

Ecological Wisdom in Oral Literature: An Ecolinguistics Analysis of Jambi Folktales

Putri Ayu Lestari¹, Lucy Khawardi², Retno Utari³, Azrida⁴

UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi^{1,4}, Universitas Sains Cut Nyak Dhien^{2,3}

putriayulestari@uinjambi.ac.id, lucykhawardi88@gmail.com, retnoutari660@gmail.com, azridabr@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the ecological wisdom embedded within local oral literature by analyzing traditional Jambi folktales. In the modern era, dominant cultural narratives often promote environmental exploitation and human exceptionalism, necessitating a search for alternative, eco-centric discourses. Utilizing Arran Stibbe's ecolinguistics framework, this qualitative descriptive research examined selected stories from the *Kumpulan Cerita Rakyat Jambi* to uncover "the stories we live by", specifically looking at how language structures the relationship between humans and the natural environment. The data were collected through textual documentation and analyzed using critical discourse analysis, focusing on ecological erasure, salience, and framing. The results revealed that Jambi folktales convey deep ecological wisdom, portraying nature not as a mere resource, but as an interconnected living system. Elements such as the preservation of the Batanghari River and respect for local fauna were highlighted through positive framing and moral imperatives. This study concludes that traditional oral literature serves as a crucial linguistic vehicle for fostering ecological awareness and countering destructive modern environmental narratives.

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Corresponding Author:

Putri Ayu Lestari

Faculty of Adab and Humanities

UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi

Jambi, Indonesia

putriayulestari@uinjmabi.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

The global environmental crisis in the modern era is deeply rooted in how human civilization perceives and treats the natural world. According to Stibbe (2015), these ecological disruptions are fundamentally driven by destructive cultural narratives embedded within everyday language referred to as "the stories we live by" which normalize consumerism, endless economic growth, and human exceptionalism. Under this anthropocentric paradigm, nature is often reduced to a mere passive resource ready to be exploited. To counter these ecologically damaging discourses, ecolinguistics offers a framework to resist such narratives and search for alternative, eco-centric stories that foster a harmonious relationship between humans and the ecosystem (Stibbe, 2015). One

of the potential domains that preserve these beneficial, eco-centric stories is traditional oral literature, which has historically guided indigenous societies to live sustainably alongside their environment.

In the context of Indonesian oral tradition, folktales from Jambi Province serve as a rich repository of local wisdom that reflects deep environmental consciousness. Research on oral literature from an ecological perspective has been widely conducted in recent years. For instance, Herminingrum (2019) explored how traditional stories in Java instill moral and environmental values in younger generations. Similarly, Sukmawan and Jatimurti (2020) demonstrated that local myths act as informal traditional laws that prevent deforestation in rural communities. In the realm of discourse analysis, Wardoyo (2021) utilized critical discourse analysis to reveal the representation of rivers in Sumatran folklore, while Kurniawan (2022) focused on how eco-literacy is embedded in regional legends. Furthermore, Sari (2023) argued that local narratives are essential linguistic tools for modern environmental campaigns. However, despite the abundance of literature on ecocriticism and folklore, most existing studies tend to evaluate traditional texts through general thematic lenses, structuralism, or character education values, without employing a rigorous linguistic methodology to unpack the exact discourse mechanics.

A significant gap analysis reveals that specific research analyzing *Kumpulan Cerita Rakyat Jambi* (Larlen, Wilyanti, & Wulandari, 2021) through a critical ecolinguistic framework remains virtually absent. Previous scholarly works on Jambi folktales have predominantly focused on historical lineages, such as the heroism of Orang Kayo Hitam or pedagogical values for elementary schooling, thereby overlooking how the text's linguistic choices actively structure human and non-human relationships. This omission is critical, given that Jambi's unique geography is shaped by vital ecosystems like the Batanghari River and vast tropical forests, both of which are central to the region's folklore. Therefore, analyzing these narratives using Stibbe's concepts of erasure, salience, and framing is urgent to determine whether these traditional texts promote an eco-centric worldview or inadvertently conform to anthropocentric bias.

To address this gap, this study aims to investigate the ecological wisdom embedded within selected Jambi folktales from an ecolinguistic perspective. Specifically, this research examines how the natural environment, flora, and fauna are linguistically represented and framed as active, interconnected participants rather than erased entities. Ultimately, this article emphasizes how traditional oral literature can be revitalized as a powerful linguistic vehicle to resist modern destructive environmental narratives and to cultivate a renewed ecological awareness in contemporary society.

METHOD/METODE

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design with a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach, specifically utilizing the ecolinguistic framework proposed by Arran Stibbe. The research targeted the identification, classification, and evaluation of "the stories we live by", the institutionalized narratives that influence how humans treat the natural world. By implementing this linguistic approach, the study aimed to uncover the deep-seated ecological wisdom within traditional oral literature, focusing on how language structures the relationship between human and non-human participants.

Data and Data Sources

The data sources for this study were drawn from the literary corpus titled *Kumpulan Cerita Rakyat Jambi*, a compilation compiled by Larlen, Wilyanti, and Wulandari (2021) and published by Komunitas Gemulun Indonesia. The book comprises various oral narratives from Jambi Province. Out of the entire collection, three specific folktales were purposively selected as the primary data sources due to their dense representation of ecological elements: “Orang Kayo Hitam” (focusing on geographical origins and territorial sacredness), “Putri Reno Pinang Masak”, and “Asal-usul Sungai Batanghari” (focusing on riverine ecosystems). The actual data investigated consisted of linguistic units, including specific lexical choices, clauses, metaphors, and textual discourse markers that represented the natural environment, flora, fauna, and geographical landscapes.

Research Design

The operational design of this research relied on Stibbe’s (2015) ecolinguistic taxonomy, which evaluates texts to determine whether they promote destructive, ambivalent, or beneficial narratives. The analytical framework was designed around three main linguistic dimensions:

- a. Erasure: Investigating whether non-human elements (animals, trees, rivers) were marginalized or completely omitted from the discourse, or if they were given active presence.
- b. Salience: Analyzing how the text brought the natural world into prominence, making environmental aspects vivid and significant to the readers.
- c. Framing: Examining the conceptual frames used to depict nature, specifically analyzing whether the environment was framed anthropocentrically (as a mere resource for exploitation) or eco-centrally (as a living partner).

Procedure

The research was executed through four systematic, chronological stages to ensure reproducibility:

- a. Data Collection and Familiarization: The selected folktales from *Kumpulan Cerita Rakyat Jambi* were read closely and repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative arcs. Sentences and paragraphs containing environmental keywords (such as river, forest, soil, animals, and sacred landscapes) were highlighted and extracted into a structured data matrix.
- b. Data Classification: The extracted linguistic units were categorized based on Stibbe’s dimensions of erasure, salience, and framing. Lexical items that personified nature or granted agency to non-human entities were marked as indicators of salience, while structural omissions were coded under erasure.
- c. Ecolinguistic Analysis: A critical discourse analysis was applied to the classified data. The textual analysis focused on how grammatical choices (such as active vs. passive voice and participant roles) positioned nature. For instance, the analysis scrutinized whether the Batanghari River was represented as an active subject with its own intrinsic value or merely as a passive background object for human convenience.
- d. Evaluation and Reliability Check: The identified narratives were evaluated against ecological criteria to determine if they qualified as beneficial stories that support life-sustaining systems. To ensure the reliability of the qualitative coding, peer triangulation was conducted. The extracted data and their corresponding ecological classifications were cross-examined by two external researchers.

specializing in linguistics and environmental literature until a consensus on the textual interpretations was fully reached.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The ecolinguistic analysis of three selected folktales from *Kumpulan Cerita Rakyat Jambi* (Larlen, Wilyanti, & Wulandari, 2021), namely "Orang Kayo Hitam: Asal-usul Tanah Pilih Negeri Jambi," "Putri Reno Pinang Masak," and "Asal-usul Nama Sungai Batanghari" revealed rich and consistent patterns in how language structures the human relationship with the natural environment. Based on Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic taxonomy, the data were classified into three analytical categories: erasure, salience, and framing. The frequency and distribution of these features are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Ecolinguistic Features in Selected Jambi Folktales

Folktale Title	Erasure	Salience	Framing	Total
Orang Kayo Hitam: Asal-usul Tanah Pilih	2	12	9	23
Putri Reno Pinang Masak	1	8	6	15
Asal-usul Nama Sungai Batanghari	0	15	11	26
Total	3	35	26	64

The data reveal that salience dominates the corpus with 35 occurrences (54.7%), followed by framing with 26 occurrences (40.6%), while erasure is remarkably scarce at only 3 occurrences (4.7%). The total of 64 ecolinguistic instances across three texts signals a dense and deliberate ecological consciousness woven into the fabric of Jambi oral literature. The following subsections present the detailed findings for each ecolinguistic dimension, with direct textual evidence drawn from the source.

Erasure

Erasure refers to the linguistic absence or marginalization of non-human elements within a discourse, the degree to which nature, animals, and ecological entities are rendered invisible or incidental to human affairs (Stibbe, 2015). A text with low erasure continuously grants the natural world narrative presence.

Across the entire corpus, erasure was remarkably rare, recorded at only 3 instances. This low frequency is itself among the most significant findings of this study, as it demonstrates that Jambi oral literature fundamentally resists the tendency toward ecological invisibility that characterizes dominant modern discourses. The 3 instances of erasure were distributed across "Orang Kayo Hitam" (2 instances) and "Putri Reno Pinang Masak" (1 instance), and in both cases they appeared in passages focused exclusively on human social and political affairs, where the narrative's attention shifted momentarily away from the environment toward dynastic succession, political negotiation, and royal ceremony.

In "Orang Kayo Hitam: Asal-usul Tanah Pilih," for example, erasure appeared in passages describing the formal transfer of political power between Orang Kayo Pingai and Orang Kayo Hitam. The lengthy court dialogue in which each nobleman pledges their specific roles to the new king makes no reference to the rivers, forests, or landscapes that are otherwise central to the narrative. The natural environment becomes temporarily invisible as the human social hierarchy assumes center stage. Notably, this passage is immediately preceded and followed by vivid ecological description: before the ceremony,

the narrative foregrounds the Sungai Batanghari and Sungai Tembesi as the protagonist's navigational and spiritual guides; after the ceremony, the narrative returns to the ecological act of founding the new settlement based on the behavior of two ducks (*itik angsa*) in the natural landscape.

In "Putri Reno Pinang Masak," the single instance of erasure occurs in a passage that catalogs the three royal advisors (*hulubalang*) of the queen Datuk Raja Penghulu, Datuk Dengar Kitab, and Datuk Mangun and their respective administrative functions. This passage is entirely human-centered, framing governance as a set of purely social relationships without ecological grounding. However, as with "Orang Kayo Hitam," this moment of erasure is brief and surrounded by ecological content: the story opens in a kingdom whose defensive perimeter is literally made of living bamboo (*bambu berduri*), and its narrative crisis is triggered by the human decision to cut down that ecological boundary.

Crucially, "Asal-usul Nama Sungai Batanghari" recorded zero instances of erasure across its entire text. In this folktale, the natural environment particularly the great river is never absent from the discourse at any point. Every narrative event is spatially and linguistically anchored within an ecological context, confirming that this text operates entirely from an eco-centric foundation in which the human and non-human worlds are presented as inseparable.

Salience

Salience refers to the degree to which a text foregrounds elements of the natural world making nature vivid, cognitively prominent, and experientially present for the reader or listener (Stibbe, 2015). High salience invites the audience to notice, feel, and value the natural world rather than treating it as a passive backdrop to human action.

With 35 total occurrences, salience was the dominant ecolinguistic feature of the corpus. Analysis of the textual evidence identified three primary sub-dimensions of salience operating across the three folktales.

Agentive Language and Personification of Natural Elements

The most frequent and consequential salience strategy across all three texts was the use of agentive language and personification that granted non-human elements active, autonomous roles in the narrative. In "Orang Kayo Hitam: Asal-usul Tanah Pilih," the founding of the new settlement of Tanah Pilih is not initiated by human decision but by two ducks (*itik angsa*) navigating the river system. The text narrates how Temenggung Merah Mato instructs Orang Kayo Hitam: "*nanti akan mamanda hanyutkan itik angsa dua ekor untuk mencari tempat yang baik bagi kalian membuka negeri baru. Di mana saja itik itu memupur sampai tiga hari lamanya, maka ananda mundurkan itik itu, lalu tempat pupurnya itu ananda jadikan tempat pertama mengapakkan parang untuk mulai menebas membuat negeri*" (Larlen et al., 2021, p. 22–23).

In this passage, the ducks as representatives of the natural world function as the sovereign decision-makers in the founding of what would become the city of Jambi. The human protagonist is explicitly positioned as a follower of animal agency: he does not choose the location of his new settlement; the ducks choose it for him. This linguistic construction grants the natural world a form of political and geographical authority over human affairs that is among the clearest examples of eco-centric salience in the entire corpus.

Further in the same folktale, the protagonist Orang Kayo Hitam demonstrates the salience of the natural environment through the practice of weighing river water (*menimbang air*) as a method of divination. The text describes how Orang Kayo Hitam "*mengambil air Sungai Batanghari dan air sungai yang berasal dari arah Tembesi. Ditimbanganya berat kedua air tersebut, ternyata air dari arah Tembesi lebih berat. Konon itu pertanda ada orang sakti tinggal di daerah tersebut*" (Larlen et al., 2021, p. 16). Here, river water is not merely a physical substance but an information-bearing, spiritually meaningful agent: its weight communicates intelligence about the human world. The river *speaks* through its physical properties. This is a powerful act of salience the text positions the natural world as a source of knowledge and guidance superior to ordinary human perception.

In "Asal-usul Nama Sungai Batanghari," the river assumes the most dramatic form of agentive salience in the entire corpus. The folktale narrates that the people of Jambi undertook a long journey to India (*Negeri Keling*) in search of a future king who could pass a series of extreme physical trials being burned by fire, submerged in a river for three days, and crushed by an iron post. When the delegation returns with their chosen candidate and approaches the great river of Jambi, they have not yet named it. When they ask the candidate what the river is called, he immediately answers: "*Haa... Inilah yang ambal muara Kepetangan Hari*" (Larlen et al., 2021, p. 41). The river's identity its name functions as a test of the candidate's fitness for kingship. The ability to recognize and name the river is portrayed as a prerequisite for legitimate political authority. Through this narrative construction, the river is made salient as a gatekeeper of human governance: it is not merely a background geographic feature but an active participant in the selection of a king.

Vivid Sensory and Spatial Grounding in Ecological Settings

A second major salience strategy across the corpus was the dense use of specific geographical and ecological detail to ground all narrative events within a precisely realized natural environment. Rather than describing settings in abstract terms, the texts consistently anchor characters and actions within named rivers, specific bodies of water, and particular ecological formations.

In "Orang Kayo Hitam," the protagonist's journey is narrated as a sequence of river navigation: he travels up the Sungai Batanghari, then enters the tributary Sungai Tembesi, then turns into Sungai Air Hitam. Each waterway is individuated with its own name and its own ecological significance. The text notes the precise confluence of rivers (*Kuala Air Hitam*), the physical characteristics of the water (Air Hitam, "black water," whose color implies spiritual depth), and the objects found floating on its surface — a piece of *upih pinang* (areca sheath) containing a coil of long hair, which the protagonist discovers and interprets as evidence of a beautiful woman upstream. In this passage, the natural environment functions as a system of signs: the river is not a passive pathway but an active communicator, transmitting messages about human reality through its physical contents. This form of ecological salience is deeply sophisticated it positions the natural world not just as a setting but as a semiotic system parallel to human language.

In "Putri Reno Pinang Masak," the ecological dimension of salience is expressed most powerfully through the bamboo (*bambu berduri*) that the queen orders planted around the kingdom as a defensive perimeter: "*Sang Ratu memerintahkan agar negeri diberi parit dan ditanam bambu berduri di sekeliling negeri sebagai pagar*" (Larlen et al., 2021, p. 28). The living plant material not stone walls or wooden fortifications

constitutes the kingdom's primary defense. The bamboo is not merely an instrumental resource but a living partner in the community's survival. Crucially, the kingdom's downfall is precipitated not by military defeat but by the cutting of the bamboo: "*Putri Reno Pinang Masak memutuskan untuk mengambil uang ringgit logam tersebut dengan cara menebang pagar bambu yang telah dijadikan benteng pertahanan*" (Larlen et al., 2021, p. 29). The destruction of the ecological boundary directly causes the collapse of the human political community, making the bamboo one of the most narratively consequential non-human agents in the entire corpus.

Moral and Spiritual Salience of Ecological Transformation

A third and particularly distinctive form of salience in the corpus is what may be termed *cosmological salience* the construction of natural elements as the physical manifestations of spiritual and moral realities. In "Orang Kayo Hitam: Asal-usul Tanah Pilih," the disappeared characters of Temenggung Merah Mato and his wife are ultimately identified as having transformed into a *bedil besi* (iron cannon) and a *gong besar* (large gong) objects that the protagonist had already discovered and named Si Jimat and Si Timang. The text records the explanation given by Temenggung Temuntan: "*Jika memang demikian kisahnya, maka bedil besi itu ialah kakanda Temenggung Merah Mato dan gong besar itu ialah istrinya, sudah menjelma keduanya, tak usah lagi kita cari*" (Larlen et al., 2021, p. 26).

These objects subsequently become the sacred symbols (*lambang*) of the kingdom of Jambi described as "*lambang perlindungan dan cinta kasih orang tua kepada anaknya*" (Larlen et al., 2021, p. 26). Here, material objects the products of metalwork become the cosmological embodiment of human parental love. While not directly ecological in the strict sense, this transformation narrative establishes a broader worldview in which the boundary between human persons and material/natural objects is permeable and spiritually charged, a worldview that underpins all the forms of ecological salience identified across the corpus.

Framing

Framing refers to the conceptual structures through which a text constructs the relationship between humans and the natural world (Stibbe, 2015). Eco-centric framing positions the natural world as a living system with intrinsic value and relational agency, while anthropocentric framing positions nature as a resource existing primarily for human exploitation.

With 26 occurrences, framing was the second most prominent ecolinguistic feature. Analysis identified three distinct eco-centric frames operating systematically across the three folktales, with no anthropocentric framing identified in any of the texts.

Frame 1: Nature as Sovereign Guide and Decision-Maker

Across the corpus, the natural world is consistently framed not merely as context but as a directing authority whose guidance humans are obligated to follow. This frame is most completely realized in "Orang Kayo Hitam: Asal-usul Tanah Pilih," where the act of founding a new settlement historically one of the most momentous political acts a community could undertake is delegated entirely to two ducks navigating the landscape. Orang Kayo Hitam, the most powerful ruler in the region, follows the ducks patiently, interprets their behavior, and acts only upon their ecological signals. The text reinforces this frame through the instruction "*ketika itik itu sedang lapar, berikan saja makanan*

jangan dihimbau" (Larlen et al., 2021, p. 23) even the animals' hunger must be respected, not overridden.

The same frame operates through the practice of water-weighing (*menimbang air*) that Orang Kayo Hitam employs throughout his journey. In this practice, natural water is treated as an oracle: its physical weight communicates spiritual and social realities that humans cannot perceive through ordinary means. This frame positions the natural world as epistemically superior to human knowledge nature knows things that humans do not, and humans must attend to the natural world's signals in order to navigate their social reality successfully.

The same framing also appears in "Asal-usul Nama Sungai Batanghari," where the ability to name the river functions as the ultimate test of kingly fitness. The river does not merely exist as a geographic fact; it poses a question to human political authority. The king-candidate who can recognize and name the river demonstrates the quality most essential for legitimate rule: attentiveness and responsiveness to the natural world. This frame encodes an implicit political philosophy that good governance begins with ecological awareness.

Frame 2: Living Ecological Boundary as the Foundation of Political Community

In "Putri Reno Pinang Masak," the most fully developed framing construct in the corpus is the identification of the living bamboo hedge (*pagar bambu berduri*) with the sovereignty and integrity of the kingdom itself. The bamboo is not merely a defensive fortification built from natural materials; it is the living body of the community's political order. The kingdom thrives while the bamboo lives; the kingdom falls when the bamboo is cut.

This frame establishes a direct equivalence between ecological health and political stability. The queen's decision to cut the bamboo even with good intentions, to retrieve coins that had fallen through it is framed as a catastrophic act of political self-destruction. The narrative does not present this as a military failure or a tactical error but as the consequence of severing the living ecological bond that constituted the kingdom's identity. The bamboo's living presence its biological nature as a plant rather than an inert wall is precisely what makes its destruction so consequential. A stone wall could be rebuilt; a living community of plants, once cut, is a relationship broken.

This frame carries a sophisticated ecological ethics: it suggests that human communities derive their strength and legitimacy not from their ability to dominate the natural world but from their ability to maintain living relationships with it. The moment the natural world is treated as instrumental as a resource to be exploited for immediate material gain, even the small gain of retrieving lost coins the foundation of community life collapses.

Frame 3: Nature as the Origin and Legitimizing Source of Human Identity

A third eco-centric frame running through the corpus is the construction of natural features rivers, lands, and ecological events as the generative sources of human names, political identities, and cosmological meanings. This frame is most explicitly realized in "Asal-usul Nama Sungai Batanghari," where the name of Jambi's greatest river originates in a human encounter with the river at a moment of political transition. The name *Batanghari* derived from *Kepetangan Hari* (the time of approaching evening, the *petang* hour) is given by the king-candidate at the moment he first encounters the river on his return to become Jambi's ruler. The river receives its identity at the same moment that the

new king receives his political legitimacy: river-naming and king-making occur simultaneously, establishing a structural equivalence between the natural world and the human political order.

Similarly, in "Orang Kayo Hitam: Asal-usul Tanah Pilih," the name of the new settlement *Tanah Pilih* ("The Chosen Land") is explicitly derived from the ecological act of the ducks: "*Bernamalah tempat itu menjadi Tanah Pilih, sebab dipilih oleh dua ekor itik angsa*" (Larlen et al., 2021, p. 24). The land's name and by extension the identity of the Jambi capital city originates in the free behavior of two birds in the natural landscape. This frame constructs the ecological world as the ultimate author of human identity: it is nature, not human decision, that names and therefore constitutes the most significant places in the human world.

Discussion

The Eco-Centric Orientation as Linguistic Architecture

The findings of this study demonstrate that the eco-centric worldview in Jambi folktales is not merely a thematic or moral feature—it is embedded in the linguistic architecture of the texts themselves. The near-total absence of erasure (3 instances, 4.7%), the dominance of salience (35 instances, 54.7%), and the consistent eco-centric framing (26 instances, all eco-centric with zero anthropocentric instances) collectively demonstrate that these texts do not simply describe a positive relationship with nature: they construct one through the systematic choices of who acts, what is named, what is foregrounded, and what is made to matter.

This distinction is methodologically significant. Previous studies of folklore and ecological values—including Herminingrum's (2019) work on Javanese folktales—have tended to identify ecological values through thematic analysis: researchers look at what a story is "about" and note that it includes respect for nature, moral lessons about the environment, or characters who live in harmony with their surroundings. The present study demonstrates that this approach captures only the surface level of ecological meaning. At the deeper level of language—in the grammar of agency, in the distribution of salience, in the cognitive frames activated by specific lexical choices—these texts encode ecological relationships that go beyond explicit moral instruction to constitute an entire ontology: a way of being in the world in which human and non-human existence are mutually constitutive.

Stibbe (2015) argues that the "stories we live by" are effective not because they contain explicit environmental messages but because they structure perception itself—they determine what people notice, what they value, and what kinds of relationships with the natural world seem natural and obvious. The ecolinguistic profile of the three Jambi folktales analyzed here suggests that these texts are precisely such structuring stories: they do not tell their audiences to respect nature; they construct a world in which respecting nature is the only intelligible form of action. A protagonist who ignores the signals of the river, fails to follow the ducks, or cuts down the living bamboo is not merely acting immorally in these stories—he or she is acting unintelligibly, failing to navigate reality as the narrative constructs it.

Textual Evidence and Cross-Corpus Comparisons

Reading across the three texts reveals not only that all three are eco-centric, but that they express eco-centrism through different narrative strategies that complement and

reinforce one another. "Orang Kayo Hitam: Asal-usul Tanah Pilih" foregrounds the river system and animal behavior as guides to human political and geographical decision-making. "Putri Reno Pinang Masak" constructs the living plant world as the foundation of political sovereignty. "Asal-usul Nama Sungai Batanghari" establishes the naming of the natural world as the basis of human cultural identity. Together, these three texts cover the full range of human social life governance, defense, identity and in each domain they position the natural world as the prior, generative, and authoritative element.

This cross-corpus consistency is itself a significant finding. It suggests that the eco-centric orientation identified in these texts is not incidental or coincidental but reflects a coherent and systematic ecological epistemology embedded within the Jambi oral tradition as a whole. The different stories encode the same fundamental worldview through different narrative vehicles, suggesting that this worldview was widely held, deeply internalized, and sufficiently flexible to be expressed across the full range of narrative genres available to the tradition.

Comparison with Previous Research and Broader Significance

The findings of the present study extend and deepen the conclusions of previous research on the ecological dimensions of Indonesian oral literature. Sukmawan and Jatimurti (2020) demonstrated that traditional myths in rural communities function as symbolic ecological guardians, but their analysis focused on the thematic content of environmental prohibition the myths say "do not cut this tree" or "do not pollute this river." The present study reveals a more fundamental level of ecological protection: the Jambi folktales do not issue explicit ecological prohibitions but construct a cognitive world in which ecological attentiveness is the prerequisite for successful human action of any kind. The ecological protection is not in the message; it is in the grammar.

Wardoyo's (2021) finding that rivers in Sumatran folklore are constructed as living entities with intrinsic rights receives direct and detailed textual support from the present study. The Batanghari River in "Asal-usul Nama Sungai Batanghari" is not merely described as significant or sacred it is linguistically constructed as a sovereign entity whose recognition is a prerequisite for legitimate kingship. The river's name the most fundamental act of linguistic acknowledgment becomes the test of human fitness for governance. This extends Wardoyo's (2021) analysis significantly: the river is not merely a living entity in these texts, but an entity with political authority over human institutions.

The specific finding regarding the bamboo hedge in "Putri Reno Pinang Masak" reveals an ecological framing with no direct parallel in the existing literature. The identification of a living plant community with the sovereignty and integrity of a political community is a form of ecological framing that goes beyond what Stibbe (2015) terms kinship framing it is more accurately described as constitutive framing: the living bamboo does not merely represent the community or symbolize its values; it is the community in a form that, once destroyed, cannot be politically recovered. This finding suggests that the Jambi oral tradition contains forms of ecological cognition more sophisticated than those currently described in the ecolinguistics literature and warrants further theoretical development.

The comparative international perspective provided by Mhlongo and De Beer (2021) who found that personification of natural elements and kinship framing of the human-nature relationship are cross-cultural features of oral traditions in ecologically dependent communities is confirmed and extended by the present study. The Jambi texts display personification (the river as oracle, the ducks as political decision-makers, the

bamboo as sovereign body) and kinship framing (the river as the community's ancestor and namesake) in forms that are structurally similar to those identified in southern African oral traditions. This cross-cultural convergence supports the argument that these are not culturally idiosyncratic features but reflect a broadly distributed indigenous ecological epistemology that emerges wherever human communities have historically depended on intimate ecological knowledge for their survival.

The Historical and Cosmological Context

The linguistic patterns identified in the corpus are most fully intelligible when placed within their historical and cosmological context. The indigenous communities of Jambi Province were historically organized around a form of animistic cosmology in which rivers, forests, animals, and geographical features were understood as inhabited by spirits and possessed of agency (*kesaktian*) qualities of power and intentionality that human beings could relate to, negotiate with, and be guided by. This cosmology is visible throughout the corpus: the water of the Sungai Tembesi is heavier than ordinary water because of the sacred person who lives upstream; the ducks know where the best land is; the bamboo possesses a kind of living authority that metal walls cannot replicate.

Within such a cosmological framework, the ecolinguistic patterns identified in this study agentive construction of natural elements, water as oracle, animals as political guides, plants as sovereign bodies are not merely rhetorical strategies employed for narrative effect. They are accurate representations of how the world actually works as understood within the animistic worldview of the text's community of origin. The grammar of the texts is, in this sense, a grammar of reality: it describes the world as the community genuinely experiences it. This means that the ecological wisdom encoded in these texts is not a cultural overlay on top of a more fundamental human-centered reality, but the primary epistemic framework through which the community organizes all of its experience, including its political life, its navigation of the landscape, and its understanding of its own historical origins.

This observation has significant implications for contemporary environmental discourse. One of the central arguments of ecolinguistics as a field is that the environmental crisis is fundamentally a crisis of meaning that the ecologically destructive behaviors of modern industrial society are sustained by narratives and language systems that make such behaviors seem natural, rational, and inevitable (Stibbe, 2015). The Jambi folktales analyzed in this study demonstrate that it is possible for language systems to construct ecological attentiveness as the natural, rational, and inevitable orientation toward the world. They demonstrate that the grammar of human-nature relationship is not fixed or universal but culturally constructed and therefore, in principle, reconstructable.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study carry concrete implications for environmental education at multiple levels within the Indonesian educational system. At the most fundamental level, the Jambi folktales analyzed here demonstrate that the cognitive resources needed for eco-centric thinking—the capacity to perceive the natural world as agentive, meaningful, and authoritative—are already present in the local cultural tradition. Environmental educators in Jambi Province do not need to import external ecological frameworks or translate foreign environmental discourse; they can draw on a rich indigenous narrative tradition that has been encoding eco-centric cognition for generations.

This is particularly significant in light of the findings of Kurniawan (2022), who argued that eco-literacy requires not merely factual knowledge of ecological systems but a deep orientation toward the natural world as something that matters. The Jambi folktales develop precisely this orientation not through abstract argument or scientific data but through narrative engagement that operates at the level of imagination and moral identification. A student who has internalized the story of Orang Kayo Hitam following the ducks to find Tanah Pilih does not merely know that animals navigate landscapes intelligently; they have imaginatively inhabited a world in which attending to animal behavior is the most politically consequential act a ruler can perform. This imaginative inhabitation is exactly the kind of deep eco-literacy that classroom instruction in ecological facts rarely achieves.

Furthermore, the finding that ecological inattentiveness leads to political catastrophe as in the case of Putri Reno Pinang Masak's decision to cut the bamboo provides a narrative framework for understanding the relationship between ecological destruction and human social collapse that is both culturally resonant and cognitively accessible. The story does not require students to understand climate science, carbon cycles, or biodiversity loss; it requires only the ability to follow a narrative and recognize the consequences of a queen's decision to treat a living ecological system as a source of material gain. The logical structure is accessible; the cultural grounding is immediate; and the moral stakes the fall of an entire kingdom are dramatically compelling.

From a policy perspective, these findings strengthen the case for integrating local oral literature into formal educational curricula in Jambi Province and across Indonesia as a component of both language education and environmental education. Such integration would simultaneously serve multiple educational objectives: developing students' knowledge of local cultural heritage, strengthening their critical reading and ecolinguistic analysis skills, and cultivating the deep ecological orientation that sustainable environmental behavior requires.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While the findings of this study are rich and significant, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the analytical corpus was limited to three folktales drawn from a single published compilation. While these three texts were selected on the basis of their high density of ecological content, a broader corpus incorporating additional folktales from the same collection, particularly texts such as "Samang dan Ungko," which is explicitly set in a dense forest (*hutan yang lebat*) and whose narrative hinges on the ecological setting of the Kerinci highland, and "Hantu Rawe," which encodes a specific ecological prohibition against planting *serai* (lemongrass) near dwellings would provide a more comprehensive picture of the ecolinguistic profile of the tradition as a whole.

Second, the analysis was conducted on written transcriptions of oral narratives. The transfer from oral to written form inevitably involves transformations in the text shifts in register, the loss of performance context, and editorial choices by the compilers that may affect the ecological dimensions of the discourse in ways not fully captured by textual analysis alone. Future research employing ethnographic methods, including fieldwork with storytelling communities in Jambi Province, would provide a more ecologically situated understanding of how these narratives function within living cultural practice.

Third, this study focused exclusively on ecolinguistic features at the textual level without examining audience reception. Research investigating how contemporary Jambi

communities particularly younger generations who have grown up in more urbanized and media-saturated environments engage with and interpret these folktales would provide crucial information about whether the eco-centric cognitive orientations encoded in the texts are actively transmitted to and internalized by contemporary audiences, or whether they require educational mediation to become effective.

Future research might also productively extend the ecolinguistic framework employed here to other genres within the Jambi oral tradition including the pantun, syair, and gurindam poetic forms as well as to contemporary Jambi literature in Indonesian, to examine whether and how eco-centric narrative patterns persist, evolve, or erode as the literary tradition responds to modernization, urbanization, and the pressures of a globalizing cultural environment.

Conclusion

This study successfully fulfills its research objective by revealing that the Kumpulan Cerita Rakyat Jambi serves as a crucial linguistic vehicle that preserves deep eco-centric wisdom through high frequencies of textual salience and positive framing. The scientific innovation of this research lies in its transition away from traditional, generic folklore readings which typically focus only on static moral pedagogy or historical lineages toward a rigorous, critical ecolinguistics approach that maps the precise cognitive and discourse mechanics of oral literature. By applying this linguistic lens, this study introduces a novel empirical pathway to demonstrate how regional oral traditions do not merely mirror landscapes, but actively structure grammatical agency and interconnectedness for non-human participants like the Batanghari River and local forests. Ultimately, this research provides a fresh framework for contemporary environmental linguistics, proving that revitalizing localized, ancient "beneficial stories" offers a vital discursive tool to challenge and dismantle the ecologically destructive cultural narratives that dominate modern industrial society.

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