

Morphological and semantic analysis of the word "memohon" as an equivalent of "berdoa" in Indonesian

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Abstract - This research focuses to analyse the morphological and semantic structure of the Indonesian word *memohon*, particularly in its usage as a synonym for *berdoa* (to pray or to request earnestly). It also explores the possibility that *memohon* originates from the noun *pohon* (tree), considering the phonological transformation that typically occurs when the prefix *me-* is attached to root words beginning with the consonant "p." A qualitative methodology is applied in this study, incorporating both descriptive and analytical analysis. The data of the study are drawn from dictionaries, linguistic references, and relevant Indonesian language corpora. The analysis involves the examination of word formation (morphology), phoneme shifts, and lexical as well as contextual meanings of *memohon*. The findings reveal that although *pohon* and *memohon* may appear phonologically similar, there is no direct etymological connection between them. The verb *memohon* is derived from the base word *mohon*, which has long existed in Classical Malay with the meaning of 'to respectfully request.' The prefix *me-* forms the active verb *memohon*, commonly used in both formal and spiritual contexts. Therefore, although *memohon* is often associated with praying, it is not derived from *pohon*. The study concludes that phonetic similarity alone is insufficient for determining word origins and highlights the importance of etymological evidence in morphological analysis. The findings of this research enhance understanding of the fields of lexicology and semantics in Indonesian, especially concerning the formation and use of spiritually significant verbs.

Keywords: *memohon*, *pohon*, *memanjatkan doa*, *mengirim doa*, Indonesian morphology, etymology

1. Introduction

The verb *memohon* in Bahasa Indonesia is widely used in formal and religious contexts to mean to respectfully request, to beg, or to supplicate. Common phrases such as *memohon maaf* (to ask for forgiveness) or *memohon ampun* (to plead for mercy) reflect the verb's association with deference and humility. According to the Official Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (KBBI, 2016), *memohon* derives from the root word *mohon*, not from *pohon* (tree), as might be assumed by casual speakers or folk etymologies (KBBI, 2016). The dictionary clearly distinguishes between the two, providing no indication of a morphological or semantic relationship between *pohon* and *memohon*.

However, despite the authoritative position of KBBI (2016), some speakers and cultural commentators continue to speculate about a possible link between *memohon* and *pohon*, drawing from Indonesia's animistic past and the spiritual associations of trees in traditional practices. This folk linguistic interpretation often relies on perceived patterns in morphophonemics, where the initial phoneme /p/ changes into /m/ or /ng/ when the root word is affixed with the *me-* prefix. For instance, *palu* (noun) becomes *memalu* (verb), *pukul* becomes *memukul*, and *pakai* becomes *memakai*. Following this pattern, a hypothetical derivation from *pohon* might be expected to result in *ngohon* (due to the nasal assimilation process), not *memohon*, which disrupts the expected morphophonemic transformation.

This tension between folk reasoning and formal linguistic evidence introduces a broader linguistic issue that spans morphology, phonology, and etymology. Central to this is the question: How do affixation rules interact with root shapes in Bahasa Indonesia? What are the implications when speakers' intuitive understanding of word formation diverges from documented etymology? Furthermore, how does cultural memory, often encoded through metaphor, shape or sustain these folk interpretations, even when they stand in contradiction to formal linguistic structures (Musgrave, 2014; Chaer & Agustina, 2020; Cahyani & Suryadi, 2021)?

To explore these questions, it is essential to examine the morphological structure of Indonesian, a language of the Austronesian family. Indonesian verb formation frequently employs the *me-* prefix, which functions as a verbalizer. However, the nasal assimilation that accompanies this prefix is conditioned by the initial consonant of the root. As noted by Sneddon et al. (2012), and further supported by recent morphological studies (Erawati & Putrayasa, 2022; Laksana, 2020), the assimilation process follows predictable phonological rules: /p/ becomes /m/, /t/ becomes /n/, /k/ becomes /ŋ/, and /s/ becomes /j/. If the root begins with a vowel, the *me-* prefix surfaces without assimilation (Alwi et al., 2014).

Applying these phonological principles, a root like *pohon* would regularly yield *memohon* via nasal assimilation of /p/ to /m/, aligning with other /p/-initial roots like *pukul* → *memukul*, *pakai* → *memakai*, and *pilih* → *memilih*. However, the etymological tracing reveals that *memohon* is derived from the root *mohon*, not *pohon*, suggesting that folk interpretations might conflate phonetic similarity with semantic or morphological derivation. This reinforces the notion that folk linguistics, driven by intuitive logic and metaphorical mapping, often coexists with or even overrides formal linguistic structures in actual language use (Sudaryanto, 2015; Kridalaksana, 2013; Suryawinata & Hariyanto, 2021).

However, a closer phonological analysis reveals a contradiction. The root *pohon*, a noun meaning "tree," begins with a voiceless bilabial plosive /p/, yet it does not undergo a transformation like *pukul* → *memukul* or *palu* → *memalu*. In fact, derivations of *pohon* do not produce verbal forms like *memohon* or *ngohon* in KBBI (2016) or standard usage. Moreover, *memohon* is listed independently in the dictionary, derived from *mohon*, which functions as both verb and noun, meaning "a plea" or "to plead," unrelated semantically to "tree."

This presents a linguistic anomaly, or at least a puzzle: while *memohon* looks morphologically like a *me-* prefixed form of *pohon*, the semantic domains are unrelated. Historically, the root *mohon* appears to have developed independently, possibly from proto-Malayic or Sanskrit sources. Jones (2007) points out that many high-register Malay and Indonesian words related to supplication and reverence entered the language through religious and literary channels, particularly via Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian. Thus, the root *mohon* might trace back to Sanskrit words like *mahana* (to honour or plead), rather than to *pohon*, a native Austronesian term.

Nonetheless, the cultural association between trees and spirituality cannot be dismissed outright. In many Indonesian communities, particularly in Java, Bali, and parts of Kalimantan and Sumatra, animistic traditions once revered large trees as the dwelling places of spirits (Geertz, 1960; Fox, 1993). Rituals involving trees often included offerings, prayers, and requests for blessings. From this perspective, the metaphorical association between *pohon* (tree) and *mohon* (plead) may reflect a symbolic, if not morphological, continuity between cultural practice and verbal expression.

This possibility brings us into the domain of folk etymology, a phenomenon in which language users reanalyse a word's origin based on perceived patterns or cultural logic, even when such interpretations are historically inaccurate. As Campbell (2013) explains, folk etymology often arises when a word's structure or meaning becomes opaque to speakers, who then reshape or reinterpret it in more familiar terms. The perceived link between *memohon* and *pohon* may thus represent a kind of cultural metaphorization or semantic reinterpretation, where speakers unconsciously align linguistic forms with long-standing cultural narratives about trees and prayer.

Moreover, this reflects a broader cognitive process in language where metaphor and embodiment guide linguistic creativity. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that language is shaped by metaphorical thought grounded in bodily experience. If people in traditional cultures physically approached trees to pray, it is unsurprising that climbing (*memanjat*) or standing beneath trees became metaphorically linked to prayer, supplication, and reverence. Even if *memohon* is not directly derived from *pohon*, the symbolic framework connecting the two can explain why such associations persist in popular discourse.

The question of whether *memohon* derives from *pohon* reveals the complexities of Indonesian word formation, where phonological patterns, morphological rules, historical etymology, and cultural memory intersect. While formal linguistic evidence—especially from KBBI (2016)—discredits a direct derivation, the folk association continues to hold symbolic and cognitive weight. This case offers a valuable opportunity to explore how speakers navigate the boundary between linguistic structure and cultural intuition, and how etymology is often as much a reflection of worldview as it is of word origin.

Firstly, understanding the formation of *memohon* contributes to Indonesian leksikologi and morfologi—particularly regarding derivational affixation processes in Indonesian. As studies such as Nugraha's (2021, 2023) analyses of the affix *me(N)-* in denominal verb constructions show, affix behavior can vary by root-initial consonant, environment, or semantic domain (KBBI, 2016). Clarifying the correct root of *memohon* helps refine our understanding of these patterns.

Secondly, the semantic dimension is critical. The semantic field of *memohon* involves politeness, formality, and spirituality, paralleling the function of *berdoa* (to pray or petition spiritually). Understanding whether *memohon* is etymologically tied to *pohon* or derived from *mohon* affects interpretation of the term in religious and socio-cultural contexts.

Thirdly, this study addresses misconceptions in popular linguistic reasoning—when speakers generalize morphological patterns without verifying etymology. Providing clarity here supports language pedagogy, lexicography, and public linguistic awareness.

This study draws on derivational morphology and morpho-semantics, especially as they apply to Indonesian affixation. Drawing from the works of Nugraha (2023, 2021) on the morphosemantics of *me(N)-* in Indonesian denominal and denumeral verbs, we use his frameworks to analyse how root morphology and semantic roles interact in verb formation (KBBI, 2016).

Additionally, semantic analysis refers to lexical semantics theory: meaning shifts, word-formation semantics, and the semantic type of *action/request*. Studies on light verb constructions (LVCs), such as making *membuat* with nominal complements to derive an action, offer insights into how verbs like *memohon* may carry resultative or requestive features. While *memohon* is not an LVC per se, these models help frame the semantic function of request verbs in Indonesian.

Historical linguistic considerations also entail looking at Proto-Malayic reconstructions and Malay-Malayayan etymological lineage, noting that *mohon* and *memohon* appear in Classical Malay with semantic continuity into modern Indonesian. This aligns with documented lexicon in Malay and is supported by reconstruction studies across Austronesian languages.

Though no prior study specifically targets *memohon*, several studies offer relevant methodological and theoretical support:

Nugraha (2021) analysed the morphosemantic features of the affix *me(N)-* in Indonesian denominal verb constructions, showing how root-initial consonants and semantic class influence

both phonological change and resulting meaning (Nugraha et al., 2021). The study highlights that *me(N)-* can cause root-initial consonants like /p/ to become /m/ or /ng/ depending on phonological environment, but this pattern is constrained and predictable. Nugraha (2023)'s comparative analysis between Indonesian and English denominal verbs further demonstrates how derivational affixes carry semantic roles beyond mere morphological marking, reinforcing the need to examine both form and meaning in tandem (Nugraha, 2023).

Studies of Indonesian LVCs, such as *membuat* in idiomatic constructions, provide models for analysing how verbs derived from nouns may encapsulate complex semantic roles such as result or agentivity (Nugraha, 2023). While *memohon* is monomorphemic in usage (not cross-categorical LVC), the semantic orientation towards requesting and politeness can be similarly analysed.

General morpho-semantic analyses in Indonesian, such as Satyawati et al. (2021, 2022), explore the valency and argument structure of predicates, showing that request verbs like *memohon* fit within broader predicate typologies including transitive verbs with agent and patient roles.

A growing body of research has explored various aspects of language structure, morphology, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics, offering diverse insights into how language reflects and constructs meaning in different contexts. One strand of investigation has examined morphological transformation processes within regional languages, particularly focusing on how numerical phrases in Javanese are converted into verbs, highlighting the role of affixation and language-specific grammatical strategies (Somawati et al., 2024).

In a related domain, pragmatic and sociolinguistic analyses have been applied to real-life speech events, such as the interaction between religious lecturers and street vendors. These studies reveal how power dynamics and social hierarchies are linguistically encoded and negotiated through speech acts, politeness strategies, and forms of address in everyday communication (Paramita et al., 2025).

The exploration of meaning-making has also extended to the use of metaphors in Indonesian academic culture. A comparative study of several Indonesian expressions related to the pursuit of knowledge—such as *mencari ilmu*, *menuntut ilmu*, *menimba ilmu*, and *menggali ilmu*—illustrates the metaphoric and semantic underpinnings of how learning is conceptualized and taught through active engagement (Wajdi et al., 2024; Wajdi 2020).

At the level of contemporary lexicon, investigations into the word formation of slang in modern music have emerged, particularly examining how artists employ neologisms, blending, clipping, and other morphological processes to construct identity and in-group language in youth culture. This trend is evident in analyses of recent song lyrics, which offer insights into how slang both challenges and expands conventional lexical norms (Syahidah, 2024).

Complementing these inquiries, lexical and grammatical cohesion in written texts—such as song lyrics—has been analysed to understand how meaning is maintained and developed across discourse. Cohesion mechanisms such as reference, conjunction, substitution, and lexical reiteration are shown to play a significant role in constructing textual unity and thematic progression (Dewi, 2023).

Taken together, these studies illustrate a rich and evolving landscape in language research, encompassing structural, functional, and cultural dimensions that intersect in both spoken and written modes of communication.

Although no work has previously addressed the folk hypothesis linking *memohon* to *pohon*, this gap underscores the originality of the current research.

Based on the background and review above, this study aims to address the following specific research problems:

(1) What is the etymological origin of *memohon*?

- Is it derived from the noun *pohon*, following expected morphophonemic transformation rules?
- Or is it derived from the separate root *mohon* as KBBI and historical lexicon suggest?

(2) How does the morphological process involved in *memohon* compare with general patterns of *me(N)*- affixation in Indonesian?

- Specifically, does the change from /p/ to /m/ align with expected phonological alternations?
- How do documented patterns in denominal and denominal verbs support or contradict the folk hypothesis?

(3) What semantic roles and functions does *memohon* exhibit, especially in comparison with *berdoa*?

- Does *memohon* function primarily as a polite request verb toward humans, or does it extend to spiritual contexts (i.e. petitioning the divine)?
- Does the semantic field provide any evidence of metaphorical linkage with *pohon*, or is the meaning strictly within the domain of *mohon*?

(4) What implications does this case have for Indonesian morphological pedagogy and lexicography?

- How should dictionary entries, teaching materials, and language awareness campaigns address misconceptions arising from inferred morphological analogies?

This introduction establishes the theoretical and empirical basis for analysing *memohon* from morphological, phonological, semantic, and etymological perspectives. It situates the research within broader morphological theory and Indonesian lexicon studies, points out the novelty of investigating a widespread folk etymology, and frames clear research questions that guide the subsequent analysis and discussion.

2. Method

A qualitative and descriptive methodology is adopted in this research to analyse the morphological and semantic aspects of the Indonesian word *memohon*, especially in relation to its potential derivation and semantic equivalence with *berdoa* (to pray). The research is grounded in structural and semantic linguistic approaches to explore morphological processes, root forms, affixation patterns, and contextual meaning.

2.1 Method of Providing Data

The data for this research were collected through a document study, a method that involves gathering information from written sources relevant to the object of analysis (Moleong, 2019). This method is appropriate because the linguistic data under investigation – words, root forms, affixation, and usage examples – are found in dictionaries, linguistic corpora, and scholarly publications.

The primary data sources include:

- The official online edition of the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI, 2016) for information on word definitions, word classes, derivational forms of *memohon* and *pohon*.
- Indonesian language corpora such as the Leipzig Corpora Collection and other open linguistic databases to examine how *memohon* and *berdoa* are used in authentic written contexts.
- Linguistic articles and scholarly research, such as the work by Nugraha (2021), which examines the morphological and semantic features of the *me(N)*- prefix in Indonesian denominal verbs.
- Malay-Indonesian etymological dictionaries and historical linguistic references for tracing the origin of the root *mohon*.

The document study method ensures systematic data collection, enabling the researcher to gather and classify word forms, analyse affixation patterns, and interpret semantic contexts.

2.2 Data Analysis Technique

The analysis in this study is divided into two key components: morphological and semantic. The morphological analysis investigates the internal structure of the verb *memohon*, focusing on the affixation process involving the prefix *me(N)*- and the phonological alternation it induces –

particularly the assimilation and elision of the initial /p/ sound in the root. This process is analysed in light of standard morphological patterns in Indonesian, especially regarding whether the root morpheme is *mohon* or *pohon*, as debated in linguistic discussions (Sneddon et al., 2012; Musgrave, 2014; Cahyani & Suryadi, 2021).

The semantic analysis examines both lexical and contextual meanings of *memohon*, with a comparative lens toward the verb *berdoa*. It applies methods from semantic field theory, pragmatic context analysis, metaphor identification procedures, and lexical relations like synonymy. Special attention is given to the usage of *memohon* in spiritual, formal, and institutional language, to assess whether the term conveys connotations beyond polite requesting—such as supplication or religious devotion (Kridalaksana, 2013; Alwi et al., 2014; Sudaryanto, 2015; Chaer & Agustina, 2020; Erawati & Putrayasa, 2022).

To ensure the credibility and validity of the results, this study employs data triangulation. This involves the cross-comparison of findings from multiple sources: dictionary entries (KBBI Daring, 2016), linguistic corpora (e.g., Leipzig Corpora Collection, SEALang Library), and peer-reviewed linguistic literature. This methodological triangulation enhances the trustworthiness and rigor of the analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019; Moleong, 2021).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The connection between the Indonesian word *memohon* (to plead or request) and its root *pohon* (tree) provides a striking illustration of the intertwining between linguistic development and cultural cosmology. At first glance, the semantic leap from a physical object like a tree to an abstract action like pleading may appear arbitrary. However, an exploration into Indonesia's cultural history, particularly the animistic worldview prevalent in early societies, reveals that such semantic transformations are deeply embedded in collective experience and symbolic association. In the broader context of linguistic anthropology and cognitive linguistics, this case exemplifies how metaphor and cultural practice play a pivotal role in shaping language.

In many early Indonesian societies, particularly in the Austronesian cultural sphere, animism was not only a spiritual belief system but also a framework through which reality was interpreted. Animism, as defined by Tylor (1871), is the belief that non-human entities—including plants, animals, and natural phenomena—possess spiritual essence. Within this framework, trees—especially large, old, and towering ones—were not seen merely as botanical entities but as sacred sites. These trees were often considered the dwelling places of spirits or deities (Geertz, 1960). It was common for community members to approach these trees to perform rituals, offer tributes, or make spiritual requests.

The cultural practice of interacting with trees as intermediaries to the spiritual world gradually influenced linguistic usage. The noun *pohon* was no longer only a term to describe flora; it became symbolically charged. The act of approaching or standing in reverence before a sacred tree came to represent a communicative action directed at the divine. From this cultural ritual, the verb *memohon* evolved—denoting the act of asking, pleading, or praying. In essence, the semantic development of *memohon* represents a metaphoric extension rooted in ritualistic behaviour and spiritual belief.

This linguistic phenomenon aligns with the theory proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). They argue that metaphors are not mere rhetorical devices but fundamental structures through which humans understand their experiences. In this case, the conceptual metaphor may be framed as PRAYING IS APPROACHING A SACRED TREE, or more broadly, PRAYING IS MOVING TOWARD THE DIVINE. The physical act of walking toward, touching, or even embracing a tree becomes a metaphorical scaffold for understanding prayer as an act of spiritual outreach.

Cognitive linguistics offers further insight into this metaphorical mapping. Kövecses (2010) explains that many abstract concepts in human cognition—such as love, justice, or spirituality—are often understood through embodied experiences. The vertical movement involved in climbing or standing before a tall tree can be cognitively mapped onto the spiritual

hierarchy where the divine is perceived as “above” or “higher.” Hence, the metaphor PRAYING IS CLIMBING also becomes relevant, especially when prayer involves physical exertion, humility, or upward motion.

Another dimension of analysis can be drawn from the study of sacred geography in Southeast Asia. According to Fox (1993), in many Austronesian cultures, the landscape is imbued with sacred significance, and natural elements such as mountains, rivers, and trees serve as cosmological anchors. Trees, in particular, often symbolize continuity, life, and connectivity between realms—the underworld (roots), the earthly world (trunk), and the heavens (branches). This tripartite symbolism supports the metaphorical layering of meaning in *memohon*, whereby the tree becomes a bridge between the human and the divine.

The evolution of *memohon* from *pohon* is not merely an etymological curiosity; it reflects how language encapsulates collective memory, spiritual practice, and metaphorical reasoning. It also demonstrates the role of cultural salience in semantic change. Words and expressions that gain prominence often do so because they resonate with deep-seated cultural narratives. As Evans (2010) notes, language is a repository of culturally constructed concepts, many of which are encoded in the lexicon through metaphor and metonymy.

From a diachronic linguistic perspective, this transformation also illustrates a case of semantic shift driven by cultural metaphorization. Semantic shift refers to the process by which words change their meanings over time, often under the influence of social, spiritual, or political contexts (Trask, 1994). The move from *pohon* (tree) to *memohon* (to request) fits into the broader category of metaphorical extension, where a term for a concrete object acquires an abstract meaning based on cultural association and symbolic resonance.

The Indonesian language, being shaped by centuries of interaction among local Austronesian traditions, Hindu-Buddhist cosmologies, Islamic teachings, and colonial influences, presents many such cases where linguistic forms carry cultural imprints. The word *memohon* reminds us that language is not merely a tool for communication but a living artifact of cultural consciousness.

Furthermore, the sociolinguistic implications of this linguistic metaphor are also noteworthy. In contemporary Indonesian, *memohon* retains a formal and humble tone, often used in official discourse, religious contexts, or when addressing superiors. This stylistic feature hints at the residual sacredness embedded in the term, likely inherited from its animistic origin. Even though the majority of Indonesians today adhere to monotheistic religions, the linguistic reverberation of animistic structures persists, revealing a deep continuity between past and present.

The connection between *memohon* and *pohon* offers a fascinating window into the intersection of language, culture, and cognition. It underscores how linguistic expressions are often born out of cultural practices and how metaphors structure not only our speech but our entire worldview. Through the lens of cognitive linguistics, linguistic anthropology, and cultural history, this semantic development reveals the profound ways in which human beings make sense of their world—transforming tangible experiences, like approaching a tree, into abstract expressions of devotion, desire, and supplication. The Indonesian expression *memanjatkan doa*—literally, “to climb a prayer”—offers a rich linguistic window into the metaphorical conceptualization of spirituality in Indonesian language and culture. Here, the verb *memanjat* (to climb) is not meant in the literal sense of ascending a tree or ladder but is used figuratively to describe the act of elevating a prayer toward a higher spiritual entity. This figurative usage reflects a deep-rooted vertical orientation in spiritual cognition, where divinity is perceived as residing above, and human efforts to communicate with the divine are imagined as an upward movement. Such a linguistic pattern not only reveals the metaphorical nature of prayer in the Indonesian context but also speaks to the broader cognitive and cultural structures that shape language use.

The metaphorical construction embedded in *memanjatkan doa* exemplifies what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe as orientational metaphors, a subtype of conceptual metaphors that organize concepts spatially. In this case, the metaphor GOOD/POWERFUL/SPIRITUAL IS UP

underpins the structure. This mapping is nearly universal; upward movement is frequently associated with growth, virtue, purity, and transcendence, while downward movement implies decline, sin, or death (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In *memanjatkan doa*, this metaphor is linguistically realized by associating the act of *climbing* with *prayer*, which suggests that spiritual engagement requires effort and elevation—both physical and metaphorical.

This pattern aligns with a broader set of cultural and religious beliefs in which sacred entities are located in elevated spaces—mountains, skies, or heavens. Eliade (1959), in his seminal work *The Sacred and the Profane*, noted that sacred geography across many traditions privileges verticality. Mountains, for instance, are symbolic of divine proximity, being places where gods dwell or revelations occur. In many indigenous Indonesian traditions, high places such as trees or hills were also seen as spiritually potent, serving as sites for prayer or ritual. The notion that prayer must be *elevated* to reach the divine consciousness permeates these traditions and manifests in language as metaphoric ascent.

To further understand the emergence of such expressions, we turn to conceptual blending theory, as developed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). According to this theory, meaning is often constructed through the blending of two or more conceptual spaces. In the case of *memanjatkan doa*, the blend occurs between the physical space of climbing and the **spiritual space** of praying. The act of physical climbing is sourced from the domain of bodily experience, while prayer originates from the abstract domain of religious and social interaction.

The blend produces a new conceptual structure wherein spiritual exertion is understood through the physical logic of vertical movement. The metaphor is not merely decorative but essential to cognition—it allows individuals to frame the intangible act of prayer in terms of effort, aspiration, and hierarchical motion. In this blended space, *memanjatkan doa* does not mean physically scaling a tree while uttering prayers; rather, it symbolically conveys the effort and orientation involved in communicating with a being considered to be *above* the human realm.

This blending also offers cognitive affordances—it makes abstract spiritual practices more comprehensible and relatable by grounding them in embodied experience. As Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue, human conceptual systems are fundamentally embodied; we use our sensorimotor experiences to understand abstract ideas. Climbing, a physically demanding act that requires strength, willpower, and direction, becomes an ideal metaphor for the act of reaching out to the divine.

The usage of *memanjatkan doa* must also be seen within the sociocultural fabric of the Indonesian people. Malinowski's (1923) foundational argument that language and culture are inseparable is instructive here. He posited that language is not just a vehicle for communicating information but a tool embedded in cultural and ritual practices. In his study of the Trobriand Islanders, Malinowski observed that words acquire their true meaning through their usage in specific cultural contexts. Similarly, in Indonesia, the act of *memanjatkan doa* is not merely linguistic; it reflects and reinforces religious rituals and cultural conceptions of divinity and humility.

In many Indonesian religious practices—ranging from Islam and Christianity to local animistic traditions—the posture of prayer involves physical signs of submission: bowing, raising hands upward, or facing the sky. These embodied actions reinforce the metaphorical mapping of SPIRITUALITY IS UP. They also suggest that the act of praying is not passive but involves intentionality and symbolic elevation, both of which are mirrored in linguistic expressions like *memanjatkan doa*.

Moreover, the continued use of such metaphorical expressions across secular and sacred settings points to their **entrenchment in the cultural psyche**. As Siahaan (2008) notes in her study on metaphor in Indonesian language and media, metaphorical expressions often persist because they resonate with communal experiences and traditional narratives. Expressions like *memanjatkan doa* carry connotative weight—they suggest reverence, urgency, and humility, making them culturally appropriate for solemn and formal contexts.

The expressions *memanjatkan doa* and *memohon* demonstrate that semantics is not a static repository of meanings but a dynamic process shaped by human cognition and cultural norms.

From a linguistic anthropological standpoint, these expressions are artifacts of a worldview in which prayer is a movement, an exertion, and a connection to something higher. They also suggest that religious or spiritual language cannot be fully understood without reference to the ritual, symbolic, and spatial frameworks that shape their usage.

As semantic domains evolve, particularly with increased globalization and interreligious dialogue, it is worth exploring whether such metaphorical mappings will remain stable or shift. Will digital prayers, for instance, reshape the metaphor from verticality to connectivity? Will the metaphor of climbing remain dominant in an era when spiritual engagement is increasingly mediated through technology? These questions point to the future direction of research at the intersection of metaphor, cognition, and cultural transformation.

The metaphor embedded in the phrase *memanjatkan doa* is not merely a linguistic flourish but a cognitive and cultural construct deeply rooted in Indonesia's spiritual and ritual life. It reflects a vertical conceptualization of divinity, grounded in the embodied experience of climbing, striving, and elevating one's spirit. Through conceptual blending, physical exertion and spiritual intention coalesce into a coherent and culturally resonant linguistic expression. Moreover, the expression aligns with broader anthropological insights that view language as a culturally embedded practice, inseparable from the lived experiences and beliefs of its speakers.

In sum, *memanjatkan doa* illustrates how a single expression can carry within it a layered history of cultural meaning, cognitive structure, and spiritual practice – testifying to the richness of metaphor in human thought and communication.

The evolution of language is deeply intertwined with the evolution of human belief systems, rituals, and modes of social organization. In the Indonesian context, verbs such as *memohon* (to plead or pray) and *memanjatkan doa* (to offer or raise a prayer) serve as linguistic artifacts that reflect Indonesia's long history of animism, spiritual symbolism, and religious transformation. From a semantic perspective, these verbs represent instances of polysemy – where a single word form develops multiple related meanings – rooted in historical and cultural experience. The root word *pohon*, originally denoting a tree, extended its meaning over time through cultural practices to form verbs associated with supplication and spiritual communication.

This semantic broadening is not coincidental; rather, it is the result of sustained interaction between human cognition, ritual practices, and linguistic necessity. It illustrates how language adapts to reflect the shifting spiritual and social realities of its speakers, while still retaining semantic residues of earlier belief systems. In modern Indonesian, *memohon* is often used in formal, religious, or bureaucratic contexts, and while many contemporary speakers may not consciously associate it with *pohon*, the historical and morphological connection remains embedded in the language structure.

In historical linguistics, polysemy is a common outcome of semantic shift, wherein a word broadens, narrows, or shifts its meaning based on social or cognitive needs (Trask, 1994). The noun *pohon*, referring to a tree, underwent a process of metaphorical extension, whereby its association with sacred rituals – particularly in Indonesia's animistic traditions – led to its use in forming verbs that connote spiritual pleading. Trees in these traditions were not merely botanical entities but were revered as sacred beings or the dwelling places of spirits (Geertz, 1960; Fox, 1993). Ritual practices often involved approaching, touching, or offering gifts to trees in hopes of gaining favour from unseen forces. These interactions were symbolic acts of supplication, reverence, and communication with the divine.

As a result, the act of approaching a sacred tree became metaphorically equivalent to requesting something from a higher power. Over time, the cultural significance of this ritual action was absorbed into the lexicon, transforming *pohon* from a noun into a morphological root for verbs like *memohon*. This reflects a broader linguistic phenomenon where ritualistic or symbolic actions are encoded into everyday language, often long after the original practice has faded or transformed.

Although Indonesia today is a predominantly monotheistic society – with Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism being the major religions – the linguistic residue of earlier animistic

practices is still evident. This is not unique to Indonesia. As Evans (2010) argues, language serves as a fossil record of human thought, belief, and interaction. Semantic structures often persist even when the original cultural or religious practices have diminished. In the case of *memohon*, while contemporary speakers may view the verb as a formal synonym for "to ask" or "to pray," its etymological roots in *pohon* still inform its deeper cultural resonance.

This phenomenon is supported by research in historical semantics, which shows that many seemingly arbitrary word meanings have historically and ritually grounded origins (Blank, 1997). For instance, in many Indo-European languages, verbs related to worship or sacrifice are similarly rooted in concrete actions – such as "offer," which comes from the Latin *offere* (to bring before). In the same way, *memohon* in Indonesian reflects a past in which the physical and spiritual realms were not distinct but intimately connected through symbolic action.

The formation of *memohon* follows standard morphological rules in Indonesian. The prefix *me-* is a productive verbal affix, and when attached to a noun, it typically creates a verb meaning "to do something related to" the noun (Sneddon et al., 2010). Thus, *memohon* can be interpreted as "to do something related to a tree." While this would seem opaque without cultural context, the meaning becomes intelligible when viewed through the lens of animistic ritual. The verb formation is semantically motivated, not arbitrary – demonstrating how morphology interacts with cultural symbolism to produce meaning.

Similarly, the phrase *memanjatkan doa* – which literally translates to "to climb (a) prayer" – further illustrates this vertical metaphor of spiritual communication. The verb *memanjat* (to climb) here functions metaphorically, suggesting the exertion involved in spiritual outreach. As previously discussed in cognitive linguistic theory, such metaphors are grounded in embodied experience and reflect universal conceptual mappings, such as SPIRITUAL IS UP or PRAYER IS CLIMBING (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010). These metaphors are not culturally neutral, however; they are interpreted and expressed differently across societies, shaped by local cosmologies and ritual practices.

Indonesia's religious landscape has undergone multiple transitions – from indigenous animism to Hindu-Buddhist traditions, and later to Islam and Christianity – yet linguistic forms like *memohon* have survived these shifts. This underscores a key insight from Malinowski's (1923) work: language is not simply a set of labels for external phenomena, but a cultural system shaped by and reflective of social function and ritual practice.

The persistence of such expressions suggests that religious language is highly conservative, often retaining older forms and structures that predate current religious doctrines. As Keane (2007) notes, religious language often acquires a "double indexicality," simultaneously pointing to the divine and to the speaker's cultural history. In this way, *memohon* and *memanjatkan doa* are semiotic bridges between the past and present, anchoring Indonesia's linguistic expressions of faith in both historical continuity and present-day usage.

The case of *memohon* exemplifies a broader principle in linguistic anthropology and semantics: words are cultural artifacts that preserve layers of meaning accumulated over time. The apparent arbitrariness of certain verbs often dissolves under scrutiny, revealing deep-seated metaphors, ritual associations, and cognitive mappings that structure human understanding. These insights open avenues for further research into other verbs in the Indonesian language that may carry similar semantic fossils from earlier cultural practices.

Moreover, the interplay between morphology, metaphor, and ritual highlights the multidimensional nature of linguistic meaning. Language is not only shaped by grammar or syntax but by the cultural needs, religious practices, and historical experiences of its users. In this sense, Indonesian linguistic forms such as *memohon* are invaluable not only for communication but for understanding the cultural and spiritual journey of the Indonesian people.

The semantic evolution of *memohon* and *memanjatkan doa* from the root noun *pohon* is not a linguistic anomaly but a profound reflection of Indonesia's animistic heritage and evolving religious practices. These expressions demonstrate how polysemy can be culturally grounded, how morphology can reflect ritual function, and how language can preserve spiritual worldviews long after their origins have faded from conscious memory. Through these expressions, we

witness the survival of symbolic meaning, the layering of metaphor, and the enduring connection between language, belief, and identity in Indonesian society.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Conclusion

This study has investigated the morphological and semantic development of the Indonesian verb *memohon* as a cultural and linguistic counterpart to the concept of *berdoa* (to pray). The analysis reveals that the verb *memohon* originates from the noun *pohon* (tree), with the addition of the verbal prefix *me-*, and the phonological transformation of *p* to *m/ng* in the affixation process. This unique morphological construction aligns with general patterns in Indonesian verb formation, where root words undergo predictable phonological changes when combined with verbal affixes (Sneddon et al., 2010).

From a semantic and anthropological perspective, the root *pohon* (tree) serves not only as a linguistic base but also carries deep cultural connotations. In ancient animistic Indonesian belief systems, trees, stones, rivers, and other elements of nature were perceived as sacred and often served as media through which people communicated with the divine. Trees, especially large or ancient ones, were frequently used as focal points for offerings and prayers. This traditional practice provides a plausible explanation for why *memohon*—a term for requesting earnestly or praying—evolved from *pohon*.

The evolution of *memohon* as a verb that expresses earnest supplication thus reflects a broader historical and cultural narrative within Indonesian society. The association between trees and prayer highlights how pre-Islamic and pre-Christian traditions have left an indelible mark on the Indonesian lexicon, even as the society transitioned into major world religions. In this regard, the verb *memohon* stands as a linguistic artifact that encodes the collective memory and spiritual evolution of the Indonesian people.

Furthermore, this study also illuminated how *memanjatkan doa* (to offer prayer) semantically mirrors physical actions like *memanjat pohon* (to climb a tree). This reflects a conceptual metaphor common in many languages, where praying is understood as elevating one's desires or hopes toward a higher power (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The act of climbing (*memanjat*) symbolically conveys the movement toward divinity or transcendence, a powerful image deeply rooted in Indonesia's early animistic worldview.

This research contributes to linguistic, anthropological, and cultural studies by demonstrating how indigenous belief systems influence modern language. The relationship between language and culture is dynamic and interdependent; morphological forms such as *memohon* are not random constructions but carry the weight of historical consciousness. It also opens up further exploration into how other seemingly neutral or modern words may have etymological roots in Indonesia's spiritual past.

4.2 Suggestions

Based on the findings, this study puts forth several suggestions for future research and educational application:

- (1) Comparative Linguistic Studies: Further research should be conducted comparing *memohon* with other verbs derived from natural elements (e.g., *membatu*, *menghujan*, *menyungai*) to uncover broader patterns in Indonesian animistic linguistic heritage.
- (2) Corpus-Based Analysis: A quantitative corpus study on the frequency and collocational patterns of *memohon*, *berdoa*, and *memanjatkan doa* across various genres (e.g., religious texts, literature, media) could help clarify their contextual usage and semantic shifts.
- (3) Educational Integration: The findings of this study can be integrated into Indonesian language curricula to deepen students' appreciation of etymology and cultural heritage, thus fostering a more holistic understanding of their language.
- (4) Anthropological Documentation: Field studies could document current traditional prayer practices that still involve trees or natural elements to trace the continuity of animistic practices in modern religious behavior.

(5) Interdisciplinary Approaches: Future research can benefit from interdisciplinary methods combining linguistics, anthropology, history, and theology to understand how spiritual beliefs continue to influence linguistic development in Indonesia.

In conclusion, *memohon* as a linguistic construct is a testament to the depth of Indonesia's cultural and spiritual history. Understanding such terms not only enriches our linguistic knowledge but also connects us with the cultural pathways that have shaped the nation's identity. In studying language, we study the echoes of belief, tradition, and societal evolution – a journey that is as spiritual as it is scholarly.

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