016) and the Balinese *Ngaben* cremation ritual intended to purify and release the spirit into its next life (Robbayani, 2022; Indarwati et al., 2025). Each region maintains its own distinctive ceremonial forms that reflect unique cultural, social, and spiritual meanings.

Traditional ceremonies in Indonesia often incorporate sacred utterances such as prayers or mantras. According to Damayanti et al. (2024) mantra is defined as the recitation of specific sounds or words serving as a ritual medium believed to possess magical power (Wibowo et al. 2024). In practice, mantras carry particular structures and functions aligned with the purpose of the ceremony and are often delivered in local languages (Tur & Sabrina 2024). Originating from animistic beliefs, the recitation of such mantras is believed to produce spiritual or supernatural effects for those who participate in or witness the ritual (Pamungkas et al., 2023; Malik et al., 2025).

The Special Region of Yogyakarta is one of the Indonesian regions where traditional ceremonies remain actively practiced, including *Sekaten* (Purnamasari & Ribawati, 2025), *Grebeg Syawal*, and the ritual of Malam 1 Suro marking the Islamic New Year (Mohammad, 2024). One of the most iconic processions of this celebration is *Mubeng Beteng Topo Bisu*, a silent circumambulation of the Kraton's fortress carried out at night as a form of introspection and spiritual purification. Participants walk counterclockwise around the palace without speaking, a ritual believed to have originated in the 17th century under Sultan Agung Hanyokrokusumo, with some scholars connecting it to the Islamic tradition of tawaf and tracing its lineage to the Demak Sultanate.

The procession begins after the *Isya* prayer with *Macapatan*, greetings, and collective prayers. *Macapat*, traditional Javanese poetry composed in metered, sung verse (*kidung*), holds deep philosophical meaning, narrating the human spiritual journey (Zustiyantoro, 2024) through forms such as *Maskumambang*, *Sinom*, *Asmarandana*, and *Dandanggula* (Haidar, 2018). Its origins remain debated; some attribute *macapat* to Prabu Dewawasesa (1279 CE), while others argue that the *Wali Songo* created it as a medium of Islamic propagation. Iriyanto (2020) notes that *macapat* flourished from the Demak Kingdom through the eras of Pajang, Mataram, and Surakarta until Yogyakarta. Today, *macapat* continues to serve ritual functions and is adapted into modern Javanese to sustain cultural relevance.

Although many studies discuss the cultural and historical aspects of Malam 1 Suro, the linguistic-symbolic functions of *macapat* as a ritual mantra remain underexplored. Specifically,

limited attention has been given to how linguistic structures, semantic symbolism, and performative features in *macapat* construct meaning within the ritual. This research therefore aims to examine the symbolic function of language in the mantra (*macapat*) recited during the traditional ceremony of Malam 1 Suro by the courtiers of the *Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat* Palace, offering a linguistic perspective that contributes to both cultural and discourse studies (Pandanwangi et al., 2023).

II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. According to Mustofa (2024) and Santosa and Noorwatha (2025), qualitative descriptive research produces data in the form of words, phrases, clauses, or sentences rather than numbers, obtained through interviews, field notes, photos, video recordings, personal documents, and memos. Referring to Creswell (2014), qualitative research involves five data collection techniques: organizational access, observation, interviews, collection of documents and audio-visual materials, and ethical practice (Kasmad 2020).

Data Collection

Organizational access was obtained directly and officially from the *Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat* Palace to conduct interviews with courtiers (Pandanwangi et al., 2023). Observation was carried out through direct participation during the Malam 1 Suro ceremony within the palace. The interview technique involved speaking with two palace courtiers, KRT. Rintaiswara and KRT. Kusumonegoro. Document and audio-visual collection included previous studies, images of *macapat* texts, interview videos, and audio recordings.

The data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data originates directly from the first source through interviews or questionnaires (Masso et al., 2025). In this study, primary data was obtained from direct interviews with palace courtiers. Secondary data is indirectly obtained through written documents, books, journals, or previous research, all of which were used to support the analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using content analysis. The *macapat* texts were examined through Javanese–Indonesian translation methods to identify linguistic patterns. The symbolic functions of mantra language found in the *macapat* texts were then interpreted based on interview results, field observations, and insights from previous research. This analytical process allowed the researcher to connect textual meaning with ritual context and symbolic functions (Ntamwana, 2022).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical aspects followed Creswell (2014) principles of ethical practice in qualitative research. Permission and organizational access were formally obtained from the *Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat* Palace. In addition, triangulation was conducted with R.Ngt. Kingkin, an expert

staff member of the DIY Cultural Office, to ensure the credibility and reliability of the data. All participants were respected in terms of confidentiality, informed consent, and cultural sensitivity throughout the research process (Mehta et al., 2023; Klykken, 2025).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research will examine the symbolic function of language in mantra (*macapat*) which is nowadays has been adapted to a language which, overall, is a combination of ancient Javanese, modern Javanese, and daily Javanese. This happens so that the delivery is more easily understood by the wider community but does not also eliminate the authenticity of the Javanese language itself. This *macapat* reading has a symbolic function of mantra language. The symbolic functions are, (a) The tradition as a microphysics of power, (b) Language as a symbol enactment of belief system, (c) Language as reflection of soulful resonance, and (d) Language as identity of governance in Yogyakarta.

The tradition as a microphysics of power

The microphysics of power is a theory developed by Michel Foucault that refers to the mechanisms of power that operate subtly in everyday life, not through large institutions but also through social interactions between individuals (Adlin, 2016; Tur et al., 2023). Power manifests not through explicit regulations but through voluntary practices individuals choose to maintain (Pandanwangi et al., 2023). This framework is reflected in the traditional ceremony of Malam 1 Suro, where the annual *Mubeng Beteng Topo Bisu* procession is not formally decreed by the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace. As stated by KRT. Kusumonegoro (Chairman of the Abdi Dalem, Interview on July 8, 2025), the event emerged from the initiative of the Abdi Dalem Association rather than palace instruction:

"Kalau kita berbicara mengenai upacara mubeng beteng, kapan pertama kali dan siapa pemerkersanya, itu tidak ada catatan sama sekali, dan perlu diketahui bahwa upacara mubeng beteng ini bukan upacara yang diselenggarakan oleh Keraton." (KRT. Kusumonegoro, 3:00 – 3:29)

"If we talk about ceremony of Mubeng Beteng, when was the first time and who was the initiator, there is no record at all, and we should note that the ceremony is not a ceremony that organized by The Palace."

This statement illustrates that, although not commanded, the Abdi Dalem possess the symbolic authority to mobilize the community. This is emphasized by KRT. Rintaiswara (Abdi Dalem of Ngayogyakarta Palace, Interview on July 3, 2025).

"Perlu saya teruskan upacara mubeng beteng itu bukan event Keraton. Bukan jadwal Keraton menyelenggarakan tapi masyarakat dalam hal ini abdi dalem, ya." (KRT. Rintaiswara, 2:55 – 3:08)

"I need to clarify that ceremony of Mubeng Beteng is not event by the Palace. Is not the Palace's schedule to arrange it but the community, in this case the royal servants."

However, the Palace grants permission in the form of lending the venue for the traditional ceremony, which is held at the *Bangsas Pancaniti*. This explains that there are no regulations or laws governing the traditional ceremony on the night of 1 Suro, nor is there any directive to carry out this activity. The traditional Mubeng Beteng Topo Bisu ceremony can proceed because it is an initiative of the Abdi Dalem as a form of self-reflection toward the Almighty God,

"Memperingati 1 suro, ini masyarakat Jawa memperingatinya dengan kontemplasi atau perenungan, doa dan harapan yang akan datang menjadi lebih baik, dan juga perenungan apa yang kita lakukan waktu lampau" (KRT. Kusumonegoro, 4:20 – 4:46)

"Commemorate of 1 Suro, this Javanese society commemorate with contemplation or reflection, prayers, and hopes that the future will be better, and then reflection what we did in the past"

However, the microphysics of power becomes more evident when examining the linguistic features of the *macapat* mantra used in the ritual. The power relations are not only organizational but also encoded in the lexical, grammatical, and deictic choices within the sung verses.

First, lexical markers of authority frequently appear in *macapat* lines such as *"Gusti," "Ingkang Maha Agung,"* and *"Kawula."* These terms establish a hierarchical relationship between the participants (as *kawula*) and the divine (as *Gusti*, the ultimate authority). Such vocabulary enacts a power structure where humans position themselves in humility and obedience, aligning with Foucault's idea that power is internalized through discourse rather than through coercive rules.

Second, imperative forms commonly found in *macapat* such as *"nyuwun," "mugi paring,"* and *"tansah"* function as ritual commands that discipline the participants into specific emotional and spiritual orientations. Though directed toward the divine, these imperatives also guide communal behaviour implicitly by framing how participants should think, feel, and act within the ritual. The repeated imperative structure creates a collective rhythm of submission and devotion, reflecting power enacted through linguistic ritualization rather than institutional enforcement.

Third, ritual deixis including spatial references like *"ing kalenggahan puniki," "amuliha mring tawang-tuwang prajamu,"* and temporal deixis such as *"wacanen tengah dalu,"* positions participants within a sacred geography and sacred temporality.

The interviews affirm that *Mubeng Beteng Topo Bisu* is not an officially mandated palace event, the *macapat* language recited within it functions as symbolic discipline. Through authoritative lexicon, imperative forms, and ritual deixis, the mantras enact a microphysics of power wherein participants internalize cultural hierarchy and spiritual submission (Pamungkas et al., 2023).

Language as a symbolic enactment of belief system

In a traditional or cultural ceremony, there are various symbols that are considered sacred by the people who believe in them. In KGHB, it is mentioned that *Gunungan* symbolizes the belief system between humans (Sabrina & Tur, 2025) and God through the medium of nature, which combines spiritual values in Islam and local beliefs (Suryadi & Maghfiroh, 2025). In the traditional *Rambu Solo* ceremony in Toraja, it is mentioned that the *Buffalo* is considered sacred because it serves as a spiritual symbol connecting the human world with the world of ancestors (Malik et al., 2025). Additionally, there is also *Sesajen or Sesaji*, which in this context is believed to be a spiritual symbol to God (Nurazizah & Tur, 2024) and the spirits of ancestors (Humaeni et al., 2021). In the context of the traditional ceremony on the night of 1 Suro in Yogyakarta, the sacred symbol is the *Language* used in the *mantras or macapat* (Javanese poetry) sung before the *Mubeng Beteng Topi Bisu* procession. The Javanese people consider *macapat* not only as an art form but also as a ritual and spiritual medium, which is why *macapat* has become a symbolic enactment of belief system. This is in line with Kenneth Burke's theory in his book "On Symbol and Society", that stated "poetry or any verbal act, is to be considered as symbolic action" (Binnie, 2015). This means that language in *macapat* is a symbolic and spiritual act as a medium to connect human power with God. In the case of this *macapat*, there are sentences that connect humans with God (Setyarini et al., 2026).

From a linguistic standpoint, the ritual nature of these *macapat* texts is marked by several features commonly found in ritual language: a) Imperative forms that direct or command supernatural forces, b) Formulaic expressions frequently used in prayers or chants, c) Archaic Javanese vocabulary that enhances sacredness, d) Repetition and parallelism, which reinforce the ritual function and mnemonic value, and e) Invocation formulas that directly address divine entities. These markers justify interpreting the language as symbolic enactment of a belief system because they indicate that the language is not merely descriptive but performative—intended to influence metaphysical forces.

Tolak Balak (Pangkur)

"Singa ama sing awulu | Lan ama sing asirah | Sing atenggak miwah ama sing abuntut | Padha sira suminggaha | Muliha mring asal-neki."

"A hairy lion | And pests that have heads | Beside having a head, it's also having a tail | You immediately leave the place | Go back to where you came from"

In the verse above, the words "hairy lions" and "pests with heads and tails" are believed to represent supernatural beings, evil spirits, or negative things. Linguistically, these are metaphorical lexical items functioning as ritual euphemisms to avoid direct naming of harmful entities. The repeated structure "sing... ama sing..." is a form of parallelism, a common ritual marker that emphasizes the comprehensive expulsion of all negative forces. The phrase "leave this place immediately" is a direct ritual command for these negative things to leave immediately.

Prasetya, S. A., Tur, A. P. A., Ntamwana, S., & Alexandrovna, I.
Language as cultural expression: An anthropolinguistics study of Javanese mantra ...

"Setan lan brekasakan | Amuliha mring tawang-tuwang prajamu | Iblis kang kari angarang | Kulhu balik bolak-balik."

"There are demons who not ease | Go back to your own kingdom | There are demons who like to instigate | Because of the recitation of Surah Al-Ikhlâs."

The lexical choices "*setan*," "*brekasakan*," and "*iblis*" represent a specific ritual taxonomy of malevolent beings, a feature often found in protective incantations. The imperative "*Amuliha*" ("go back") and the phrase "*tawang-tuwang prajamu*" invoke a symbolic cosmology of supernatural territories. The reference to "*Qulhu*" (Surah Al-Ikhlâs) is a formulaic religious invocation signaling reliance on divine power to neutralize negative forces (Acri et al., 2024).

The verse above shows the relationship between humans and God because the *macapat* entitled "*Tolak Balak*" talks about a human hope that the pests and demons will go away, not hurting humans. These linguistic markers such as imperatives, parallelism, and ritual metaphors support the interpretation that the *Tolak Balak* text embodies a belief that language can control supernatural powers.

Sinom

"Dhuh Gusti Pangeran Hamba | Mugi paduka miyarsi | Panyuwuning pra kawula | Ing kalenggahan puniki | Sahiyeg eka kapti | Samya nyuwun mring Hyang Agung | Murih manggya widada | Tinebihna ing bilahi | Adhuh Gusti mugi paringa wilasa"

"Oh, my God | My you be pleased | Your servant's plea | In this place | Unite together | Together asking the Almighty God | Hopefully get the safety | Kept away from disasters | Oh, God give us your love"

The *Sinom* text displays the invocative formula "*Dhuh Gusti*", which directly addresses God, a hallmark of ritual prayer. The repeated optative particle "*mugi*" ("may/hopefully") is a formulaic supplication marker indicating humility and dependence. The phrases "*panyuwuning pra kawula*" and "*samya nyuwun*" show collective subjectivity, reinforcing communal ritual identity. The archaic lexicon such as "*wilasa*" adds a sacred register distinct from daily speech. These features justify interpreting the language as symbolic communication that constructs a relationship of supplication between humans and God.

Pangkur

"Mangga sami sesarengan hanyenyuwun | Konjuk Ngarsaning Pangeran | Rahayua kang pinanggih."

"Please ask together | Asking the God | The safety that we have gotten."

The repetition of "*sami sesarengan*" emphasizes communal unity, functioning as ritual collectivization, a typical linguistic marker of ceremonial language. The verb "*konjuk*" (to present or submit reverently) is an archaic term associated with court and ritual registers. This reinforces the sacred tone and situates the utterance within a spiritual hierarchy between humans and God.

The language as a symbolic enactment of belief system means that *macapat* here is used as a belief system and contains a relationship between humans and God. Language in *macapat* is not only a means of communication but can also reinforce beliefs, provide spiritual effects and add to the sacredness of the *macapat* itself. Imperatives expel danger, invocations summon divine presence, archaic vocabulary elevates the register, and patterned repetition strengthens performative effect. Through these linguistic markers, the *macapat* embodies a belief that ritual language can safeguard the community, mediate the human-divine relationship, and maintain cosmic balance.

Language as a reflection of soulful resonance

Language as a reflection of soulful resonance means that in the context of *macapat*, language is not only a tool of communication but also a reflection of human inner feelings, emotion, and soul expression (Tur et al., 2025). Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling (Alan & Adon, 2024). This proves that the artwork, in this case *macapat*, is a symbolic form that expresses the structure of human emotions and represents the inner motion and harmony of the soul. In the *macapat* recited at the *Mubeng Beteng Topo Bisu* traditional ceremony, the part that reflects soulful resonance is found in Dhandhanggula.

"Moji sukur ing Ngarsaning Gusti"
"Be Grateful to Allah"

The semantic field centers on gratitude and submission to divine authority. The lexical choice *moji sukur* indexes humility and reverence, while its performative force lies in enacting gratitude rather than merely describing it. Through rhythmic chanting, the utterance becomes a ritual act that reaffirms the participant's emotional acknowledgment of God's greatness. The sentence's simplicity and parallel phrasing contribute to a solemn, meditative tone.

"Wedi asih pandulune"
"The center is love"

Here, the semantic field shifts to affection and compassion as foundational principles of life. The metaphor of *asih* (love) as the "center" constructs life as orbiting around spiritual care and emotional harmony. In performance, chanting these words functions pragmatically as a collective affirmation of emotional unity, reinforcing the ceremony's contemplative purpose. The concise parallel structure gives the line rhythmic balance, intensifying its poetic resonance.

"Sarwa sarira ayu | Ingideran ing widodari | Rinekseng malaekat | Sakathaning rosul"
"Always our body is healthy and beautiful | Like an angel | Witnessed by the angels | and rosuls"

This verse belongs to a semantic field of purity, beauty, and divine protection. Through metaphorical comparison with angels (*widodari*) and the presence of *malaekat* and *rosul*, the language expresses an aspirational desire for body and spiritual harmony. The pragmatic

function is not merely descriptive; chanting these lines invokes protection and spiritual elevation, functioning performatively as a request for divine safeguarding. Stylistically, the parallelism across successive phrases reinforces a climbing spiritual progression—from human body, to angelic presence, to prophetic witness.

“Ati Adama | utekku Bagindha Esis | Pangucapanku ya Musa | Napasku Nabi Isa linuwih | Nabi Yakub pamiyarsaningwang | Yusuf ing rupaku reke | Nabi Dawud swaraku | njeng Suleman kesekten mami | Ibrahim kang anyawa | Idris ing rambutku | Sayid Ali kulitingwang | Abu Bakar getih daging | Umar singgih | Balung Bagindha Usman | Sungsumku Fatimah kang linuwih | Aminah kang bebayuning angga | Ayub minangka ususe”

“My heart is like Adam | My brain is like Syis | My speech is like Moses | My breath is Isa | My sight is Jacob | My face is Joseph | My voice is David | My power is Solomon | My life is Ibrahim | My hair is Idris | My skin is Sayid Ali | My blood is Abu Bakr | My bones is Usman | My marrow is Fatimah | My body is Aminah | My intestines is Ayub”

This sequence forms a rich semantic field of embodiment, holiness, and spiritual identification. Through repeated metaphors aligning each part of the human body with prophetic or sacred figure the speaker constructs a symbolic union with purity and divine perfection. This is not merely expressive; it carries a performative force, as chanting these identifications functions as an act of self-sanctification, ritually aligning the participant with divine models. The extensive use of parallelism (“my heart... my brain... my speech...”) and rhythmic enumeration creates a liturgical cadence that reinforces the spiritual intensity of the chant.

Language as a reflection of soulful resonance means that the *macapat* above does more than convey meaning, it embodies deep emotional and spiritual vibrations. Across the verses, the semantic fields of gratitude, affection, purity, and embodiment reveal how inner emotions and spiritual aspirations are structured linguistically. Meanwhile, the pragmatic force of chanting transforms these expressions into performative acts of devotion, reflection, and self-purification. The stylistic devices inherent in *macapat* especially parallelism, rhythm, metaphor, and enumerative structure serve to amplify the expressive power of the text, reinforcing *macapat* as a medium through which participants articulate inner harmony and establish a spiritual connection with God during the *Mubeng Beteng Topo Bisu* ceremony.

Language as Identity of Governance in Yogyakarta

The Special Region of Yogyakarta is the only province in Indonesia that does not conduct elections for Governor and Deputy Governor. In determining the Governor and Deputy Governor, Yogyakarta uses a system of hereditary Sultan who served at that time. The term of office of the Governor and Deputy is 5 years and extended for a lifetime. This provision has been formalized through Law no.13 of 2012. *Macapat* as one of the communication media is used to spread this as a form of respect for Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X and Kangjeng Dipati Pakualaman who currently serves as Governor and Deputy Governor of Yogyakarta. In the *macapat* that is recited during the traditional ceremony of the 1st night of Suro, there is a

section specifically designed to discuss the Yogyakarta government system, which includes the head of the region, the specialty law, and the specialty fund with the title “*Moji Sukur Jogjakarta Tetap Istimewa* (Dhandhanggula).

“*Moji sukur ing Ngarsaning Gusti | Dene tansah lestari Dwi Tunggal | Kang ngasta peprentahane | Ngarsa Dalem Sinuwun | Sampyan Dalem Kangjeng Dipati | Kekalihnya pranyata | Ngasta bawatipun | Gubernur lan Wakilira | Ingkang samya ngasta puseraning adil | Datan perlu pilihan*”

“Be grateful to Allah | Because always harmonious, two become one | who leads the government | Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono | Pakualaman | both are real | become a figure | Governor and Deputy | who both bring fair government | does not require election”

The honorifics *Ngarsa Dalem Sinuwun* and *Sampyan Dalem Kangjeng Dipati* are linguistically marked features that index hierarchy. *Ngarsa Dalem* literally means “*the revered presence in front*”, embedding spatial deixis (*ngarsa* “front”) to signal superior status. *Sinuwun* is a high-level Javanese honorific used exclusively for royalty, morphologically derived from *suwun* (“to request respectfully”), with the circumfix *si...-nun* elevating the referent to a sacred status. *Sampyan Dalem* employs the pronominal honorific *dalem*, signaling utmost respect through bodily metaphors associated with royal presence. *Kangjeng* is a morphological intensifier indicating veneration (*kang + jeng*) that has no parallel in everyday Javanese honorifics.

Linguistically, these forms encode a hierarchical power relation, where the Sultan is positioned as both a political leader and a sacred cultural figure. This use of hyper-honorific morphology underscores how *macapat* legitimizes authority not through overt political discourse but through ritualized linguistic elevation.

The verse also expresses gratitude for the harmonious leadership of the “Dwi Tunggal,” reinforcing Yogyakarta's unique cultural-political identity. However, the linguistic identity emerges specifically through the choice of honorific lexicon and the ritualized register of Javanese used to construct authority.

“*Telu siji Agustus kawuri (31-8-2012) | Undhang-undhang Keistimewaan wus kasil katetepake | Ngayogyakarta tuhu | Istimewa araning nigari | Kangjeng sinuwun Sultan Kang ngasta Gubernur | Paku Alam wakilira | Sami ngasta peprentahan otonomi | Rahayu kang pinanggya*”
“August 31st yesterday | the specialty law has been enacted | Yogyakarta is good | a special country | Sri Sultan who leads the government | Paku Alam who is deputy | both served in the government's autonomy | hopefully always safe”

The verse employs juridical vocabulary such as *undhang-undhang* (law), *katetepake* (has been established) which carries formal authority. However, these terms are embedded within the poetic *macapat* register, blending administrative terminology with symbolic reverence.

Linguistically, this fusion creates a hybrid discourse that is culturally grounded (through *macapat* structure and Javanese honorifics) and politically informative (through explicit reference to the Special Status Law). This demonstrates the distinction required by reviewers on cultural-political identity is expressed through the mention of the hereditary system and

Special Status Law and linguistic identity is expressed through honorific morphology, Javanese royal deixis, and poetic form, not merely by mentioning political content.

The verse closing petition, "*Rahayu kang pinanggya*," adds a performative blessing, positioning the *macapat* not merely as narrative but as a linguistic act of safeguarding authority.

"Redana istimewa sayekti | Tumrap warga ing Ngayogyakarta | Kinarya karaharjane | Mring kawula sadarum | Kutha ndesa temekeng ardi | Kamulyaning kawula | Murih gesangipun | Angleluri kabudayan | Pra kawula jinangkung dening Hyang Widi | Aamiin tutuping donga"
"The real speciality fund | used by Yogyakarta citizens | to become prosperous | for all citizens | whether in the cities, villages, or mountains | all the citizens get glory | for a living | preserving culture | all people are protected by God Almighty | Aamiin as a closing prayer"

Here, hierarchical encoding shifts from royal honorifics to communal referents such as *kawula* ("subjects," "citizens") and spatial deixis (*kutha*, *ndesa*, *ardi* – city, village, mountains). In Javanese political language, *kawula* contrasts with *gusti* (lord), implicitly framing the Sultan–people relationship within a lord–subject schema that remains culturally resonant. By placing the allocation of privilege funds within this linguistic frame, the *macapat* subtly legitimizes the Sultan's role as caretaker of welfare and culture, reinforcing symbolic authority through benevolent governance. The closing prayer "*Aamiin tutuping donga*" demonstrates the performative nature of *macapat*, the chant itself acts to sanctify political structures by embedding them in ritualized speech.

In this section, we highlight the autonomy of Yogyakarta's government, which aims to make everyone know about Yogyakarta's Privileges. These privileges include the no regional elections to elected Governor and Deputy Governor, the existence of a Specialty Law, and a Specialty Fund which is Yogyakarta's identity and does not exist in other provinces in Indonesia. Clarifying the Distinction Between Cultural–Political and Linguistic Identity. Cultural–political identity of Yogyakarta arises from the hereditary governance system, the Specialty Law, and the recognition of the Sultan as both cultural and administrative leader. Linguistic identity is encoded in the *macapat* through royal honorific morphology (*Ngarsa Dalem*, *Sinuwun*, *Kangjeng*, *Sampyan Dalem*), ritual deixis (spatial positioning and reverential reference), semantic elevation (symbolic metaphors of harmony, unity, divine blessing), and performative structure (prayers and blessings as speech acts).

In addition, language here is not only a means of communication, but also a tool to legitimize power (Sofyan, 2014). Ningtyas (2015) also mentions that "language is closely related to symbolic power." In Yogyakarta, the highest position is a Sultan and his Deputy who serves as Governor, so *macapat* is used as a medium to honor and the power of Sultan and his deputy as a political and cultural center that symbolizes harmony and justice, in this case it means the Sultan as the highest authority in Yogyakarta.

IV. CONCLUSION

The conclusion in this analysis is that the tradition of the 1 Suro night traditional ceremony, in this case *Mubeng Beteng Topo Bisu* is not an event organized by order of the Sultan, but on the initiative of Abdi Dalem. This reinforces the function of ritual as microphysics of power, where authority does not operate coercively but circulates through voluntary communal action. Mantra chanted at the traditional ceremony of the 1st suro night, in this context is *macapat*, is not only as a prayer for physical and spiritual protection but also as a linguistic mechanism that shapes ritual participation.

From the perspective of linguistic theory, this study contributes to understanding how ritual language enacts and distributes symbolic authority. First, *macapat* reveals language as a symbolic belief system, where supernatural forces are organized, controlled, and invoked through formulaic ritual expressions. Second, it demonstrates language as soulful resonance, where lexical choices and poetic structures encode gratitude, affection, desire, and spiritual orientation, thereby reflecting the speaker's inner states while shaping shared emotional frameworks. Third, *macapat* serves as a medium of political identity, articulating the cultural-political structure of Yogyakarta, its hereditary governorship, specialty law, and privilege funds, while simultaneously functioning as a linguistic tool for legitimizing leadership.

Future research can address these gaps by examining prosody and intonation to understand how vocal delivery strengthens ritual authority, applying multimodal analysis to explore gesture, movement, and spatial orientation during chanting, and conducting comparative studies of ritual discourse across regions or ritual types to identify broader typologies of Javanese ritual language. Such approaches would deepen our understanding of how linguistic form, performance, and culture collectively construct meaning within ritual contexts.

DECLARATION

Author contribution: All authors made substantial contributions to the conceptualization of the study, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, manuscript drafting, and approval of the final version of the manuscript.

Funding statement: No funding got from any institution for this research publication.

Conflict of interest: No conflict of interest.

Additional information: No additional information is available for this paper.

REFERENCES

- Acri, A., Meyer, V. H., & Aminullah, Z. P. (2024) Antinomianism as a way to God in nineteenth-century Java: the Suluk Lonhang between Islamic and pre-Islamic religious discourse. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 34(4), 629-653. <https://www.doi.org/10.1017/S1356186323000652>

Prasetya, S. A., Tur, A. P. A., Ntamwana, S., & Alexandrovna, I.
Language as cultural expression: An anthropolinguistics study of Javanese mantra ...

- Adlin, A. (2016). Michel Foucault: Kuasa/pengetahuan, (rezim) kebenaran, parrhesia. *Jaqfi: Jurnal Aqidah Dan Filsafat Islam* 1(1), 13–26.
<https://journal.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/jaqfi/article/view/1694>
- Alan M. A., & Adon, M. J. (2024). Ritual dan simbolisme sebagai media komunikasi dengan dunia gaib dalam budaya Toraja. *Tongkonan: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat*, 3(2), 102–111.
<https://doi.org/10.47178/gf8tw440>
- Alexandrovna, I. I. (2026). The lexico-semantic field of “light” in “Life of St. Sergius of Radonezh”: A linguocultural analysis in religious discourse. *Journal of Religion and Linguistics*, 3(1), 1–10.
<https://www.doi.org/10.31763/jorel.v3i1.24>
- Binnie, C. R. (2015). Language as Symbolic Action: Burkean Analysis of Césaire’s Cahier d’un retour au pays natal. *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, 23(1), 59–78.
<https://doi.org/10.5195/jffp.2015.681>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd Ed.). SAGE.
- Damayanti, F. N. V., Adji, F. T., & Taum, Y. Y. (2024). Makna dan fungsi mantra dalam upacara adat nyadran Desa Pundungsari, Semin, Gunung Kidul: Kajian tradisi lisan. *Sintesis*, 18(1), 1–14.
<https://doi.org/10.24071/sin.v18i1.6079>
- Haidar, Z. (2018). *Macapat tembang Jawa indah dan kaya makna*. Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa.
- Humaeni, A., Purwanti, E., Awaliyah, A., & Romi. (2021). *Sesajen: Menelusuri makna dan akar tradisi sesajen masyarakat muslim Banten dan masyarakat Hindu Bali*. LP2M UIN SMH Banten.
- Indarwati, I., Wahyuni Sakka, Hasan, H., & Reski Reski. (2025). Analisis nilai religius dan sosial dalam upacara Ngaben di Bali. *DEIKTIS: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 5(2), 629–635.
<https://dmi-journals.org/deiktis/article/view/1470>
- Iriyanto, E. (2020). Tembang macapat: Kritik sosial sedulur sikep terhadap ekspansi industri semen di pegunungan Kendeng. *Sutasoma: Jurnal Sastra Jawa*, 8(2), 70–79.
<https://doi.org/10.15294/sutasoma.v8i2.43185>
- Klykken, F. H. (2025). *Informed consent in qualitative research: Lessons on relationality from a technologically dense classroom: Reframing Qualitative Research Ethics*. Helen Busby.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/S2398-601820250000012004>
- Malik, M., Rusmawanti, R., & Andriyani, H. (2025). Mantra kematian dalam tradisi akur Sunda wiwitan: Tinjauan semiotik C.S. Peirce di Kampung Pasir. *SAWERIGADING*, 31(2), 429–440.
<https://doi.org/10.26499/sawer.v31i2.1616>
- Masso, A., Gerassimenko, J., Kasapoglu, T., & Beilmann, M. (2025). Research ethics committees as knowledge gatekeepers: The impact of emerging technologies on social science research. *Journal of Responsible Technology*, 21: 100112.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrt.2025.100112>

Prasetya, S. A., Tur, A. P. A., Ntamwana, S., & Alexandrovna, I.
Language as cultural expression: An anthropolinguistics study of Javanese mantra ...

- Mehta, P., Zimba, O., Gasparyan, A. Y., Seiil, B., & Yessirkepov, M. (2023). Ethics committees: Structure, roles, and issues. *J Korean Med Sci.* 38(25): e198. <https://www.doi.org/10.3346/jkms.2023.38.e198>
- Mohammad, R. (2024). Intertwining worlds: The dynamics of linguistic religion and religious language. *Journal of Religion, Education, and Linguistics*, 1(2), 49-66. <https://doi.org/10.31763/jorel.v1i2.6>
- Mustofa, A. (2024). Budaya dan tradisi keraton Yogyakarta dalam *Itinéraire d'un Voyage à Java en 1896. KLAUSA (Kajian Linguistik, Pembelajaran Bahasa, Dan Sastra)*, 8(1), 106-114. <https://doi.org/10.33479/klausau.v8i1.969>
- Ningtyas, E. (2015). Pierre Bourdieu, language and symbolic power. *Poetika*, 3(2), 154-157. <https://doi.org/10.22146/poetika.v3i2.10437>
- Ntamwana, S. (2022). Perception of Islamic cultural policy in Burundi. *International Journal of Humanity Studies*, 5(2), 246-259. <https://doi.org/10.24071/ijhs.v5i2.4522>
- Ntamwana, S., & Adi, I. R. (2023). Translational construction of American capitalist identity through religious texts: Case of "Don't Forget the Sabbath" and "Ingat Hari Sabat." *Rubikon: Journal of Transnational American Studies*, 10(2), 263-283. <https://journal.ugm.ac.id/rubikon/article/view/90520/37795>
- Nurazizah, E., Tur, A.P.A., Evans, M.A., & Jones, D.I. (2024). Depicting the politeness strategy of Tower of God's author. *JoREL: Journal of Religion and Linguistics*, 1(1), 22-29. <https://doi.org/10.31763/jorelv1i1.3>
- Pamungkas, O. Y., Hastangka, H., Raharjo, S. B., Sudigdo, A., & Agung, I. (2023). The spirit of Islam in Javanese mantra: Syncretism and education. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 79(1), a8407. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8407>
- Pandanwangi, A., Himatul Alya, S., Budiman, I., Mochtar Apin, A., & Eka Darmayanti, T. (2023). Art illuminations in 18th – 19th centuries manuscripts from Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace as a creative industry development. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 10(2), 2277070. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2277070>
- Purnamasari, D., & Ribawati, E. (2025). Sekaten Yogyakarta: Tradisi warisan kerajaan yang tetap hidup di tengah modernitas. *Triwikrama: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial*, 9(6), 51-60. <https://doi.org/10.9963/nx9z4b84>
- Robbayani, H. B. (2022). Local wisdom upacara Ngaben di Bali dan keterkaitannya dengan nilai-nilai bimbingan dan konseling. *Borobudur Counseling Review*, 2(2), 65-70. <https://doi.org/10.31603/bcr.7217>
- Sabrina, A. & Tur, A.P.A. (2025). Politeness maxim representations in Javanese culture: Revitalization strategy to reduce verbal sexual violence. *Journal of Religion and Linguistics* 2(1), 15-29. <https://doi.org/10.31763/jorel.v2i1.13>
- Santosa, I., & Noorwatha, I. K. D. (2025). Symbolic and aesthetic fusion in Keraton Surakarta: colonial influence and Javanese cultural resistance through architectural design adaptation. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 12(1), 2482456. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2482456>

Prasetya, S. A., Tur, A. P. A., Ntamwana, S., & Alexandrovna, I.
Language as cultural expression: An anthropolinguistics study of Javanese mantra ...

- Setyarini, L., Boka, C. M., Rumiati, R., & Wibowo, D. A. (2026). Union with God in Psalm 63:8 and Manunggaling Kawula Gusti: A contextual study in Javanese culture, Indonesia. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 82(1), a11017. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v82i1.11017>
- Sofyan, N. (2014). Bahasa sebagai simbolisasi mempertahankan kekuasaan. *INTERAKSI: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 3(1), 75-84. <https://doi.org/10.14710/interaksi.3.1.75-84>
- Suryadi, M., & Maghfiroh, A. (2025). Symbolization of microcosm and macrocosm relationship in Kirab Gunung hasil bumi in Jepara regency: Ethnography of communication study. *NOTION: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Culture*, 7(1), 122-143 <https://doi.org/10.12928/notion.v7i1.12314>
- Tur, A.P.A. & Sabrina, A. (2024). Identifying Javanese cultural norms and addressing politeness maxims in mitigating verbal sexual violence. *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, 9(1), 82-96. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30659/e.9.1.82-96/>
- Tur, A.P.A., Daulay, R., & Farida, H. (2025). Negotiating identity: The social transformation of traditional nicknames in the Mandailing community of Riau. *International Journal of Society, Culture, & Language*, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ijsc.2025.2048867.3844>
- Tur, A.P.A., Munandar, A., & Winarti, D. (2023c). Petangan Jawa: Installing traditional values in names. *NOTION: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Culture*, 5(1), 58-68. <https://doi.org/10.12928/notion.v5i1.6891>
- Utami, A., Mulyana, A., & Itaristanti. (2016). Peran tradisi Seren taun dalam upaya meningkatkan pewarisan nilai-nilai sosial dan budaya di kalangan remaja Kelurahan Cigugur, Kecamatan Cigugur, Kabupaten Kuningan. *EDUEKSOS*, 5(1), 99-113. <https://doi.org/10.24235/edueksos.v5i1.992>
- Wibowo, A.A., Puspita, I., Nugroho, A.S., Nashir, R.M., Probosiwi, & Tur, A.P.A. (2024). Visual comparison of Rama's and Rahwana's characters in Javanese and Kelantanese wayang kulit. *NOTION: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Culture*, 6(1), 93-111. <https://doi.org/10.12928/notion.v6i1.10201>
- Zustiyantoro, D. (2024). Recommendations without action: criticism of the Javanese Language Congress and the Javanese Cultural Congress in Indonesia. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 11(1), 2313843. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2313843>