Historical Village Toponyms as Cultural Memory: Linguistic Structure, Semantic Representation, and Cultural Landscape in Majapahit

Fatimah Azzahra [1], Anas Ahmadi [2], Sukarman [3]

25022196010@mhs.unesa.ac.id [1], anasahmadi@unesa.ac.id [2*], sukarman@unesa.ac.id [3]

[1052-1069] Universitas Negeri Surabaya

*Corresponding author: anasahmadi@unesa.ac.id

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ABSTRACT:

Historical place names preserve valuable evidence of the relationships among language, culture, and landscape, yet studies on Majapahit toponyms have generally examined linguistic form, historical documentation, or semantic meaning separately. This study investigates the linguistic characteristics and socio-cultural representations of 167 historical Majapahit village toponyms distributed across the Majapahit cultural landscape in East Java, Indonesia. Adopting an onomastic approach within the framework of linguistic anthropology, the study integrates qualitative interpretation with reproducible corpus-based analysis using the R programming language. Each toponym was classified according to linguistic structure, semantic category, cultural value, spatial representation, and their interrelationships. The findings indicate that most historical village names have been preserved in the contemporary administrative system as villages, hamlets, or districts, demonstrating strong historical continuity. Linguistically, simplex (47.31%) and single-word forms (74.85%) dominate the corpus, whereas compound and affixed forms provide greater semantic specificity. Semantically, flora (19.16%) represents the largest category, followed by cultural artifacts, hydrology, and social organization (11.38% each), reflecting the close relationship between settlement naming and environmental as well as socio-cultural contexts. Ecological values (33.53%) constitute the dominant cultural orientation, followed by social values (23.95%). Cross-analysis further reveals systematic relationships among linguistic structure, semantic categories, cultural values, and spatial representation, indicating that Majapahit village names formed an integrated naming system through which environmental knowledge, social organization, and cultural memory were encoded. These findings demonstrate that historical toponyms function not only as geographical identifiers but also as linguistic representations of the Majapahit cultural landscape, contributing to broader discussions in historical onomastics, linguistic anthropology, and cultural landscape studies.

Keywords: cultural landscape; linguistic anthropology; Majapahit; onomastics; toponymy

1. Introduction

Language is no longer viewed merely as a structural system of signs but as a social and symbolic practice through which people interpret, organize, and construct their understanding of the world. Rather than simply reflecting reality, language actively shapes social experience by classifying, categorizing, and assigning meaning to people, objects, and places (Nugroho & Kusuma, 2023; Supatra, 2017). Within linguistic anthropology, language therefore functions as a medium through which collective knowledge, cultural values, and shared experiences are produced and transmitted across generations (Ahmadi, 2025). One of the most fundamental manifestations of this symbolic function is the practice of naming. Naming enables societies to identify and distinguish entities while simultaneously embedding them within broader systems of cultural meaning. Consequently, names are not arbitrary labels but linguistic expressions that embody social experience, collective memory, and cultural knowledge (Janggo et al., 2023; Lalira, 2022; Rahmawati & Mulyadi, 2021). As Oktavianus (2019) argues, naming operates as a symbolic mechanism that links language, space, and identity, allowing communities to transform physical landscapes into culturally meaningful places. In this sense, place names preserve historical experiences and transmit collective memories that remain embedded within the linguistic landscape of a society (Aribowo & Herawati, 2016; Baruadi et al., 2024).

Within Indonesia, naming practices exhibit remarkable linguistic and cultural diversity that reflects the long interaction among language, environment, history, and belief systems. Place names frequently encode ecological conditions, geographical features, social organization, and local cosmologies, thereby functioning as repositories of historical and cultural knowledge rather than as simple geographical references (Baruadi et al., 2023; Gin & Cacciafoco, 2021). This phenomenon is particularly evident on the island of Java, where centuries of cultural interaction involving Hindu-Buddhist traditions, Islam, and indigenous societies have produced a complex and multilayered toponymic system (Askuri & Kuipers, 2018; Tur, 2022). Javanese village names commonly derive from vegetation, hydrological features, historical events, traditional settlements, and symbolic concepts that continue to structure local spatial knowledge (Askuri & Kuipers, 2018; Maharani & Nugrahani, 2019). Consequently, Javanese toponymy represents a valuable linguistic archive through which the historical relationship between language, culture, and landscape can be reconstructed.

Among the historical cultural landscapes of Java, the Majapahit civilization occupies a particularly important position because of its extensive political influence and enduring cultural legacy throughout the Indonesian archipelago (Herho et al., 2023; Munandar, 2020). Beyond its historical significance as a kingdom, Majapahit represents a cultural landscape whose linguistic traces remain visible in numerous contemporary place names distributed across East Java. Many historical village names recorded in inscriptions, literary texts, and archaeological sources continue to survive within modern administrative geography as villages, hamlets, or districts, demonstrating remarkable continuity between the historical and present-day landscape. These surviving toponyms constitute more than historical relics; they preserve ecological knowledge, settlement organization, social institutions, and cultural values that once structured everyday life in the Majapahit period. Accordingly, historical village names provide a unique corpus through which the interaction between language, landscape, and cultural memory can be systematically investigated.

Despite the growing interest in onomastics and historical toponymy, previous studies have generally examined place names from relatively narrow perspectives. Many investigations have focused primarily on etymology, lexical meaning, or descriptive inventories of local place names, while others have emphasized historical documentation or cultural interpretation within individual communities (Lauder & Lauder, 2015; Yahya et al., 2025; Pertiwi et al., 2020; Safitri & Roselani, 2024; Siswanto et al., 2024). More recent studies have demonstrated that toponyms

preserve ecological knowledge, collective memory, and cultural identity (Gin & Cacciafoco, 2021; Kratochvíl et al., 2016), whereas critical approaches have highlighted the relationship between naming, power, and identity (Erikha, 2021; Rusu, 2019). Nevertheless, these studies have rarely integrated linguistic structure, semantic motivation, cultural values, and spatial representation into a single analytical framework. Moreover, historical Majapahit toponyms have received limited attention as a coherent linguistic system capable of explaining how naming practices simultaneously encode environmental knowledge, social organization, and cultural memory. This gap provides the foundation for the present study, which investigates Majapahit village toponyms through an integrated onomastic approach that combines linguistic, semantic, cultural, and spatial analyses.

The limitations of previous studies indicate that historical place names have rarely been examined as an integrated linguistic system capable of simultaneously representing language, culture, and spatial organization. Existing research has predominantly treated toponyms as isolated lexical items or descriptive records of local history, with relatively little attention given to the systematic relationships between linguistic form, semantic motivation, cultural values, and spatial representation. As a result, the mechanisms through which historical communities encoded ecological knowledge, settlement organization, symbolic concepts, and collective memory into place names remain insufficiently understood. This limitation is particularly evident in studies of the Majapahit cultural landscape, where historical investigations have largely concentrated on political history, archaeology, or philology, while linguistic evidence preserved in village names has received comparatively limited analytical attention. Consequently, the potential of historical toponyms as linguistic archives for reconstructing the cultural landscape of Majapahit has yet to be fully explored.

To address this gap, the present study adopts an integrated onomastic perspective situated within linguistic anthropology. Rather than treating village names simply as geographical labels, this study conceptualizes historical toponyms as symbolic linguistic expressions through which ecological knowledge, social organization, cultural values, and spatial cognition were encoded and transmitted across generations. Accordingly, the analysis combines four complementary dimensions: linguistic structure, semantic category, cultural value, and spatial representation. This multidimensional framework extends conventional descriptive approaches by examining not only how Majapahit village names were linguistically formed but also why particular lexical elements were selected and how these choices reflected the cultural logic underlying the production of historical landscapes. Such an approach contributes to the growing development of historical onomastics by positioning place names as interconnected components of broader cultural systems rather than as isolated lexical phenomena.

Accordingly, this study investigates the linguistic characteristics of 167 historical Majapahit village toponyms that have been identified within the Majapahit cultural landscape of East Java. Specifically, the study aims to (1) describe the linguistic structures of historical village names, (2) identify their dominant semantic categories and cultural values, (3) examine their spatial representations within the historical landscape, and (4) analyse the relationships among linguistic structure, semantic motivation, cultural values, and spatial representation. By integrating these analytical dimensions within a single framework, this study contributes theoretically to historical onomastics and linguistic anthropology by demonstrating how place names function as repositories of cultural memory, while methodologically introducing a reproducible corpus-based approach that combines qualitative interpretation with computational analysis using the R programming language. Empirically, the study provides new evidence that historical village toponyms preserve the ecological knowledge, cultural values, and spatial organization of the Majapahit civilization, thereby offering a linguistic perspective for reconstructing one of Southeast Asia's most significant historical cultural landscapes.

2. Theoretical Framework

The present study is situated within the field of linguistic anthropology, which regards language as a cultural practice through which societies construct, negotiate, and transmit meanings about the world. From this perspective, language is not merely a communicative system but also a symbolic resource that reflects social organization, collective memory, and cultural identity. Linguistic expressions are therefore understood as representations of human experience that emerge through continuous interaction between language, culture, and the surrounding environment (Supatra, 2017; Yunhadi, 2016; Ahmadi, 2025).

Within this framework, naming constitutes one of the most fundamental symbolic activities because it enables communities to classify people, places, and objects according to culturally shared knowledge. Rather than functioning as arbitrary labels, names encode social values, historical experiences, and cultural interpretations that become embedded within everyday language use. Consequently, linguistic anthropology provides an appropriate theoretical foundation for examining historical place names as cultural representations rather than merely lexical units.

Within linguistic anthropology, onomastics serves as the principal analytical approach for investigating naming systems. Onomastics examines proper names as linguistic signs whose meanings extend beyond reference to include historical, cultural, and social dimensions. Modern onomastic research has shifted from viewing names solely as etymological objects toward understanding them as products of social interaction that preserve collective memory, identity, and cultural knowledge (Coates, 2017; Hough & Izdebska, 2016).

This perspective emphasizes that naming practices are shaped by the interaction between linguistic conventions and the sociocultural contexts in which names are created and maintained. Among the principal branches of onomastics, toponymy focuses specifically on place names and investigates how geographical entities are linguistically conceptualized and culturally interpreted. Previous studies have shown that toponyms preserve information concerning ecological conditions, historical events, economic activities, political organization, and belief systems, thereby functioning as repositories of local knowledge transmitted across generations (Lauder & Lauder, 2015; Gin & Cacciafoco, 2021; Baruadi et al., 2023). Consequently, historical village names provide valuable linguistic evidence for reconstructing past cultural landscapes and understanding how societies organized their relationship with space.

Building upon this perspective, the present study adopts the concept of toponymic characteristics as the principal analytical framework. In onomastic studies, the characteristics of place names can generally be identified through two complementary dimensions, namely linguistic form and semantic motivation. The linguistic dimension concerns the formal construction of a place name, including its morphological structure, lexical composition, and word formation processes. The semantic dimension explains the meanings represented by the lexical elements that constitute the name (Resticka et al., 2021; Kurniawan et al., 2024).

These semantic meanings subsequently reflect broader cultural values because the selection of lexical forms is influenced by how communities perceive their natural environment, organize social life, and interpret symbolic concepts. Accordingly, this study classifies Majapahit village toponyms into four linguistic structure types consisting of simplex, compound, affixed, and reduplicated forms.

These structural categories are subsequently examined in relation to semantic categories, cultural values, and spatial representations. This analytical framework allows linguistic form to be interpreted not as an isolated morphological phenomenon but as an integral component of cultural meaning.

The interpretation of semantic meaning in this study is further informed by theories of space and cultural identity. Space is understood not merely as a physical setting but as a socially and culturally constructed domain whose meanings are

continuously produced through human interaction. Social space emerges through patterns of economic activity, governance, and community interaction. Symbolic space develops through religious beliefs, ritual practices, and shared cultural values (Lefebvre, 1991; Iskandar & Sardjono, 2020; Brata et al., 2019). Because place names function as linguistic markers of these spaces, they provide evidence of how historical societies perceived, categorized, and organized their landscapes. Toponyms referring to vegetation, rivers, mountains, settlements, religious institutions, or political authority therefore represent more than geographical descriptions. They express culturally meaningful spatial relationships that connect language with everyday social practice. The cultural significance of place names extends beyond their referential function because they also contribute to the symbolic construction of landscape and collective identity.

The relationship between language, space, and identity forms the central theoretical proposition of this study. From the perspective of linguistic anthropology, language mediates the interaction between communities and their environment by transforming physical landscapes into meaningful cultural spaces. Onomastics provides the analytical foundation for identifying and classifying naming patterns, whereas toponymy explains how these patterns preserve ecological knowledge, historical experiences, social organization, and cultural values.

Integrating these perspectives enables historical village names to be interpreted as components of a broader cultural landscape rather than as isolated lexical forms. Accordingly, this study examines Majapahit village toponyms through four interconnected analytical dimensions, namely linguistic structure, semantic category, cultural value, and spatial representation. These dimensions provide the theoretical basis for explaining how historical naming practices encoded the cultural memory of the Majapahit civilization and how these meanings continue to be preserved within the contemporary landscape.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive–interpretative design within the framework of linguistic anthropology using an onomastic approach. The research focused on historical village toponyms associated with the Majapahit cultural landscape in East Java, Indonesia. Rather than examining place names solely as geographical labels, the study considered toponyms as linguistic expressions that preserve cultural knowledge, environmental perception, and collective memory. The present article addresses the first research objective of the broader dissertation by investigating the linguistic characteristics and socio-cultural representations of Majapahit village toponyms.

The analysis integrates qualitative interpretation with computational descriptive analysis. Qualitative analysis was used to interpret the linguistic structures, semantic motivations, cultural values, and spatial representations of individual place names, while quantitative descriptive analysis was employed to identify overall distributional patterns across the corpus.

This combination enables the study to describe systematic naming patterns without employing inferential statistical testing, which is not required for the interpretative objectives of onomastic research.

3.2 Data Sources and Corpus

The corpus consists of 167 historical village toponyms identified within the cultural landscape of the Majapahit Kingdom. Each historical village name constitutes a single unit of analysis. The corpus was compiled through documentary research by integrating information from Old Javanese literary sources, inscriptions, historical records, archaeological reports, historical maps, previous toponymic studies, and contemporary administrative records. These multiple sources were compared to verify the historical existence and present administrative status of each village name.

Following corpus compilation, each toponym was standardized and documented in a structured

dataset. Every record contains information regarding the historical name, present administrative location, linguistic structure, lexical composition, semantic classification, cultural value, and spatial representation. This standardized corpus provides the basis for both descriptive statistical exploration and qualitative interpretation.

To facilitate systematic analysis, each toponym was coded according to six principal analytical variables: (1) linguistic structure, consisting of simplex, compound, affixed, and reduplicated forms; (2) word count; (3) semantic category; (4) semantic subcategory; (5) cultural value; and (6) spatial representation. Additional variables, including historical location, present administrative status, morphological segmentation, and interpretative notes, were retained to support qualitative analysis.

3.3 Data Coding and Classification

Data coding was conducted through several sequential stages to ensure analytical consistency. First, all historical place names were normalized by standardizing spelling, removing duplicate entries, and verifying their correspondence with historical and modern administrative records. This process ensured that each toponym represented a unique historical settlement within the corpus.

Second, each toponym was morphologically segmented to identify its lexical composition. Compound names were divided into their constituent lexical elements (e.g., *Majapahit* = *maja* + *pahit; Rabut Tugu* = *rabut* + *tugu; Banu Hanget* = *banu* + *hanget*), whereas simplex, affixed, and reduplicated forms were classified according to their morphological characteristics. This procedure enabled the identification of productive naming patterns across the corpus.

Third, semantic coding was performed by assigning every toponym to a semantic category and a more specific semantic subcategory according to its lexical meaning. The semantic classification includes categories such as flora, hydrology, topography, cultural artifacts, religion and belief, social organization, symbolic-conceptual expressions, socio-psychological concepts, natural phenomena, fauna, spatial-geographical references, and socio-cultural expressions.

Finally, each toponym was interpreted in terms of its dominant cultural value and spatial representation. Cultural values were classified into ecological, agrarian, social, ideological, religious, and historical dimensions, whereas spatial representations were categorized as ecological, economic, social, symbolic, or mixed spaces. The entire coding process was conducted manually to preserve linguistic accuracy and contextual interpretation before being validated through computational analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

The analytical procedure combined qualitative interpretation with reproducible computational analysis using the R programming language (R Core Team, 2025). Following manual coding, the dataset was imported into R for data validation, standardization, descriptive statistics, and visualization. All analytical procedures were implemented through a structured and reproducible workflow consisting of data preparation, variable recoding, frequency analysis, cross-tabulation, graphical visualization, and interpretative synthesis.

Descriptive statistical analysis was used to calculate frequencies and percentages for each analytical variable, including linguistic structures, semantic categories, cultural values, and spatial representations. Cross-tabulation analysis was subsequently performed to examine relationships among linguistic structure, semantic category, cultural value, and spatial representation.

These relationships were visualized using publication-quality figures generated with the ggplot2 package, while data manipulation and summarization were conducted using the tidyverse, dplyr, readxl, and janitor packages. The computational analysis was intended to reveal systematic distributional patterns rather than to test statistical hypotheses.

The final stage consisted of qualitative interpretation of the statistical outputs. Rather than treating frequencies as findings in

themselves, the quantitative results were interpreted through an onomastic perspective by examining representative toponyms from each category. This integrative procedure enabled linguistic structures to be connected with semantic meanings, cultural values, and spatial representations, thereby reconstructing the Majapahit cultural landscape as reflected in its historical village toponyms.

4. Results & Discussion

4.1 Historical Transformation of Majapahit Village Toponyms

Before examining the linguistic characteristics of Majapahit village toponyms, it is necessary to understand how these historical place names have been preserved within the present administrative system. In toponymic studies, place names are not merely geographical labels but also repositories of collective memory, cultural identity, and historical continuity. Their persistence across different historical periods reflects the dynamic interaction between language, society, and landscape (Baruadi et al., 2023; Laksmi & Prihatmoko, 2023; Hough & Izdebska, 2016). Consequently, tracing the administrative transformation of historical village names provides an important foundation for interpreting their linguistic and cultural characteristics in subsequent analyses.

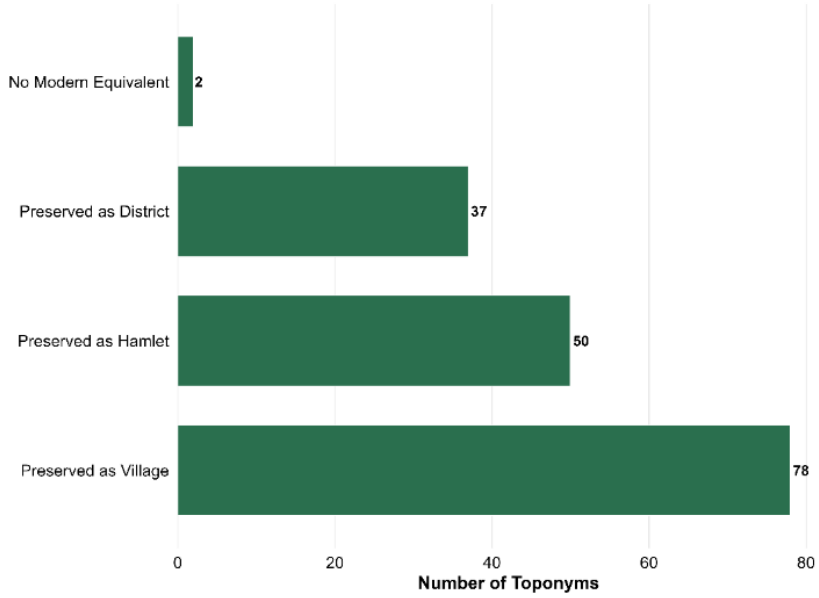

Figure 1. Administrative Transformation of Historical Majapahit Village Toponyms

Figure 1 presents the distribution of historical Majapahit village toponyms according to their present administrative status. Of the 167 historical place names identified in this study, 78 toponyms (46.71%) have been preserved as modern village names, representing the largest category. Another 50 toponyms (29.94%) have survived as hamlet names, while 37 toponyms (22.16%) have been preserved as district names. Only two historical toponyms (1.20%) no longer have an identifiable equivalent within the current administrative system. These findings indicate that the overwhelming majority of Majapahit village names have continued to exist despite administrative restructuring over several centuries.

The largest proportion of historical toponyms has been preserved at the village level. Several names have remained almost unchanged, such as Mandhala, which continues as Mandhala Village, and Binor, which is still recognized as Binor Village. Other names exhibit only minor phonological adaptation while maintaining their historical identity, such as Pongging, which developed into Pungging, and Singhasari, which is currently known as Singosari. These examples suggest that phonological modification does not necessarily indicate the disappearance of historical identity. Instead, such changes may

represent natural linguistic evolution while preserving the cultural memory associated with the original place names. Similar patterns have been reported in previous studies, which argue that place names frequently undergo phonological or orthographic adjustment without losing their historical reference or cultural significance (Kurniawan et al., 2024; Maharani & Nugrahani, 2019; Baruadi et al., 2024).

A considerable number of Majapahit village names have also survived at different administrative levels. Some historical villages have become present-day hamlets, indicating that the original settlements remain identifiable despite changes in administrative hierarchy.

Examples include Daluwang, which survives as Dluwang Hamlet, Jingan as Ngijingan Hamlet, Jajawa as Jawi Hamlet, and Sampora as Tampora Hamlet. Conversely, several historical village names have evolved into district names, suggesting an expansion of their administrative significance rather than a decline. Examples include Japan, which is currently represented within Bangsal District, Pahyangan within Puri District, and Pajarakan, whose historical name continues as Pajarakan District.

These findings demonstrate that historical place names may persist through different administrative scales, reflecting long-term continuity in the cultural landscape rather than simple preservation of administrative status. This observation supports previous arguments that toponyms function as enduring markers of cultural landscapes and spatial identity despite changes in political or administrative organization (Anggawirya et al., 2021; Kratochvíl et al., 2016; Rijadi & Wuryaningrum, 2023).

The small proportion of historical names without modern administrative equivalents suggests that the disappearance of Majapahit toponyms is relatively uncommon. Overall, the findings reveal a strong continuity between the historical settlement system of the Majapahit Kingdom and the present administrative landscape of East Java. Rather than indicating the loss of historical identity, administrative transformation appears to represent an adaptive process through which historical place names continue to function within changing political and territorial structures. This continuity reinforces the argument that toponyms constitute an important component of cultural identity, linking contemporary communities with their historical landscapes through the preservation of place names (Baxter, 2016; Hall, 2020; Harefa & Harefa, 2024).

The persistence of historical Majapahit toponyms in contemporary administrative units also provides an essential context for the linguistic analysis presented in the following section. Since most historical place names remain identifiable within the modern landscape, their linguistic structures can be examined as evidence of the continuity and transformation of naming practices across different historical periods.

4.2 Linguistic Characteristics of Majapahit Village Toponyms

The linguistic characteristics of Majapahit village toponyms were examined through two complementary dimensions, namely morphological structure and lexical composition. In onomastic studies, linguistic structure reflects how a place name is formally constructed, while lexical composition indicates the degree of complexity employed in the naming process.

Together, these characteristics reveal the naming strategies adopted by past communities and provide insight into how language was used to encode geographical and cultural knowledge within the landscape (Tent & Blair, 2019; Hough, 2016). As discussed in the conceptual framework of this study, linguistic characteristics constitute the first analytical layer for understanding the relationship between language, place, and cultural identity.

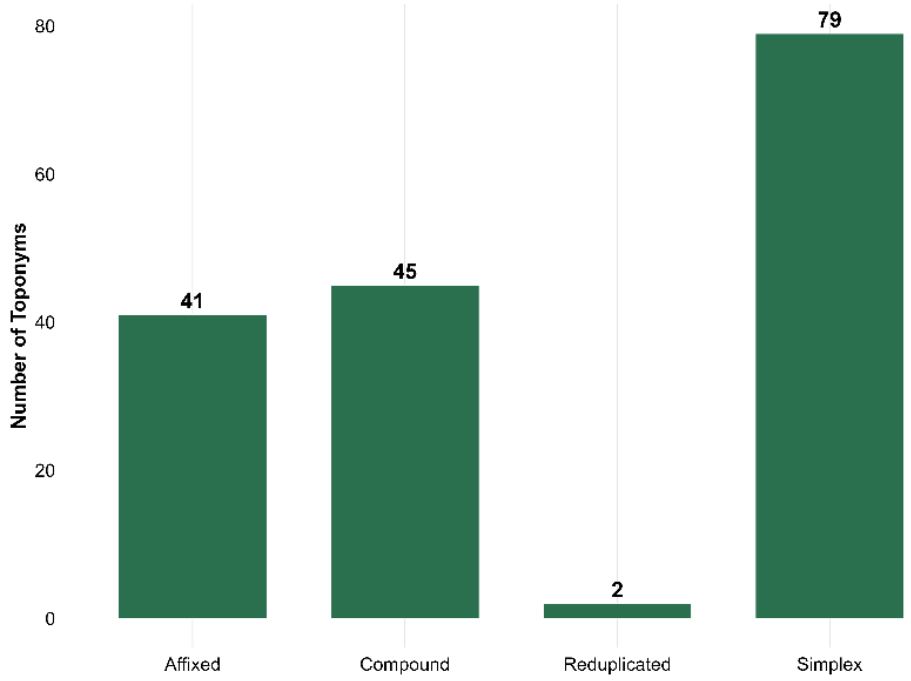

Figure 2. Distribution of Linguistic Structure Types

Figure 2 shows that simplex toponyms constitute the largest structural category, accounting for 47.31% of the dataset (79 names), followed by compound forms (26.95%), affixed forms (24.55%), and reduplicated forms (1.20%).

The predominance of simplex forms indicates that the naming system of Majapahit villages generally favored morphologically simple lexical units rather than complex word formations. Examples of simplex toponyms include *Japan, Tebu, Daluwang, Karici,* and *Pongging*, each consisting of a single lexical form without additional morphological processes.

The widespread use of simplex forms suggests that direct lexical reference was the principal strategy in naming settlements, enabling place names to remain concise while retaining distinctive referential meanings.

Although simplex forms dominate the dataset, compound toponyms also represent a substantial proportion of historical village names. These names are typically formed by combining two independent lexical elements, as illustrated by *Majapahit (maja + pahit), Kuwu Hanar (kuwu + hanar), Rabut Tugu (rabut + tugu), Pancuran Mungkur (pancuran + mungkur),* and *Kedung Dawa (kedung + dawa).*

Such constructions demonstrate that lexical compounding was employed to create more specific place references by integrating two semantic components into a single toponym.

In contrast, affixed forms, including *Pandhawan, Pahyangan, Kapulungan, Sawungan,* and *Pajarakan*, indicate that derivational morphology also contributed to the formation of settlement names, although less frequently than simplex forms. Reduplicated forms are exceptionally rare, represented only by *Babala* and *Baru-Bara*, suggesting that reduplication was not a productive naming strategy for villages during the Majapahit period.

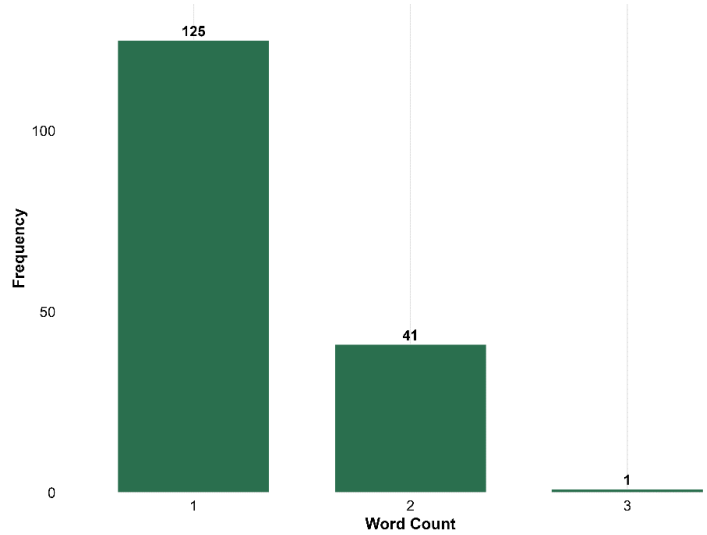

Figure 3. Distribution of Word Count in Historical Majapahit Village Toponyms

The structural pattern identified in Figure 2 is further supported by the distribution of lexical composition presented in Figure 3. Approximately 74.85% of all toponyms consist of a single word, whereas 24.55% comprise two-word constructions, and only one toponym (0.60%) contains three lexical elements. One-word toponyms include *Japan, Tambak, Jajawa, Rembang,* and *Binor*, whereas two-word constructions are represented by names such as *Majapahit, Rabut Tugu, Pakis Haji, Banu Hanget,* and *Pancuran Mungkur*. The only three-word construction identified in the corpus is *Madakaripura*. The close correspondence between the dominance of simplex structures and one-word toponyms indicates that Majapahit place naming generally relied on lexical economy, employing the shortest possible linguistic form capable of distinguishing a settlement from its surrounding landscape.

The internal composition of compound toponyms further illustrates the lexical diversity of the naming system. Rather than repeatedly employing a limited set of lexical components, compound names combine a wide range of initial and final elements. For instance, *Majapahit* consists of the elements *maja* and *pahit*, *Rabut Tugu* combines *rabut* and *tugu*, *Banu Hanget* joins *banu* and *hanget*, while *Kedung Dawa* integrates *kedung* and *dawa*. Similar patterns are observed in *Pakis Haji, Jati Gumelar, Kambang Rawi*, and *Tal Tunggal*. The frequency analysis shows that no initial or final element dominates the corpus, as most lexical elements occur only once. This finding indicates that the productivity of Majapahit village names did not depend on the repeated use of particular morphemes but rather on the creative combination of diverse lexical units adapted to local environmental, social, and cultural contexts.

Overall, the linguistic characteristics of Majapahit village toponyms demonstrate a clear preference for structurally simple naming practices while allowing sufficient flexibility through compounding and derivation when greater semantic specificity was required. The predominance of simplex and one-word toponyms reflects an economical naming strategy that prioritizes recognizability and efficiency, whereas compound constructions enrich lexical representation by combining multiple semantic elements into a single place name. These structural patterns provide the linguistic foundation for understanding how meanings were encoded in Majapahit toponyms and therefore serve as an essential basis for the semantic and cultural analyses presented in the following section.

4.3 Semantic and Cultural Representation of Majapahit Toponyms

The semantic characteristics of Majapahit village toponyms reveal how historical communities conceptualized their physical environment, social

institutions, and cultural worldview through place naming. While linguistic structure explains how names were morphologically formed, semantic analysis provides insight into what those names represented within the cultural landscape. In linguistic anthropology and onomastics, place names are regarded as repositories of ecological knowledge, social organization, belief systems, and collective memory because they encode culturally meaningful information associated with particular landscapes. Consequently, examining semantic categories and cultural values enables a deeper understanding of the cognitive and cultural principles underlying the Majapahit naming system.

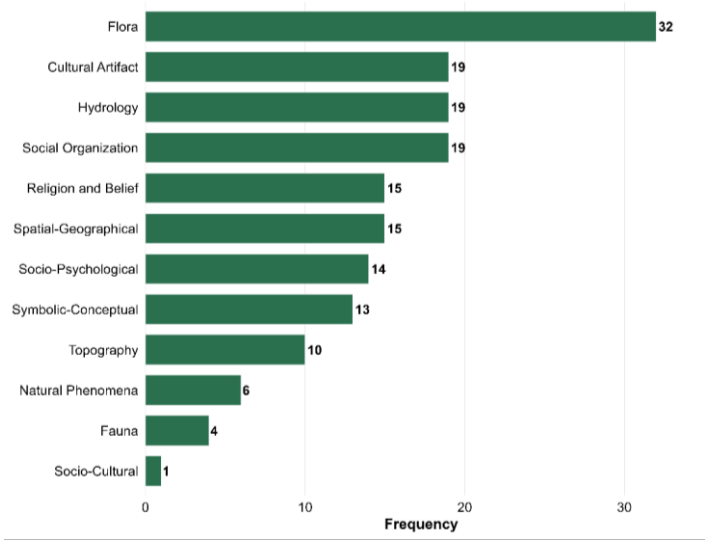

Figure 4. Distribution of Semantic Categories of Majapahit Village Toponyms

Figure 4 demonstrates that flora constitutes the largest semantic category, accounting for 32 toponyms (19.16%), followed by cultural artifacts, hydrology, and social organization, each represented by 19 toponyms (11.38%). Other categories include religion and belief (8.98%), spatial-geographical references (8.98%), socio-psychological concepts (8.38%), symbolic-conceptual expressions (7.78%), topography (5.99%), natural phenomena (3.59%), fauna (2.40%), and socio-cultural references (0.60%). Rather than concentrating on political figures or personal names, Majapahit village toponyms predominantly describe environmental features, social institutions, and symbolic meanings, indicating that naming practices were closely associated with the lived landscape.

The predominance of flora-based toponyms suggests that vegetation constituted one of the principal reference systems in naming settlements. Examples include *Tebu*, referring to sugarcane and associated with plantation agriculture; *Waru*, derived from the waru tree (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*); *Pakis Haji*, referring to the cycad plant; *Arenon*, associated with sugar palm; and *Gebang Kerep*, describing dense gebang palms. Other names, such as *Pajarakan*, *Pasawahan*, and *Kunir*, likewise refer to cultivated plants or agricultural landscapes. These examples indicate that vegetation functioned not merely as a physical landmark but also as an economic resource that shaped local livelihoods. The dominance of this category therefore reflects the close interaction between settlement patterns and ecological resources, highlighting the importance of agricultural and forest environments within the Majapahit cultural landscape.

The second major group comprises hydrological and cultural artifact toponyms. Hydrological names frequently describe rivers, springs, lakes, or wetlands, as illustrated by *Karici* ("a spring"), *Pancuran Mungkur* ("a spring located behind the settlement"), *Kedung Dawa* ("a long deep pool"), *Ranu Akuning* ("a yellowish lake"), *Banu Hanget* ("a hot spring"), and *Toya Rungun* ("a fast-flowing stream"). These names indicate that access to water constituted a fundamental criterion in the establishment and identification of settlements.

By contrast, cultural artifact toponyms emphasize human-made objects and institutions. Examples include *Madakaripura*, referring to a royal administrative centre, *Dhadhap*, meaning a shield, *Balerah*, denoting a traditional pavilion, *Tumbu*, referring to a woven basket, and *Candhi*, representing a sacred temple. Together, these categories demonstrate that Majapahit place naming simultaneously reflected environmental resources and material culture, suggesting that settlements were conceptualized through both natural and built environments.

Semantic references to social organization, religion and belief, and symbolic concepts further illustrate the sociocultural dimensions of Majapahit toponymy. Social organizational names include *Japan*, interpreted as an administrative centre, *Kuwu Hanar*, associated with village leadership, *Sadheng*, referring to a trading port, *Panggulan*, indicating a distribution route, and *Patukangan*, denoting a craft production centre. Religious names such as *Mandhala*, *Pahyangan*, *Rabut Tugu*, *Pawitra*, *Wedha-wedwan*, and *Tarapas* refer to sacred spaces, temples, hermitages, or places of worship, demonstrating the importance of spiritual geography in organizing settlement space. Meanwhile, symbolic-conceptual names, including *Pancasara*, *Jayakreta*, *Kagenengan*, and *Arya*, represent ideas of authority, victory, governance, and nobility rather than tangible landscape features. These semantic patterns indicate that Majapahit place names functioned not only as geographical identifiers but also as symbolic expressions of political authority, religious belief, and collective values embedded within the cultural landscape.

The semantic patterns identified above are closely reflected in the distribution of cultural values presented in Figure 5. Ecological values dominate the corpus, accounting for 56 toponyms (33.53%), followed by social values (23.95%), ideological values (13.17%), agrarian values (11.38%), religious values (10.18%), and historical values (7.78%). The predominance of ecological values corresponds closely with the high frequency of flora, hydrology, and topographical categories. Toponyms such as *Karici*, *Kedung Dawa*, *Ranu Akuning*, *Gebang Kerep*, and *Pakis Haji* encode ecological characteristics that would have assisted communities in identifying water sources, vegetation, and landforms. Social values are reflected in names such as *Japan*, *Kuwu Hanar*, *Patukangan*, and *Sadheng*, which refer to governance, production, and trade. Ideological values emerge in names such as *Jayakreta*, *Pancasara*, and *Kagenengan*, representing victory, authority, and legitimate governance, whereas religious values are expressed through *Mandhala*, *Pahyangan*, *Pawitra*, and *Rabut Tugu*. Historical values are embodied in names such as *Majapahit*, *Madakaripura*, *Singhasari*, and *Balater*, which preserve memories of political institutions, royal centres, and military organization.

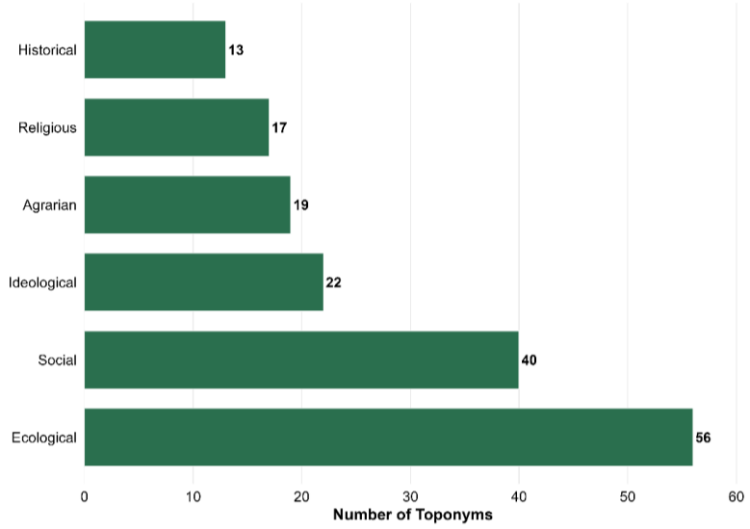

Figure 5. Distribution of Cultural Values Represented in Majapahit Village Toponyms

Overall, the semantic and cultural patterns demonstrate that Majapahit village toponyms were not assigned arbitrarily but constituted a coherent system of environmental and cultural representation. The predominance of ecological references indicates that natural landscapes formed the primary basis of settlement identification, while social, religious, ideological, and historical references reveal the integration of political organization, belief systems, and collective memory into the naming process. These findings support the proposition that Majapahit toponyms functioned as linguistic representations of cultural landscapes, preserving both environmental knowledge and sociocultural values across generations.

4.4 Relationships among Linguistic Structure, Semantic Categories, Cultural Values, and Spatial Representation

The preceding analyses have independently described the linguistic structures, semantic categories, cultural values, and spatial representations of Majapahit village toponyms. However, these individual distributions do not fully explain how morphological forms interact with semantic meanings and cultural representations within the Majapahit naming system. Place names are not merely linguistic labels but constitute integrated semiotic constructions in which lexical form, semantic content, cultural knowledge, and spatial perception operate simultaneously (Hough, 2016; Tent & Blair, 2019). Consequently, examining the relationships among these dimensions provides a more comprehensive understanding of how the Majapahit community organized and encoded knowledge about their cultural landscape through toponymy. Rather than functioning independently, linguistic structures appear to influence the semantic domains represented by village names, which subsequently correspond to particular cultural values and spatial functions. This integrated perspective enables Majapahit toponyms to be interpreted not only as linguistic expressions but also as representations of environmental adaptation, social organization, ideological beliefs, and spatial cognition.

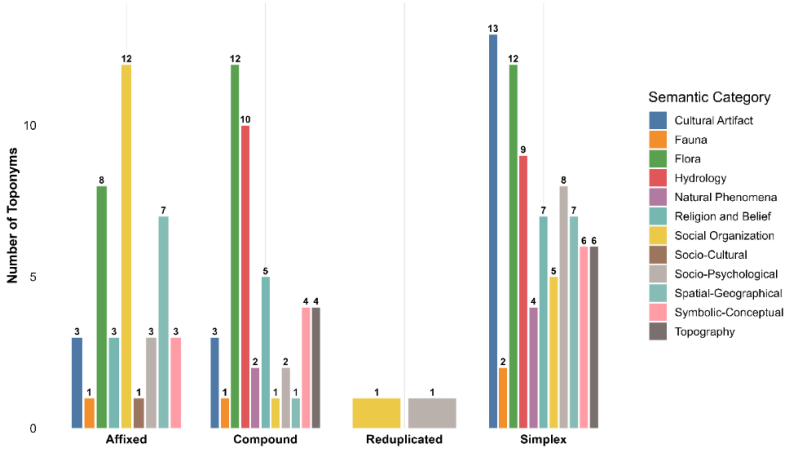

Figure 6. Relationship between Linguistic Structure and Semantic Categories

Figure 6 demonstrates a systematic relationship between linguistic structure and semantic category. Compound toponyms are predominantly associated with environmental semantics, particularly flora (12 names) and hydrology (10 names), whereas affixed forms are concentrated in social organization (12 names). By contrast, simplex forms occur across nearly all semantic categories, indicating greater lexical flexibility. Compound constructions typically combine two lexical elements to provide a more specific description of environmental characteristics. For example, *Majapahit* combines *maja* ('bael tree') and *pahit* ('bitter'), referring to a landscape identified by the presence of the maja tree. Likewise, *Pancuran Mungkur* denotes "a spring located behind the settlement," while *Kedung Dawa* literally refers to "a long deep pool," and *Banu Hanget* denotes "a hot spring." Similar ecological descriptions are also evident in *Gebang*

Kerep, meaning "a dense gebang palm forest," and *Ranu Akuning*, referring to "a yellowish lake." These examples indicate that compounding enabled the combination of two meaningful lexical units, producing more detailed representations of environmental features than simplex forms. In contrast, affixed toponyms such as *Panggulan* ("distribution route"), *Payaman* ("place of livelihood"), *Patukangan* ("craft production centre"), and *Sarampwan* ("meeting place") primarily denote social institutions and collective activities. The recurring suffix *-an* functions as a locative marker, transforming lexical roots into place names that designate settlements according to their social functions rather than their physical characteristics. Meanwhile, simplex names such as *Tebu*, *Karici*, *Mandhala*, *Pongging*, and *Daluwang* occur across flora, hydrology, religion, topography, and cultural artifacts, demonstrating that morphologically simple forms were sufficiently productive to represent diverse semantic domains without additional derivational processes.

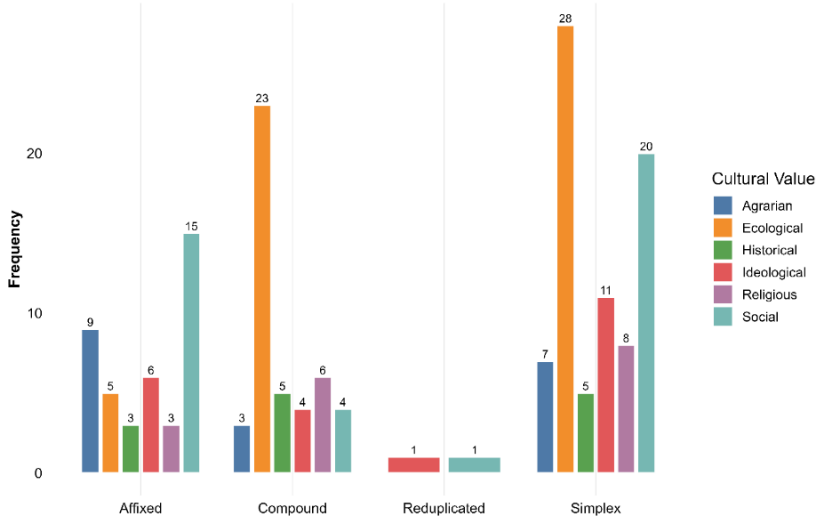

Figure 7. Relationship between Linguistic Structure and Cultural Values

The association between linguistic structure and semantic category is further reflected in the distribution of cultural values, as presented in Figure 7. Compound toponyms are overwhelmingly associated with ecological values (23 names), whereas affixed forms are predominantly linked to social values (15 names). Simplex forms likewise exhibit a strong ecological orientation (28 names), followed by social values (20 names). This pattern suggests that different morphological strategies were employed to encode different aspects of the Majapahit cultural landscape. Compound names such as *Kedung Dawa*, *Ranu Akuning*, *Banu Hanget*, *Toya Rungun*, and *Gebang Kerep* describe prominent environmental features that were directly relevant to settlement location and resource availability. Conversely, affixed names such as *Panggulan*, *Payaman*, *Patukangan*, *Kutugan*, and *Sumandhing* represent transportation, production, occupational specialization, community organization, and social interaction, emphasizing functional aspects of settlement life rather than environmental characteristics. At the same time, simplex names including *Waru*, *Renes*, *Gelam*, *Pongging*, and *Balanak* continue to preserve ecological references through direct lexical designation of trees, watercourses, landforms, and fauna. These findings indicate that morphological structure was not selected arbitrarily but was systematically associated with particular semantic domains and cultural values, suggesting that the linguistic form of Majapahit village names reflected the primary function or significance of the places they identified.

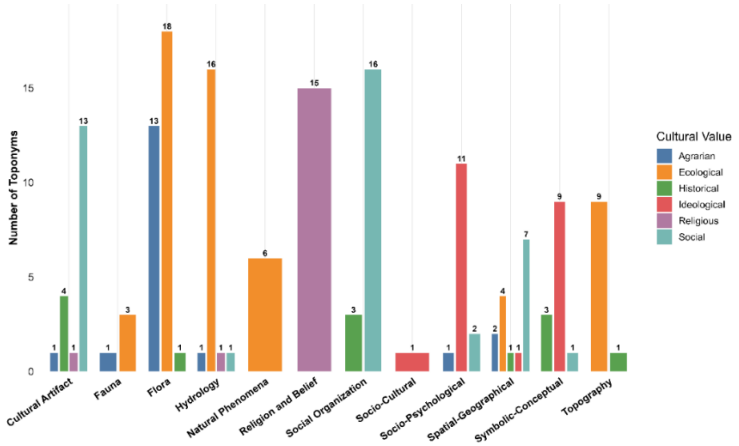

Figure 8. Relationship between Semantic Categories and Cultural Values

The relationships observed between linguistic structure and cultural values become even more evident when semantic categories are examined directly against their associated cultural values (Figure 8). The results indicate that each semantic category consistently corresponds to a particular cultural orientation rather than being randomly distributed across multiple values. Flora, for example, is predominantly associated with ecological (18 names) and agrarian values (13 names). Toponyms such as *Tebu*, *Pakis Haji*, *Arenon*, *Gebang Kerep*, and *Pasawahan* illustrate how vegetation was conceptualized not only as a natural resource but also as the basis of agricultural production and local subsistence. Likewise, hydrological toponyms are overwhelmingly linked to ecological values, as reflected in names such as *Karici*, *Kedung Dawa*, *Jaladhi*, *Banu Hanget*, and *Toya Rungun*, all of which describe springs, rivers, lakes, or other water-related landscape features. In contrast, social organization is almost exclusively associated with social values, represented by names such as *Japan*, *Kuwu Hanar*, *Patukangan*, *Sadheng*, and *Payaman*, which refer to administrative functions, local governance, craft production, commercial activities, and settlement organization. Similarly, the semantic category of religion and belief corresponds almost entirely to religious values, as exemplified by *Mandhala*, *Pahyangan*, *Rabut Lawang*, *Wedha-wedwan*, and *Tarapas*, all of which denote sacred places, religious institutions, or spaces associated with ritual activities. Another distinctive pattern appears in the symbolic-conceptual category, where names such as *Pancasara*, *Jayakreta*, *Kagenengan*, and *Arya* predominantly express ideological values related to authority, legitimacy, leadership, and social prestige rather than describing physical landscape features. These patterns demonstrate that semantic categories function as the principal mediators through which cultural values are embedded in Majapahit village toponyms.

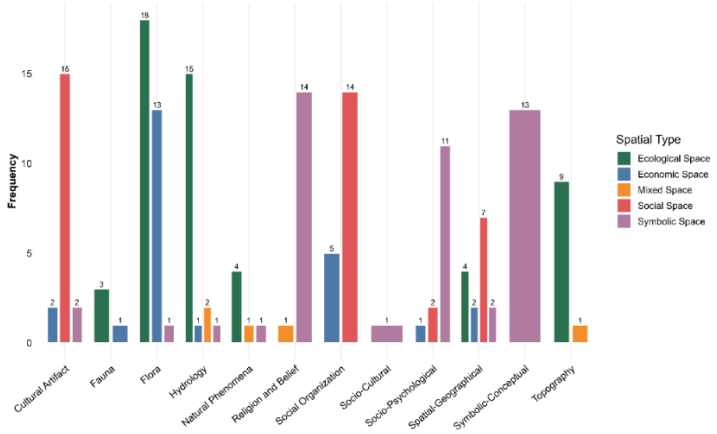

Figure 9. Relationship between Semantic Categories and Spatial Representation

The close association between semantic meaning and cultural values is further reflected in the spatial dimension of Majapahit toponymy (Figure 9). Ecological semantic categories are primarily associated with ecological space, whereas social and religious categories tend to occupy social and symbolic spaces, respectively. Flora and hydrological names provide the clearest examples of ecological space. Toponyms such as *Karici*, *Gebang Kerep*, *Banu Hanget*, *Ranu Akuning*, and *Jaladhi* identify springs, forests, lakes, and other environmental resources that were essential for settlement establishment and daily subsistence. In contrast, names representing social organization, including *Japan*, *Kuwu Hanar*, *Patukangan*, *Sarampwan*, and *Sumandhing*, define social space by referring to administrative centres, production areas, transportation routes, and locations where social interaction occurred. Meanwhile, symbolic space is dominated by religious and symbolic-conceptual toponyms such as *Mandhala*, *Pahyangan*, *Pancasara*, *Kagenengan*, and *Tarapas*, whose meanings are associated with sacred places, political legitimacy, spiritual authority, and collective identity rather than tangible environmental features. These findings indicate that Majapahit village names simultaneously encoded not only the physical characteristics of settlements but also the functional and symbolic organization of space, reflecting the multidimensional relationship between language and landscape.

Taken together, the four cross-analyses reveal that the Majapahit naming system followed a coherent and interconnected pattern. Linguistic structure determined how place names were morphologically constructed, semantic categories specified the principal domain of reference, cultural values reflected the social significance attached to those references, and spatial representations situated those meanings within the broader cultural landscape. Rather than operating as independent linguistic features, these four dimensions formed an integrated system through which Majapahit communities interpreted, organized, and transmitted knowledge about their environment. This hierarchical relationship demonstrates that Majapahit toponyms functioned as more than geographical identifiers; they constituted linguistic representations of ecological adaptation, social organization, ideological beliefs, and spatial cognition that collectively shaped the cultural landscape and preserved historical memory across generations.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the toponyms of Majapahit villages constitute an integrated linguistic and cultural system that reflects the historical continuity of the Majapahit cultural landscape. Most historical village names have been preserved within the present administrative system as village, hamlet, or district names, indicating the persistence of historical place identities despite administrative transformations. Linguistically, the naming system is characterized by the predominance of simplex and single-word forms, suggesting a preference for concise lexical constructions, while compound and affixed forms provide greater semantic specificity for describing environmental features and social functions. Semantically, the toponyms are dominated by ecological references, particularly flora and hydrology, which correspond closely with ecological and agrarian cultural values. Cross-analysis further reveals systematic relationships among linguistic structure, semantic categories, cultural values, and spatial representation, indicating that Majapahit place names were created through a coherent naming system rather than as isolated lexical units. These findings support the view that Majapahit toponyms function not only as geographical identifiers but also as linguistic representations of ecological knowledge, social organization, cultural values, and spatial cognition that collectively preserve the cultural memory of the Majapahit civilization.

Future research should extend the present framework by integrating historical documents, archaeological evidence, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to reconstruct the spatial evolution of Majapahit settlements and to verify the historical continuity of individual toponyms across different periods. Comparative

studies involving other historical kingdoms in Indonesia or Southeast Asia would also contribute to a broader understanding of how linguistic structures, semantic systems, and cultural landscapes interact in the formation and preservation of historical place names. Such interdisciplinary approaches would strengthen the role of toponymic studies in documenting cultural heritage, supporting historical landscape conservation, and enriching theoretical discussions within linguistic anthropology and onomastics.

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