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UNDERSTANDING JAVANESE HARSH EXPRESSIONS AS REFLECTIONS OF CULTURAL NORMS, EMOTIONS, AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

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Abstract
Although extensive research on Javanese has focused on politeness, speech levels, and also the preservation of social harmony, studies addressing its harsh words and expressions remain limited. This gap fails to address how Javanese accommodate the expression of conflict, frustration, mockery, as well as other forms of emotional intensity that challenge the idealized image of politeness. The main objective of this study was to investigate the lexicons that constitute harsh words or expressions in Javanese, with particular attention to their sources and the cultural analogies that shape their harsh meanings. Data were generated through the introspective method and literature review and analyzed using Conceptual Metaphor and Dysphemism Theory. The analysis revealed that Javanese harsh words or expressions are grouped into three categories: physical activities, physical states, and body parts or organs, with their usage reflecting two opposite poles: negative, when employed to express conflict, frustration, criticism, or mockery; and neutral, when used playfully among close friends. The findings indicate that the harshness of Javanese expressions is not embedded in the lexical items themselves, but instead arises from the situational and socio-cultural contexts, along with the meanings they convey.

Keywords: conceptual metaphors, dysphemism, harsh words or expressions, Javanese language, social relations

Introduction
Javanese is more than just a language. It is a reflection of cultural values, social hierarchies, and deeply rooted traditions that have been passed down from one generation to another. Spoken in most parts of Java and by millions of people across Indonesia, the language plays a pivotal role in shaping how people relate to each other, particularly through an elaborate system of speech levels that signal respect, familiarity, and social rank. This linguistic complexity has long attracted academic interest, particularly concerning politeness and the maintenance of social harmony (see, for example, Jauhari, 2024; Jauhari & Purnanto, 2022; Nurjaleka et al., 2022); Nursanti et al., 2024; Rahmawanto & Rahyono, 2019; Sudarwati et al., 2024); Sukarno, 2015, 2018). However, like any living language, Javanese also

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conveys less harmonious emotions, whether through anger, contempt, sarcasm, or conflict. Despite this, such expressions have received far less attention in today's academic discourse.

This lack of scholarly focus and the impression of avoidance of this issue have led to an incomplete understanding of the Javanese linguistic landscape (LL), which not only upholds social harmony but also accommodates the expression of strong emotions and interpersonal tensions. On several occasions, humans are faced with unsatisfactory or upsetting conditions. In Javanese, these realities find their voice through the existence of harsh words or expressions that challenge idealized notions of politeness and restraint, often associated with the language.

Javanese features an extensive repertoire of harsh expressions employed to articulate critique, mockery, or discontent. These forms frequently appear in daily conversation, where speakers not only navigate positive attitudes in polite words or speech but also show resistance in the form of disagreement, frustration, and social boundaries. Despite their prevalence, such expressions are often perceived as vulgar or emotional outbursts rather than being analyzed as meaningful cultural tools.

However, it cannot be denied that Javanese is a very complex language. The intricacies of its speech levels, particularly in distinguishing between casual or *ngoko* language and harsh words or expressions, frequently pose challenges for non-native speakers and younger generations. Unlike harsh expressions, which are commonly driven by negative emotions or arise as spontaneous reactions triggered by the particular situation, the use of *ngoko,* though informal, does not inherently imply rudeness. Instead, it is a neutral register of the Javanese speech level system, which is often used to signal familiarity, solidarity, or informality among peers or within close social relationships (Nursanti et al., 2024). The examples can be seen in excerpts (1) through (4) as follows:

(1) *"Gimin awan-awan ngéné isih* ***turu****."*
Gimin. 3SG noon like this still **sleeping [NS.]**
"It is already noon, and Gimin is still sleeping like this."

(2) *"Gimin awan-awan ngéné isih* ***micêk****."*
Gimin. 3SG noon like this still **pretend to be blind [HW.]**
"It is already noon, and Gimin is still dozing off."

(3) *"Wah* ***mangan*** *apa kowé?"*
Oh, **eat [NS.]** what you. 2SG
"Oh, what do you eat?"

(4) *"Wah,* ***nguntal*** *apa kowé?"*
Oh. **swallow [HW.]** what you. 2SG
"Oh, what are you gulping down?"

As seen in excerpts (1) and (3), Javanese lexemes *turu* 'to sleep' and *mangan* 'to eat' are classified within the *ngoko* speech level, which denotes informality and familiarity in Javanese sociolinguistic practice. This register is typically used in informal settings, particularly with people of similar age, close familiarity, or lower hierarchical position, including peers, siblings, or children. Its usage reflects the speaker's perception of an egalitarian or intimate relation, where strict adherence to hierarchical norms is not required.

In contrast, in excerpts (2) and (4), lexemes *micêk* 'pretending to be blind' and *nguntal* 'to gulp/to swallow' fall into the category of indecent language. Based

on the context, the speaker likened sleep to 'blindness' and also eating to the activity of an animal devouring its prey. In Javanese norms, equating human behavior with physical deficiency or animal traits is considered deeply disrespectful.

Harsh words encompass abusive and severe language that can emotionally harm others. Such words are commonly construed or perceived as being unpleasant, cruel, unkind, or severe (Hornby, 2018). Even so, contrary to common assumptions in Western and other linguistic traditions, harsh words should not be conflated with terms: swear words, profanities, taboo words, vulgarisms, indecent language, or other forms of obscene language. Swear words in Javanese typically appear in non-nuclear clauses, are often structured in the imperative mood, and are pragmatically employed to convey curses or intense emotional states. On the other hand, Javanese swear words or expressions are often found in non-nuclear clauses, where they may serve descriptive or expressive functions without necessarily conveying aggression, and are not employed as expletives. The excerpts below present these comparisons.

(5) *"**Mata**mu, iki dudu duwèk -mu!"*
Eyes you. 2SG [SW.] this. DEM does not have -you. 2SG.
"Your damn eyes! This [stuff] is not even yours!"

(6) *"**Gundhul**, iki pancèn nganyêlaké!"*
Shaved head [SW.] this. DEM really annoying
"Damn bald head! This is really annoying!"

(7) *"**Gundhul**é sapa kaé ngaling-alingi?"*
Shave head [HW.] who that. DEM block
"Whose head was blocking the view?"

(8) *"Yahéné **mata**n-é isih kétok, pa?"*
Time like this **eyes -you. POSS [HW.]** still can be seen what
"It is already dark. Can your eyes still see (the ball)?"

In excerpts (5) and (6), the lexemes *matamu* 'your eyes' and *gundhul* 'shaved head' are used as swear words as they serve as emotionally charged expressions that are similar to expletives: 'your damn eyes' and 'damn bald head'. In this way, their meanings shift from literal to emotional, like other swear words that are used to release tension or show strong feelings. Meanwhile, in excerpts (7) and (8), the same lexemes appear more neutrally and also descriptively. The lexeme *gundhulé* simply refers to someone's shaved head, while *matané* points to someone's eyes. Therefore, these forms fall into the category of harsh words.

If this issue is not explored further, the line between what is merely informal and what is actually offensive may become even more unclear, especially in inter-generational and intercultural settings. Younger speakers may unintentionally adopt harsh forms under the assumption that they are 'merely informal', thus eroding the sensitivity to context, hierarchy, and politeness that are foundational to Javanese sociolinguistics. Furthermore, there is a risk that these subtle differences in meaning and tone may slowly fade away in the absence of clear documentation and analysis. Over time, this can contribute to the normalization of abusive language in public and family discourse that can weaken the ethical and relational order that underpins Javanese society.

Existing literature on swearing and offensive language in other linguistic and cultural contexts, including Polish (Zarzycki, 2024), Spanish (Ávila-Cabrera, 2023; Gómez, 2023; Molero et al., 2023), Arabic (Abdelsamie et al., 2024; Aljuhani et

al., 2022; Husain & Uzuner, 2022; Mubarak et al., 2023), and English (Love, 2021; McEnery et al., 2023), has shown that they often reveal cultural ideologies about morality, power, and emotion. Tran (2024) proposed that swearing has transitioned from a transient phenomenon to a normalized element of daily discourse in English-speaking communities. In social interactions, swearing can fulfil various functions, such as fostering social bonds, reinforcing group identity, and also strengthening a sense of solidarity (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008; Locher & Graham, 2010). Ljung (2010) posits that an utterance can be classified as swearing only if it satisfies four specific criteria: (1) it must involve the use of expressions containing taboo words; (2) these taboo words should be employed in a non-literal sense; (3) a large portion of swearing follows strict patterns in word choice, phrasing, and sentence structure, indicating that it often functions as set, formula-like expressions rather than entirely spontaneous speech; and (4) swearing is a highly emotional form of language that is used to convey, or at least give the impression of, the speaker's feelings as well as attitudes. Nonetheless, unlike in many other languages, where swearing is widely acknowledged for its cathartic role or its ability to challenge social taboos, research on swearing in Javanese has been limited in scope and depth. Meanwhile, studies on Javanese harsh words have mainly remained underexplored.

The absence of scholarly attention may result in the oversight of these words or expressions as essential instruments for conveying socio-cultural meaning and emotional expression in everyday Javanese interactions. This study aims to fill the gap by examining the lexicons involved in the formation of Javanese harsh words or expressions, focusing on their sources and cultural analogies through which harsh meanings are conveyed. Thus, this study not only contributes to the documentation of Javanese harsh lexicons but also highlights how language mirrors the deeper social dynamics and the shifting cultural norms of contemporary Javanese society.

The nature of harsh expressions

The theory of harsh words or expressions can essentially be traced back to the theory of dysphemism. Allan and Burridge (1991) defined dysphemism as an expression with connotations that are offensive either about the denotatum or to the audience, or both, and it is substituted for a more neutral or euphemistic expression for just that reason. Such expressions are typically employed to describe opponents, to voice disapproval, or to deliberately downgrade something or someone (Allan & Burridge, 1991).

Dysphemism, originating from the Greek *dys* or *dus* (meaning bad, abnormal, or difficult), carries the sense of something ‘bad’ or ‘rough’ (Hermandra et al., 2024). Moreover, Glück (1993) stated that dysphemism refers to utterances that are ominous, obscene, or blasphemous. Such expressions are often biased, hurtful, and offensive, as they articulate taboo concepts through profane or vulgar language. This implies that dysphemism is closely tied to an aggressive effect since it shows negative judgments and gives rise to negative nuances through the use of language.

Nevertheless, Javanese is a relatively complex language, with intricate speech levels and cultural norms that regulate interaction. Javanese people tend to prioritize *rasa* ‘emotion’ followed by *kurmat* ‘respect’, *tépa sêlira* ‘tolerance’, *andhap asor* ‘humility’, and *êmpan papan* ‘self-awareness’ as their basic principles (Widiana et al., 2020, p. 39) to maintain social relationships in communication. Therefore, all kinds of things that could potentially trigger conflict are avoided.

ln the context of Javanese, harsh words or expressions function in the same way as dysphemism: they often substitute more neutral terms. However, there is no specific term used to refer to these words or expressions. Moreover, the forms and functions of these words still require further examination, as their use is very context-dependent. As highlighted by Widlitzki and Huber (2016), so-called 'bad language' can take many forms, which makes it often difficult to categorize.

Methods

Data and data source

This study employed a descriptive-qualitative design, which aims to describe a phenomenon in detail by using qualitative methods (Creswell, 2020; Lim, 2024; Litoselliti, 2010). The data in this study consisted of words or expressions that were harsh in nature. These were identified by their tendency in order to convey negative emotions, violate established norms of Javanese politeness, and provoke discomfort (manifested as a form of face-threatening act or FTA). The whole data was collected through the introspective (first-person) method (Spener, 2023; Xue & Van Kooten, 2023), whereby the researchers, as native speakers of Javanese who have lived in Yogyakarta for more than 40 and 29 years, utilized personal linguistic competence and intuition in order to identify and classify the expressions. A central aspect of this method is the 'researcher's involvement as the subject'. This indicates that the primary method of data collection relies on the researcher's internal self-observation of the experience being studied (Xue & Van Kooten, 2023, p. 109). To complement the primary data, additional examples were drawn from some sources, such as (1) *Kawruh Basa Jawa Pêpak* by Daryanto (1999); (2) *Pêpak Basa Jawa Lêngkap* by Nuraini (2012); and (3) *Buku Pintér Pêpak Basa Jawa* by Susanto and Trisnowati (2019). By combining the researchers' knowledge with examples from these books, this study was able to capture both the way harsh words are used in everyday speech and the way they are documented in formal language resources.

Data collection

The data collection process involved: (1) identifying and listing harsh words encountered in daily conversations, (2) collecting additional harsh words from the aforementioned reference books, and also (3) integrating them into the examples of utterances to illustrate their use in context. This step was essential to show not only the lexical form of each expression but also the situational and pragmatic nuances that accompany its use. By placing the Javanese harsh words in naturally occurring or reconstructed dialogues, the researchers were able to highlight the tone, intention, and interpersonal dynamics that shape their meaning. Furthermore, to enhance the understanding of non-Javanese speakers, the data were presented with orthographic transcriptions and grammatical markers, followed by a word-for-word translation into English and a meaning-based translation. Each word was indicated using a set of markers and abbreviations, including 1SG. for the first-person singular, 2SG. for the second-person singular, 3SG. for the third-person singular, [NS.} for *ngoko*-style, [SW.] for swear word, [HW.] for harsh word, POSS. for possessive, DEM. for demonstrative, PASS. for passive, IMP. for imperative, and PART. for particle. All of the annotations were applied manually by the researchers to ensure accuracy and consistency. In the cleaning stage, irrelevant, duplicated, or unclear entries were removed to avoid redundancy.

Data analysis

To answer the research questions, the entire dataset was grouped based on the semantical fields, sources, and the types of culturally embedded analogies used to convey harsh meanings. This categorization enables the systematic analysis of how different lexical items function in expressing harshness in Javanese. Furthermore, to facilitate the analysis and also the reader's comprehension, each section of the findings was supported by a table that clearly outlines the classifications.

The entire analysis was presented and elaborated in a descriptive qualitative form with contextual examples to illustrate how each category operates in Javanese sociolinguistic practices. Grounded in cognitive semantics, this study employed Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) framework of conceptual metaphor theory and Allan and Burridge's (1991) dysphemism theory in order to investigate how metaphorical mappings from the source domain to the target domain influence the sociolinguistic function of harsh expressions. For data that are literal or non-metaphorical, theories related to denotation and connotation, and also pragmatic approaches (Cruse, 2006), were employed to analyze the direct, literal meanings and social functions of the expressions within their context. Last, peer debriefing was used as a final strategy to minimize errors, subjectivity, and bias by involving fellow researchers to review the data, verify the accuracy of classifications, and provide critical feedback on the interpretation. This step was done in order to ensure that the analysis was consistent, credible, and aligned with the research objectives (Janesick, 2015; Litosseliti, 2010).

Findings and Discussion

Findings

This section presents a detailed classification and analysis of Javanese harsh words based on their semantic fields, sources or domains, and culturally embedded analogies through which the expressions articulate harsh meanings. Each category is illustrated with clear examples, along with explanations that reveal how word choice, social setting, and practical use come together in shaping the role of these harsh words in Javanese communication.

Harsh words referring to physical activities

The findings show that in Javanese, many words are used to describe physical actions or behaviors in a harsh or derogatory way, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Classification of Javanese harsh words referring to physical activities

No.	Physical Activity/State	Javanese Harsh Term(s)
1.	Eating	*nguntal, nyêkèk, mbladhog, mbadhog, nggaglak, njêlak*
2.	Drinking	*ngglogok, ngokop, nyocop*
3.	Speaking	*ngêcuprus, nrucus, ngocéh, nggambléh, ngablak, njêplak*
4.	Laughing	*cêngéngésan, nyéngéngés, cêngangas-cêngêngés, préngas-préngés, cériwis, cérigis*
5.	Moving/Walking out (implied)	*minggat, nggéblas*
6.	Defecating	*ngêndhog, ngising*

Table 1 outlines the categorization of Javanese harsh words, which are manifested in physical activities. These include expressions that depict various bodily actions that carry strong social meanings in daily communication. The contexts in which natives use these words can be observed in the utterances presented in the following excerpts.

(9) *Wah, Joni kuwi agèk* ***nguntal*** *apa?"*
Wow, Joni. 3SG that. DEM. currently **swallow [HW.]** what?
"Wow, what is Joni gulping down?"

(10) *"Wis wayahé* ***nyêkèk*** *saiki."*
Already time **eat [HW.]** now
"It is time to eat greedily now."

(11) *"Dhéwéké kêrêp* ***mbladhog/mbadhog*** *iwak kali."*
He. 3SG often **eats [HW.]** fish river
"He often devours river fish."

(12) *"Kabèh-kabèh kok arêp* ***digaglak."***
All why will PASS. **eat [HW.]**
"Why does everyone want to gulp them down?"

(13) *"Wah panganané wis* ***dijêlak*** *kabèh."*
Wow, food already PASS. e**at [HW.]** all
"Wow, all the food has already been gobbled up."

As shown in excerpts (9) to (13), eating in an excessive way can be realized in various harsh words. These include *nguntal* 'to swallow' or 'to gulp down food rudely', *nyêkèk* 'to eat' in the dialect of Banyumas, *mbladhog* or *mbadhog* 'to eat greedily', *nggaglak* 'to eat like a tiger', and *njêlak* 'to eat with one's mouth wide open'. Each of these harsh words not only describes the physical act of eating but also carries a negative evaluative meaning, such as bad manners, greed, or a lack of self-control. All of these are classified as harsh words since the Javanese language has various phrases to refer to 'eating', such as the term *mangan,* which is used for very familiar people, young people, or relatives; *nêdha* for less familiar people or strangers; and *dahar* for older or respected people.

In dining contexts, the term *tadhah*, which literally means "container" or "receptacle," or also understood as "saucer", sometimes carries a harsh connotation in Javanese. It is often used figuratively to comment on the quantity of food a person consumes, as illustrated in excerpt (14).

(14) *"Wah bocah kuwi* ***tadhah*** **-**é *okèh."*
Wow, kid. 3SG that. DEM. **container [HW.]** -his. POSS much
"Wow, that kid eats a lot."

In Javanese, drinking is linked to at least three harsh words, such as *glogok* 'to drink noisily', *nyocop* 'to drink by immediately putting one's protruding mouth to the drink or container', and *ngokop* 'to drink with the mouth directly covering the rim'. To see the difference in their use, consider the following excerpts.

(15) *"Dêlokên kuwi Paryo lé* ***ngglogok*** *dêgan."*
Look. IMP. that. DEM. Paryo. 3SG. the way **drink [HW.]** young coconut
"Look at the way Paryo gulps down the coconut water!"

(16) *"Duduh. -é* ***dikokop*** *waé,"*
Broth -that. DEM. PASS. **drink [HW.]** just
"Just drunk the soup straight from the bowl."

(17) *"Apik . -é* ***dicocop*** *waé saka sithik."*
Better. -that. DEM. PASS. **drink [HW.]** just by little
"Just sipped it little by little."

In excerpts (15) to (17), the three verbs are not neutral synonyms for "drinking" but encode social perceptions about manner, speed, and appropriateness of drinking as it deviates from proper table manners, where glasses, cups, mugs, tumblers, and other utensils are typically used. Normally, Javanese speakers would use the action verbs *ngombé* 'to drink' or *diombé* 'to be drunk'.

Politeness in Javanese shapes not only how people eat, drink, and sleep but also how they interact with others. Confrontations are usually handled subtly and indirectly to maintain harmony. Javanese people tend to speak slowly and carefully, as individuals are expected to speak with moderation, being truthful, measured, and careful, thereby avoiding excessive or inappropriate talk. As a result, certain harsh words are used to point out when someone talks too much or improperly, such as *ngêcuprus* 'talking a lot and non-stop', *nrucus* 'talking quickly and excessively', *ngocéh* 'talking continuously like bird chirping', *nggambléh* 'saying too much but without truth', *ngablak* 'talking too much but lacking substance', and *njêplak* 'talking bluntly or sharply, often without considering others' feelings', as presented in the following excerpts.

(18) *"Dhéwéké kok* ***ngêcuprus*** *têrus."*
She. 3SG. why **talk [HW.]** continuously
"She just keeps talking non-stop."

(19) *"Két mau* ***nrucus*** *têrus ora lèrèn-lèrèn."*
From just now **talk [HW.]** continues not stopped
"He has been talking all the time without rest."

(20) *"Mbuh apa sêbabé dhéwéké* ***ngocèh*** *têrus."*
Do not know what reason she. 3SG. **talk [HW.]** continuously
"I do not know the reason why she keeps talking non-stop."

(21) *"Nèk mung* ***nggamblèh*** *sapa waé isa."*
If just **talk [HW.]** everyone can
"If you are just talking nonsense, everyone can also do it."

(22) *"Èsuk-Èsuk wis* ***ngablak,*** *kurang gawéan."*
Early morning already **talks [HW.]** less work
"It is still early in the morning, but he was already talking as if he has nothing to do."

(23) *"Kowé aja waton* ***njêplak****!"*
You 2SG. do not just **open mouth [HW.]**
"Do not just blurt things out carelessly!"

In excerpts (18) to (23), various Javanese harsh verbs related to speaking convey negative attitudes toward excessive or inappropriate talking, as they carry strong social judgments that reflect cultural expectations about how communication should be conducted. For example, *ngêcuprus* and *nrucus* highlight continuous and uncontrolled talking that is often perceived as annoying. The uncertainty expressed in excerpt (20), about why someone talks non-stop or by '*ngocèh',* highlights social disapproval. The act of *nggamblèh,* which criticizes speeches that lack meaningful content, implies that talking nonsense is something anyone can do and is thus not

valued. Meanwhile, *ngablak* and *njêplak* show the neglect of responsibility to speak based on the facts.

Besides, laughing cynically or inappropriately is generally frowned upon. As a result, there are specific harsh terms used to criticize individuals who display such behavior, including *cêngéngésan* 'excessive laughing', *nyéngéngés* 'laughing with a cynical tone', *cêngangas-cêngéngés* 'frequent laughter', and *préngas-préngés* 'laughing repeatedly during speech', as illustrated in excerpts (24) to (27).

(24) *"Aja* ***cêngèngèsan,*** *gatèkké!"*
Do not. IMP. **laughing [HW.]** pay attention
"Do not laugh too much. Pay your attention, please!"

(25) *"Dikandhani malah* ***nyêngèngès."***
To be advised but **just laughing [HW.]**
"I give you my advice, but you just giggle."

(26) *"Ngapa kowé* ***cêngangas-cêngèngès*** *nèng pojokan?"*
Why you 2SG. **repeatedly laughing [HW.]** at corner
"Why are you giggling at the corner?"

(27) *"****Préngas-prèngès*** *kowé, ana apa?"*
Laughing repeatedly [HW.] you 2SG. be what
"You are just laughing, what is going on?"

In excerpt (24), someone is advised to tone down his laughter, suggesting that excessive laughing can sometimes be perceived as disrespectful or distracting. Similar ideas come through in excerpts (25), (26), and (27). In each excerpt, the speaker drew attention to the laughter that felt out of place, whether it was cynical, silent/furtive, or continuous. In this context, people are encouraged to be thoughtful about how their actions affect those around them by ensuring that things remain balanced.

Aside from laughter-related expressions, there are also harsh terms that call out certain speaking habits. These words are often used to criticize people/persons who dominate conversations or talk too much, which in Javanese culture were seen as impolite or exhausting for others. This is shown in the following excerpt.

(28) *"Wah,* ***cêriwis/cêrigis*** *bangêt wong kuwi!"*
Wow, **talkative/fussy [HW.]** very person that. DEM.
"Wow, that person is so talkative!"

In excerpt (28), the speaker comments on someone's tendency to talk too much, using harsh words such as *cêriwis* or *cêrigis.* In Javanese, this can be seen as a social cue signaling the speaker's disapproval of someone's speaking habits.

Asking permission to go somewhere is a key element of Javanese politeness, as it reflects consideration and respect for others. When someone leaves without telling anyone or asking permission, the harsh terms *minggat* and *nggéblas,* which mean "to run away" or "to escape", are often used to criticize the act, as shown in the following excerpts.

(29) *"Sing ngontrak omah-ku* ***minggat,*** *urung mbayar."*
That rent house-my 1SG.POSS. **run away [HW.]** not pay
"The one who rents my house ran away without paying."

(30) ***"Minggat*** *kowé saka kéné!"*
Get out [HW.] you 2SG. from here
"Get out of here!"

(31) *"Bar disênèni dhéwék-é* ***nggêblas****, sêpréné urung bali."*
After be scolded he 3SG. **go [HW.]** until now not yet return
"After being scolded, he stormed off and has not come back until now."

In excerpts (29) to (31), the harsh words *minggat* and *nggéblas* are used to describe leaving disrespectfully. When the word *minggat* conveys the idea of running away or abandoning responsibility, *nggéblas* shows a sudden and emotional exit, usually triggered by anger or offense.

Last, defecating, as the action of expelling feces from the digestive tract, is considered a disgusting act. As a result, this language has developed harsh terms to refer to it, as demonstrated in excerpts (32) to (34).

(32) *"Wah, nèk* ***ngêndhog*** *mbok aja nèng kana.*
Oh if **lay egg [HW.]** should not. in there
"Oh, if you are going to defecate, please do not do it there."

(33) *"Dhéwéké* lagi ***ngising*** *nèng kali."*
He 3SG. was **defecate [HW.]** in river
"He was defecating in the river."

(34) *"Kucing-é lagi* ***ngising*** *nèng pasir."*
Cat DEM. was **defecate [HW.]** on sand
"The cat was defecating in the sand."

In excerpts (32) to (34), the harsh words *ngêndhog* and *ngising* are used to describe the act of defecating rudely and disrespectfully. While *ngêndhog* is metaphorical and used to insult or criticize someone's actions, *ngising* is a direct and harsh term for the actions themselves, as the term is typically used for animals.

Harsh words referring to physical states

Harsh words referring to physical states in Javanese often describe bodily conditions or actions in a blunt and undignified manner. These expressions tend to lose their politeness and directly emphasize unpleasant or undesirable conditions. They are commonly used to convey irritation, contempt, or strong disapproval, and can be directed at both humans and animals, depending on the context.

Table 2. Classification of Javanese harsh words referring to physical states

No.	Physical State	Javanese Term(s)
1.	Being asleep	*micêk, mbathang, ngalong, ngênthung, mbangkong, ngêbo, nglikêr, ngglimpung, molor*
2.	Being messy	*susuh*
3.	Being dead	*ngurêk*

In Table 2., Javanese harsh words which refer to physical conditions reflect how language can frame bodily conditions in blunt, humorous, or even derogatory ways. Instead of using neutral or polite terms, they commonly employ metaphors, exaggerations or imagery that show the undesirable or socially degrading aspects of the condition. The contexts of their use are as follows.

(35) *"Néng kéné gawéané mung* ***micêk."***
In here. DEM. work POSS. just **pretend to be blind [HW.]**
"Here, his only job is sleeping."

(36) *"Sapa sing* ***mbathang*** *néng kamar-ku?"*
Who that **sleeping [HW.]** in room my. POSS.
"Who is sleeping in my room?"

(37) *"Bajigur, yahén -é isih* ***ngalong."***
Damn [SW.] time -like this still **sleep [HW.}**
"Damn, it turns out he is still sleeping like a bat."

(38) *"Ngopo sih, gawéan-é kok mung* ***ngènthung****?"*
Why PART. work -he. POSS why just **sleep [HW.]**
"Why is it that your only work is just sleeping like a cocoon?"

(39) *"Aja* ***mbangkong*** *waé!*
Do not. IMP. **sleep [HW.]** too much!
"Do not just sleep all day!"

(40) *"Bisa- bisané jam sêméné kok isih* ***ngêbo."***
How come hour like this PART. still **sleep [HW.]**
"How come you are still sleeping at this hour?"

(41) *"Gusti, bocah kon nyambut gawé malah* ***nglikêr****."*
Oh my God, kid. 3SG. told work even **sleep [HW.]**
"Oh Lord, the kid was told to work but is lying around instead."

(42) *"Siti jam sêméné kok wis* ***ngglimpung."***
Siti 3SG. hour like this PART. already **sleep [HW.]**
"How come Siti is already sprawled out like that at this hour?"

(43) *"Nèk mung arêp* ***molor*** *ra usah réné!"*
If just want **sleeping [HW.]** no need come here
"If you are just going to sleep, do not bother coming here!"

In excerpts (35) to (43), various Javanese terms with derogatory nuances are used to depict undesirable sleeping habits. They include *micêk* 'pretending to be blind' (35), *mbathang* 'sleeping like a corpse' (36), *ngalong* 'sleeping like a bat' (37), *ngênthung* 'sleeping like a cocoon' (38), *mbangkong* 'sleeping like a big frog' (39), *ngêbo* 'sleeping like a buffalo' (40), *nglikêr* 'sleeping like a snake' (41), as well as *ngglimpung* 'sleeping at a 45-degree angle' (42). On the other hand, *molor* 'sleeping like a log' (43) is adopted from the Indonesian language. In this case, Javanese speakers often compare someone's sleeping posture to that of animals or inanimate objects.

A particular expression may also target the state of the addressee's sleeping environment. For example, *susuh* 'nest' can be used to mockingly comment on a messy or untidy bed, as shown in excerpt (44) below.

(44) *"Ayo,* ***susuh*** *-é diringkêsi dhisik lagi lunga."*
Come on **nest [HW.]** -you. POSS PASS. tidy up first then go.
"Come on, tidy up your nest first before leaving."

In excerpt (44), *susuh* is used metaphorically to denote a messy bed or sleeping area. By using imagery associated with animal nests, the speaker humorously or pointedly highlights clutter, which subtly implies laziness or a lack of care for one's personal space.

The figurative expression sometimes shifts from commenting on posture or environment to alluding to the intended person's stage of life or impending death. Such statements often use metaphorical imagery to convey sharp social criticism. The following excerpt (45) exemplify this

(45) *"Wis arêp* ***ngurêk*** *kok néka-néka."*
Already will **dig a hole [HW.]** why behave strangely
"He is already about to dig a hole, yet still acting up."

In excerpt (45), the word *ngurêk,* which means "to dig a hole", is used as cultural imagery. The speaker likened the interlocutor to a worm burrowing into the ground, which is associated with decay, burial, and the end of life.

Harsh words referring to body parts and organs

Various body parts and organs are associated with specific Javanese harsh terms. They usually refer to physical characteristics or bodily functions to highlight undesirable traits or behaviors.

Table 3. Classification of Javanese harsh words referring to body parts and organs

No.	Body Part/Organ	Javanese Harsh Term(s)
1.	Head	*ndhas, gundul, cumplung*
2.	Face	*dhapur, kêris*
3.	Mouth/Lips	*cangkêm, cocot, cobrot, cungur, congor, conthong*
4.	Feet/Foot/Leg	*cèkèr, cokor, suthang*
5.	Brain	*utêk*
6.	Eyes	*mata*

Table 3. groups the expressions by their associated body parts: the head, face, mouth and lips, and foot; and organs, including brain and eyes. The contexts of their use in communication are as follows.

(46) *"Wah,* ***ndhas*** *-mu aja nêtêki."*
Hey, **head [HW.]** -you 2SG.POSS do/does not block
"Hey, do not let your head block my view!"

(47) *"****Gundhul*** *-mu kok apêk tho?"*
Shaved head [HW.] -you 2SG. POSS why musty PART.?
"Why is your head musty?"

(48) *"Kaé* ***cumplung*** *-é si Pégo kétok?"*
That **skull [HW.]** -he 3SG. POSS Pego. 3SG. visible
"Look at Pégo's head, can you see it?"

The concept of "head" is expressed through various terms. In excerpt (46), the word *ndhas* is used literally to refer to the head itself. In excerpt (47), *gundhul* specifically refers to a shaved or bald head. Meanwhile, in excerpt (48), *cumplung* is used by equalizing the head with the coconut or coconut shell.

(49) *"Saka ngêndi kowé,* ***rupa****n -é kok kaya ngono?"*
From where you 2SG. **face [HW.]** -you 2SG.POSS why like that
"Where are you from? Why does your face look like that?"

(50) *"Ngaca dhisik,* ***dhapur*** *-mu koyok apa?"*
Reflect first **face [HW.]** -you 2SG. POSS like what
"Look at yourself first, what does your face look like?"

(51) *"Dêlokên* ***kêris*** *-mu!"*
Look. IMP. **face [HW.]** -you 2SG. POSS.
"Look at your face!"

In everyday conversation, Javanese speakers typically use *rai* to refer to the face. However, in emotionally charged contexts, at least three other terms, such as *rupa* 'face or appearance', *dhapur,* and *kêris* 'a traditional Javanese wavy double-edged dagger' are often employed.

(52) *"Aja kakèhan **cangkêm/cocot**, coba tandangi dhéwé!"*
Do not IMP. too much **mouth [HW.]** please do IMP. yourself . 2SG.
"Do not babble nonsense; try to handle it yourself!"

(53) *"Wah **cobrot** -é ora mênêng-mênêng."*
Oh, **mouth [HW.]** -he. 3SG. POSS not getting silent
"Oh, his mouth never stops talking."

(54) *"Tak tabok **cungur/congor** -mu nèk ora gêlêm mingkêm."*
Will slap **mouth [HW.]** -you 2SG. POSS. if not want silent
"I will slap your mouth if you do not shut up!"

(55) *"Aja pêrcaya karo **conthong** -é wong kuwi!"*
Do not IMP.believe with **mouth [HW.]** -he. 3SG. POSS. person that
"Do not trust that person's mouth!"

In excerpts (52) to (55), *lambe* is a neutral word in Javanese for "mouth," but there are several harsh synonyms like *cangkêm, cocot, congor, cungur,* and *cobrot.* In the case of excerpt (54), c*ongor* and *cungur* are harsh as they liken a person's mouth to the snouts of animals such as cows, buffaloes, sheep, or pigs; while *conthong* stems from the resemblance between the shape of a cone and the opening of a mouth.

(56) *"**Mata** thok gêdhé-gêdhé, néng ora wêruh apa-apa."*
Eyes [HW.] just big but not know anything
"His eyes may be big, but he does not see anything."

(57) *"Kok ora nduwé **utêk,** wong tuwa dilawan."*
Why not have **brain [HW.]** person old PASS. to be opposed
"Why don't you have a brain? You even go against your elders?"

(58) *"Biyèn sêkolah mung **cèkèran/cokoran."***
In the past school only **with a claw [HW.]**
"Back then, we went to school barefoot."

(59) *"**Suthang** -mu aku ora isa léwat."*
Foot [HW.] -you 2SG. POSS. I 1SG. not can pass
"Your foot, please! I cannot pass through."

In excerpts (56) to (59), harsh words or expressions are constructed through references to body parts, including eyes, brain, claws, and feet, which serve as concrete source domains to describe perceived flaws, ignorance, or maybe social impropriety. In excerpt (56), the use of the exaggerated physical description "*mata thok gêdhé-gêdhé*", as a metaphor for ignorance or lack of awareness, suggests that physical capacity does not guarantee understanding. In excerpt (57), the brain as a cognitive metaphor for intelligence functions as a direct insult to the listener's reasoning ability, which is further compounded by the accusation of disrespecting elders. In excerpt (58), the term *cèkèran/cokoran* is employed as a dysphemistic metaphor comparing bare feet to animal claws. Meanwhile, in excerpt (59), *suthang* is used as an imperative-like exclamation to demand the listener to move.

Discussion

The findings show that the formation of Javanese harsh words can be done literally or metaphorically. When expressed literally, Javanese harsh words or expressions refer directly to a concrete object, human body part, or action without figurative meaning. They come from the direct mention of socially sensitive, taboo, or impolite terms. These terms can sound rude and disrespectful since they violate

Javanese politeness norms by stating things bluntly rather than subtly, such as terms *ndhas* 'head', *gundhul* 'shaved head', *cangkêm* 'mouth', *cocot* 'mouth', *cobrot* 'mouth', *rupa* 'face', *dhapur* 'face', *suthang* 'foot', *utêk* 'brain', and *mata* 'eyes', which all refer to human body parts and organs. In this sense, the denotative meaning of these words simply points to the body parts or organs, but their connotative meaning carries derogatory, mocking, or impolite associations within Javanese society. The harshness of these words arises not from the literal reference but from the social and cultural connotations attached to the words when used in interaction.

In contrast, when expressed metaphorically, harsh words or expressions in Javanese rely on figurative associations that extend beyond their literal meanings. Instead of directly naming body parts, actions, or objects, these expressions map certain physical traits or behaviors onto negative human traits. In this way, physical activities, physical states, as well as human body parts can be reinterpreted to mock, laugh at, or criticize someone indirectly, for example, through equating humans with animal characteristics or anatomies, or by using other objects. In this case, the meaning of each harsh word is 'intended' and can only be understood by focusing on the concept concerning the socio-cultural aspects of its formation, as metaphor is fundamentally conceptual, not linguistic in nature (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Harsh words or expressions in Javanese usually emerge from metaphorical mappings that draw parallels between the source domain and the target domain. This mapping reflects a culturally embedded tendency to characterize undesirable traits or behaviors through obvious, and often derogatory, comparisons. Because metaphors operate as underlying mental frameworks that unconsciously influence everyday language (Danesi, 2004), they can be manifested in a variety of human-life-related references, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Source domains, target domains, and general meanings in Javanese harsh expressions

No.	Source Domain(s)	Target Domain(s)	General Meaning in Harsh Expressions
1.	Animal anatomy (*cungur/congor* 'snout', *cèkèr/cokor* 'claw')	Human anatomy (mouth, feet)	Impolite speech, unattractive appearance
2.	Animal behavior (*nguntal* 'to gulp/ swallow like a bird', *nggaglak* 'to eat like a tiger', *ngêndhog* 'laying eggs', *ngising* 'to defecate', *ngalong* 'sleeping like a bat', *ngênthung* 'sleeping like a cocoon', *mbangkong* 'sleeping like a big frog', *ngêbo* 'sleeping like a buffalo', n*glikêr* 'sleeping like a snake', *ngocéh* 'talking continuously like bird chirping')	Human actions (eating greedily, defecating, sleeping postures, talking)	Rudeness, greed, laziness, inertia, or improper behavior
3.	Animal habitat (*susuh* 'nest')	Human environment (messy bed)	Disorderliness or uncleanliness

No.	Source Domain(s)	Target Domain(s)	General Meaning in Harsh Expressions
4.	Body parts (*cumplung* 'skull' or 'coconut shell', *kêris* 'a traditional Javanese wavy double-edged dagger', *conthong* 'cone', *tadhah* 'container')	Social attacks or insults (human face, mouth, or stomach)	Verbal aggression
5.	Physical conditions (*micêk* 'pretending to be blind', *ngglimpung* 'sleeping at a 45-degree angle', *molor* 'sleeping like a log')	Human actions (sleeping)	Laziness, negligence, or lack of awareness/self-discipline
6.	Movements/sudden physical actions (*minggat* 'running away or abandoning responsibility', *nggéblas* 'sudden and emotional exit, usually triggered by anger or offense')	Human social behavior (leaving rudely, rejecting norms, and escaping responsibility)	Rudeness, irresponsibility, or breaking social bonds
7.	Natural phenomena (n*gêcuprus* 'talking a lot and non-stop', *nrucus* 'talking quickly and excessively', *nggambléh* 'saying too much but without truth', *ngablak* 'talking too much but lacking substance', n*jêplak* 'talking bluntly or sharply, often without considering others' feelings', *cêngéngésan* 'excessive laughing', *nyéngéngés* 'laughing with a cynical tone', *cêngangas-cêngéngés'* frequent laughter', *préngas-préngés'* 'laughing repeatedly during speech', *glogok* 'to drink noisily', *nyocop* 'to drink by immediately putting one's protruding mouth to the drink or container', *ngokop* 'to drink with the mouth directly covering the rim', *nyêkèk* 'to eat', *mbladhog/mbadhog* 'to eat greedily')	Human communication speaking, laughing), emotional expression, eating and drinking behavior (flowing water)	Excessive talking, gossiping, laughing, eating, or drinking
8.	States of death (*mbathang* 'sleeping like a corpse', *ngurêk* 'to dig a hole like a worm')	Human conditions (sleeping or toward death)	Laziness, end of life, or severe insult

As demonstrated in Table 4., the metaphorical formation of Javanese harsh words or expressions aligns closely with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980 Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), where abstract social judgments and emotional attitudes (target domains) are understood through more concrete as well as tangible concepts drawn from the physical, natural, or animal world (source domains). This mapping process highlights how Javanese speakers employ embodied experiences in order to construct figurative harsh expressions that go beyond literal description. In this

sense, metaphors function not only as linguistic devices but also as cultural weapons that encode social values, reflect attitudes towards impoliteness, as well as reinforce societal norms through verbal aggression manifested in the use of source domains that are exclusively recognized within the Javanese community. This process is often manifested through acts of "dehumanization", where individuals are reduced to animalistic traits, bodily functions, or other degrading associations that devalue their social dignity and emphasize their inferiority in an interaction (Haslam, 2022; Kteily & Landry, 2022; Vaes et al., 2021). Consequently, the interpretation of these metaphors requires not only linguistic competence but also an understanding of the socio-cultural frameworks in which they operate. Furthermore, the findings also correspond with Allan and Burridge's (1991) dysphemism theory, which shows that dysphemistic expressions often originate from animal comparisons, references to taboo body parts or sexual acts, pointing out physical or mental weaknesses, or by attacking personal characters.

Socio-cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping the forms and functions of Javanese harsh words and expressions. These factors determine not only when and where such expressions are acceptable, but also how their meanings shift across contexts. The categorization is illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5. Situational and socio-cultural factors influencing the use of Javanese harsh words or expressions

No.	Situational Context/ Socio-Cultural Factor	Description/Setting	Function of Harsh Expressions
1.	Conflict or dispute	Occurs in quarrels, arguments, or confrontations to express anger or dominance.	Insulting the opponent to lower their social standing.
2.	Joking among close friends	Used playfully among peers in informal settings, with mutual understanding that no offense is intended.	Teasing to strengthen friendship.
3.	Expressing frustration or disappointment	Directed at oneself, others, or situations as an emotional release.	Complaining about someone's incompetence.
4.	Social criticism	Employed to point out flaws or ridicule social behavior.	Mocking irresponsible behavior.
5.	Intergenerational gap	Younger speakers may use harsh words more freely, sometimes ignoring traditional politeness norms.	Challenging authority or showing resistance to elders' advice.
6.	Socio-economic tension	Words used to highlight class differences or social inequality.	Derogatory terms for perceived laziness or ignorance.
7.	Mockery	Applied to belittle others through exaggerated comparisons or metaphors.	Ridiculing someone's physical appearance, habits, or manner of speaking.

As illustrated in Table 5, harsh words or expressions in Javanese are not always associated with negative situations or destructive consequences. Even though they often appear in the context of conflict, frustration, or socio-economic tension, where they can be used to insult, mock, criticize, or stigmatize others, they are also used in more neutral or even constructive ways. For example, among close friends, harsh words or expressions can serve as playful teasing that reinforces familiarity and solidarity. As stated by Dawes and Andrews (2025), there was substantial overlap in the features of harmful and playful teasing. While playful teasing tended to occur among friends, harmful teasing was usually directed at personal traits or physical appearance. The experience of positive emotions and also relationship benefits were only associated with playful teasing, whereas harmful teasing often leads to broken relationships (Dawes & Andrews, 2025). Therefore, harsh words and expressions in Javanese can be categorized as a form of 'casual peer-group language' when they are used neutrally.

When directed at social criticism, Javanese harsh words or expressions can be an instrument for voicing disapproval of irresponsible or deviant behavior by fostering collective awareness. This is quite different from the usual Javanese way of speaking, which tends to be indirect and full of care to avoid direct confrontation (Nadar, 2007; Nursanti et al., 2024; Ramlah & Sartini, 2023). By choosing harsh words or expressions, speakers intentionally step outside this norm, which makes their message obvious. In this way, what might sound impolite becomes a powerful way to call attention to social problems.

In intergenerational or class-based interactions, the use of harsh words or expressions reflects the underlying process of cultural negotiation rather than mere hostility. Javanese harsh words are frequently used by younger speakers either to challenge authority, resist elders' advice, or simply due to limited knowledge of speech levels. They can also be spoken by older people, particularly if there are no language restrictions imposed on the younger generation, or by those with relatively low socio-economic backgrounds due to harsh living conditions and limited access to formal education. When the speaker is inferior to the listener, s/he he will tend to avoid using harsh words. On the contrary, when the speaker is dominant, s/he will express themselves more liberally because the lines that define proper speech become obscured. This further indicates that the use of Javanese harsh words is not merely a matter of individual choice. Moreover, this dynamic nature highlights that such expressions do not have a fixed function, but adapt to different contexts, which allows them to oscillate between aggression, humor, criticism, and social bonding.

Conclusion

This study details various forms of Javanese harsh words across three primary domains: physical activities, physical states or conditions, and body parts or organs; and investigates their usage by classifying them into two opposing poles: negative (arising from conflict or dispute, expressing frustration or disappointment, engaging in social criticism, highlighting intergenerational gaps, addressing socio-economic tensions, and employing mockery) and neutral (as in joking among close friends). The contribution of this distribution lies in its ability to demonstrate that such words or expressions are not monolithic, but are continuously constructed through social interactions.

Despite their similarity to dysphemistic expressions, their meanings, intensity, connotations, and social functions often shift depending on the context of situations, the relationship between speakers, and the broader cultural setting. The boundaries between what is negative and what is neutral are often blurred, as what is perceived as harmless in one social context may be interpreted as harsh or harmful in another. This demonstrates that the harshness of linguistic forms may not reside in the words themselves, but in the social and cultural meanings they evoke.

Nevertheless, this study is limited in scope as it focuses primarily on lexical and semantic categorization without examining in depth the pragmatic dimensions of interaction. Future research is needed to address these pragmatic aspects and to explore a wider range of communicative contexts to achieve a more comprehensive understanding. This study also points out that these words or expressions are very easy to find in everyday conversation. Therefore, basic knowledge of the Javanese language, particularly its speech levels and contextual use, should be taught from an early age to prevent miscommunications and conflicts that result from language usage errors.

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