



THE MEANING OF AYAM INKUNG IN THE LANGKAHAN WEDDING TRADITION OF THE BOLO COMMUNITY IN BOYOLALI REGENCY: A LITERARY GASTRONOMY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The Langkahan wedding tradition in Bolo Village, Boyolali Regency, is facing extinction due to modernization. The younger generation performs the rituals without understanding the meaning behind each symbol, while the older generation who hold the key to this traditional knowledge is dwindling. No research has yet examined ayam ingkung as a ritual dish in relation to Indonesian language education. This study aims to analyze the meaning of "ayam ingkung" in the "langkahan" wedding tradition through a literary gastronomy approach, as well as to examine its relevance to the teaching of descriptive texts in Indonesian Language for 8th-grade students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) under the Merdeka Curriculum. The method used is qualitative descriptive with a field research design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation from twelve informants selected through purposive sampling, then analyzed using Spradley's (2016) ethnographic model grounded in Endraswara's (2018) literary gastronomy theory. The research results indicate that ayam ingkung contains (1) symbolic meanings representing submission to God, control of one's desires, and the hope for family unity (10 data points), (2) philosophical meanings encapsulating the seven noble Javanese values namely andhap asor, eling lan waspada, tepa selira, lilo legowo, control of desires, steadfastness of principles, and the origin of the name ingkung (21 data points), as well as (3) natural meanings reflecting local wisdom in ingredient selection and processing techniques (12 data points). These three meanings converge on two main cultural themes: respect for the family hierarchy and the balance between Javanese traditions and Islamic values. This study confirms that ayam ingkung has strong potential to be integrated as a subject for descriptive text learning in 8th-grade MTs, encouraging students to write in a multisensory manner, enriching their meaningful vocabulary, and instilling the values of local wisdom in accordance with the Pancasila Student Profile

INTRODUCTION

Javanese culture holds a wealth of traditions that are not merely ceremonial but are rooted in a profound system of values and philosophy of life. Rofiq (2019) defines tradition as an ancestral legacy passed down across generations in various forms, encompassing symbolic, principled, material, and social aspects. One tradition that remains alive in parts of Central Java is the langkahan wedding, a series of rituals performed when a younger sibling is set to marry before an older, unmarried sibling. This tradition is not merely a customary formality but an expression of respect for the family order, which in Javanese culture is viewed as having social and spiritual consequences if violated.

The Langkahan wedding tradition is still practiced in Bolo Village, Wonosegoro Subdistrict, Boyolali Regency. This tradition requires several ubo rampe, or ritual items, for its performance. The most important item is the “ayam ingkung.” Ayam ingkung is a whole male free-range chicken cooked with yellow spices and served with its legs and head tied together with a sharp bamboo stick, arranged to resemble a person in a prostrating position. Ayam ingkung is not merely an ordinary accompaniment but serves as the primary symbol embodying moral messages, life philosophies, and the spiritual values of Javanese society.

The threats to the survival of this tradition are real and varied. Modernization and globalization are eroding the younger generation’s understanding of the meaning behind each symbol. An increasing number of people perform the Langkahan ritual merely as a procedural formality without understanding its meaning. Furthermore, academic studies on Ayam Ingkung have predominantly focused on the fields of culinary tourism ethnography and cultural studies (Khoerunisa, 2025; Suwandojo, 2021; Lestari & Pratami, 2018), without linking them to the realm of Indonesian language education.

This gap needs to be addressed immediately, given that the teaching of descriptive texts in Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) faces urgent pedagogical challenges. Students struggle to develop rich and meaningful descriptions because the objects presented by teachers are generic, lack context, and do not challenge their imagination. The Merdeka Curriculum explicitly mandates learning rooted in local wisdom and students’ real-life experiences, yet its implementation in the classroom remains limited. This study aims to address two issues simultaneously. First, how can the meaning of ayam ingkung in the langkahan wedding tradition of the Bolo community be academically explored through the framework of literary gastronomy, Second, how can these findings be concretely integrated into the teaching of descriptive texts in Indonesian language classes for eighth-grade MTs students.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a field research design. The research was conducted in Bolo Village, Wonosegoro Subdistrict, Boyolali Regency, Central Java Province, which was selected through purposive sampling because its community actively preserves the langkahan wedding tradition. The study lasted six months from September 2025 to February 2026.

The research subjects consisted of six categories, each comprising two informants selected based on their involvement in and knowledge of the langkahan tradition, including (1) traditional leaders, (2) village elders as custodians of collective memory, (3) practitioners of the langkahan wedding tradition, (4) cooks responsible for preparing the ingkung chicken, (5) parents of the tradition’s practitioners, and (6) the general public as comparative informants to gain insight into shifts in perception in the modern era.

Data were collected using three methods: (1) in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide, which were recorded and transcribed; (2) participatory observation of the Langkahan traditional procession; and (3) documentation in the form of photographs and field notes. Data validity was tested through triangulation of methods, namely cross-checking data from interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure consistency of findings.

Data analysis employed Spradley’s (2016) ethnographic model, comprising four stages: (1) domain analysis to identify primary cultural categories; (2) taxonomic analysis to uncover the internal structure of each domain; (3) component analysis to identify contrasting dimensions between categories; and (4) cultural theme analysis to formulate overarching principles that serve as the common thread of the findings. The primary theoretical framework is Endraswara’s (2018) literary gastronomy, operationalized through three dimensions of symbolic, philosophical, and natural meaning.

RESULTS

1. The Symbolic Meaning of Ayam Ingkung in the Langkahan Wedding Tradition

An analysis of Spradley’s ethnographic model identifies symbolic meaning as the first domain in the system of meanings associated with ayam ingkung. Endraswara (2018:12) defines symbolic meaning in literary gastronomy as moral messages and social values represented through the visual attributes of food,

namely shape, color, position, name, or texture. Based on an analysis of interview data from twelve informants, three main symbolic aspects were found that consistently emerged in the narratives of various categories of informants.



Figure 1. Position of the Ayam Ingkung with Its Head Tilted Backward

Table 1. Frequency of Data Symbolic Meaning of the Roasted Chicken

No.	Symbolic Aspect	Interview Evidence	Meaning	Informant Code	Data Count
1.	A posture resembling someone in prostration, with the head tilted upward	<i>The shape resembles someone prostrating with their face upward; it symbolizes that we must always prostrate ourselves before God. (KRT-PA-160126).</i>	A symbol of submission to Allah SWT and steadfastness of faith; even though the body prostrates to the earth, the human heart and mind remain directed toward God.	KRT-PA-160126, SJ-PA-230126, SM-PT-010126, IM-PT-281225	4
2.	The binding of the arms and legs (bamboo siladan) as a means of controlling carnal desires	<i>Tied tightly to restrain human carnal desires, so that we do not give in to excessive desires. (SJ-PA-230126).</i>	A symbol of controlling carnal desires and obedience to divine law; the sharpness of the bamboo represents the firmness of God's law.	KRT-PA-160126, SJ-PA-230126, SJS-OTP-010126	3
3.	The wholeness of the whole chicken served as a metaphor for the hope of a family.	<i>The whole roasted chicken symbolizes the perfection of life, the hope that the younger sibling's family will always remain intact. (SM-PT-010126).</i>	A metaphor for the hope that family life remains intact and harmonious.	SM-PT-010126, SS-OTP-281225, IM-PT-281225	3
Total Symbolic Meaning Data					10

Source: Primary Data, 2026

2. Philosophical Meaning

Philosophical meaning refers to an in-depth interpretation of food symbols associated with a community's worldview and noble values (Endraswara, 2018). The seven main philosophical values associated with ayam ingkung yielded a total of 21 data points.



Figure 2. Presenting the Ingkung to the Older Sibling

Table 2. Frequency of Philosophical Meaning Data

No.	Philosophical Aspect	Interview Evidence	Meaning	Informant Code	Data Count
1	Andhap asor (humility)	<i>“As human beings, we must be andhap asor, or humble; a younger sibling who marries before an older sibling must be even more humble, not arrogant.” (SJ-PA-230126).</i>	Teaches younger siblings not to feel superior to older siblings even if they marry first; concretely manifested in the sungkem ritual.	SJ-PA-230126, KRT-PA-160126, IM-PT-281225	3
2	Mindful and vigilant (remembering god & being cautious)	<i>“Our hearts and minds remain focused on Allah SWT; stay mindful of the Lord, do not forget Him even when you are happy.” (KRT-PA-160126).</i>	The awareness to always remember God and be cautious amidst worldly joy and busyness.	KRT-PA-160126, SJ-PA-230126, SJS-OTP-010126	3
3	Control of desires	<i>The whole roasted chicken symbolizes the perfection of life, a hope that the younger sibling’s household will always remain intact. (SM-PT-010126).</i>	Excessive desires and emotions must be subdued to maintain the harmony of family relationships.	SM-PT-010126, SS-OTP-281225, IM-PT-281225	3
4	Empathy	<i>“To uphold proper etiquette and protect the older sibling’s feelings, the younger sibling must practice empathy, putting themselves in the older sibling’s shoes.” (SJ-PA-230126).</i>	Encouraging younger siblings to be sensitive to their older siblings’ feelings; empathy is manifested in concrete actions such as the ritual of stepping back.	SJ-PA-230126, SM-PT-010126, KRT-PA-160126, IM-PT-281225	4
5	Lilo Legowo (serenity)	<i>“To make her older sister happy, joyful, serene, and accepting of fate that is what must be in the older sister’s</i>	The older sibling is expected to accept reality with an open heart the younger sibling	KRT-PA-160126, SH-S-100126, ST-S-281225, SJ-PA-231225	4

		heart.” (KRT-PA-160126).	is willing to bear all consequences.		
6	Firmness of principles and life stance	“The chicken’s head facing upward signifies that one must have a firm stance and always remember God.” (SJ-PA-230126).	Symbolized by the chicken’s head looking upward as a representation of holding fast to values despite facing trials.	SJ-PA-230126, KRT-PA-160126	2
7	The origin of the name ingkung.	“Ingkung comes from the word linangkung, which means ‘more than more,’ so it can be interpreted as offering a prayer with utmost sincerity.” (KRT-PA-160126).	Derived from the word linangkung, meaning a prayer offered with a sincerity that goes beyond the ordinary.	KRT-PA-160126, SJ-PA-230126	2
Total Philosophical Meaning Data					21

3. Natural Meaning

Natural meaning relates to the biological functions and health aspects inherent in the ingredients and preparation process of ayam ingkung. Five aspects of natural meaning were identified (12 data points), indicating that Javanese culinary traditions do not overlook the health dimension in their ritual practices.



Figure 3. The Process of Cooking Ayam Ingkung

Table 3. Frequency of Data on Natural Meaning

No.	Natural Aspect	Interview Evidence	Informant Code	Data Count
1.	Selection of male native chickens (high protein, low fat)	“Male native chickens, not Cemani chickens, not commercial chickens. Native chickens are healthy, and their meat isn’t very fatty.” (S-JM-281225)	S-JM-281225, PR-JM-281225, KRT-PA-160126, SJ-PA-230126	4
2.	Medicinal spices (turmeric, candlenuts, lemongrass, galangal, onions)	“A complete set of kitchen spices: turmeric, candlenuts, lemongrass, galangal it’s not just about flavor, but also health.” (PR-JM-281225)	PR-JM-281225, S-JM-281225	2
3.	Slaughter in accordance with Islamic law (halal and hygienic)	“Start with ‘Bismillah,’ slaughter with ‘Bismillah,’ then it’s ready” (S-JM-281225)	S-JM-281225, PR-JM-281225	2

4.	Cooking method, boil then grill (minimal oil)	<i>"Boiled with a full set of spices, then grilled. Grill for an hour, turning it over." (PR-JM-281225)</i>	S-JM-281225, PR-JM-281225	2
5.	Balanced savory-sweet flavor without artificial flavorings.	<i>"Yes, savory-sweet, from soy sauce and natural spices, no artificial flavor enhancers." (S-JM-281225)</i>	S-JM-281225. PR-JM-181225	2
Total Natural Meaning				12

Source: Primary Data, 2026

DISCUSSION

The Significance of Ayam Inkung in the Langkahan Wedding Tradition A Literary Gastronomy Perspective

Research findings confirm that the ingkung chicken in the Langkahan wedding tradition is not merely a ritual dish but a meaningful cultural text that can be interpreted through the framework of literary gastronomy proposed by Endraswara (2018). Taxonomic analysis reveals the internal structure of each subdomain, while component analysis highlights the distinguishing characteristics of the three complementary dimensions of meaning that together form a cohesive system of meaning.

The symbolic aspect the chicken's posture resembling a person in prostration with its head facing upward carries the meaning that, although the body prostrates itself to the earth, the human heart and mind are always directed toward God. The binding of the wings and legs using sharp bamboo, or in Javanese, pring siladan, represents the firmness of moral and divine law, as well as the notion that human desires must be controlled by God's strict law. The fact that the chicken is left whole, without being cut up, serves as a metaphor for the family's life remaining intact and harmonious. This finding aligns with Sumardi (2021), who discovered that the ingkung chicken in death commemoration ceremonies in Bengkulu represents submission and gratitude to God.

The philosophical aspects that shape the seven noble Javanese values andhap asor, eling lan waspada, tepa slira, lilo legowo, self-control, steadfastness of principle, and the origin of the name ingkung form a comprehensive Javanese ethical system. These seven values can be grouped into three categories. First, the relationship between humans and God, which includes eling lan waspada, self control, steadfastness of principle, and the origin of the name ingkung. These four values center on the understanding that humans must always direct themselves toward God in every action. The value of eling lan waspada serves as a reminder that worldly happiness must not become an obstacle to spiritual connection. The origin of the name ingkung from the word linangkung affirms that prayers offered in rituals performed with sincerity go beyond the ordinary.

The origin of the word "ingkung" from "linangkung" signifies a prayer offered with utmost sincerity. As articulated by K. R.T. Darsito Wongsonagoro, this confirms that the ingkung chicken is a spiritual medium reinterpreted by Sunan Kalijaga, transforming it from a pre-Islamic offering into a means of prayer within the Islamic context. This finding confirms the process of cultural adaptation described by Koentjaraningrat (2009), in which Javanese culture demonstrates flexibility in integrating local traditions with Islamic values.

The first natural aspect is the selection of male free-range chickens as the main ingredient, this choice reflects local wisdom in food selection. Scientifically, male free-range chickens have a higher protein content and lower saturated fat levels compared to Cemani chickens. The second aspect is the use of traditional spices that are beneficial to health. Turmeric contains curcumin, which has anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. Candlenuts are rich in unsaturated fats and vitamin E, which are good for heart health. Lemongrass has antimicrobial and antibacterial properties. Galangal aids digestion. The third aspect is slaughter in accordance with Islamic law; the slaughter technique, which involves quickly cutting the main blood vessels, allows for maximum blood drainage. The fourth aspect involves traditional cooking techniques such as boiling and/or grilling, which are considered healthy methods. The boiling process ensures even cooking all the way through the chicken meat. Grilling, meanwhile, creates a dry outer layer without the addition of excessive oil.

The fifth aspect is the savorysweet flavor, which is derived entirely from natural ingredients without any added synthetic flavorings, thereby preventing the accumulation of health issues in the body when consumed.

The Relevance of the Symbolic Meaning of Ayam Inkung to Indonesian Language Education

The findings regarding the three dimensions of the meaning of ayam ingkung (symbolic, philosophical, and natural) in the langkahan wedding tradition of the Bolo Village community have a very strong relevance to Indonesian language learning. Specifically, this relevance is rooted in the Merdeka Curriculum Phase D for 8th grade Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), particularly in the writing element of the chapter “Jelajah Nusantara” (Exploring the Archipelago). The teaching of descriptive texts has often been limited to the use of overly generic and abstract objects, thereby restricting students’ imagination and expressive abilities. By integrating the ayam ingkung as a concrete object rooted in local wisdom, instructional materials become more contextual and rich in cultural content closely tied to the students’ immediate environment.

Structurally, the visual, symbolic, and natural characteristics of the ingkung chicken in the Langkahan tradition provide practical methodological insights for students in organizing the three main structures of a descriptive text, identification, description of parts, and conclusion. In the identification structure general description, the object of the ingkung chicken in Langkahan weddings serves as a strong contextual stimulus to train students in establishing the object’s identity, determining the tradition’s location in Bolo Village, Boyolali Regency, and broadening their understanding of the background for selecting the object. The uniqueness of this ritual’s ubarampe makes it easier for students to capture the reader’s attention from the very first paragraph through an initial introduction to a specific local wisdom object, thereby eliminating barriers to starting their writing.

The greatest benefit of this research lies in the completion of the part-description structure, which requires a detailed and vivid description of objects through a multisensory approach. The natural and symbolic dimensions of the ingkung chicken provide abundant visual and sensory material for students to develop into several types of part descriptions. First, part descriptions based on the object’s components can be developed by analyzing the anatomy of the whole ingkung chicken presentation, starting from the head’s downward-facing position, the tied wings, to the legs bent as if in a prostrating posture. Second, part descriptions based on the process of an event can be developed from natural aspects, where students chronologically describe the process of selecting local roosters, slaughtering techniques compliant with Islamic law, and the stage of boiling the yellow spice mixture without oil, which produces a distinctive aroma. Third, a focused description can be directed at the details of the bamboo ties that secure the chicken’s body. Through this wealth of empirical data, students can easily compose sharp, structured, and vivid descriptions without getting stuck on superficial details.

In the concluding section that is, the conclusion or final impression the philosophical dimension of the ayam ingkung provides students with material for deep reflection, enabling them to conclude their writing with substance. Unlike typical descriptive texts, which tend to end paragraphs with superficial personal impressions, the integration of this research trains students to formulate conclusions grounded in noble values. Students can compose a concluding impression by linking the physical wholeness of the ingkung chicken as a symbol of hope for family harmony, as well as a reflection of the values of andhap asor (humility) and lilo legowo (sincere acceptance) in sibling relationships. Furthermore, this philosophical dimension significantly contributes to enriching students’ mastery of meaningful vocabulary including denotative, connotative, and figurative terms which cultivates their critical and creative thinking skills as they construct a coherent text structure.

Ultimately, the significance of incorporating this content pertains to fulfilling the aspects of the Pancasila Student Profile and the Rahmatan Lil Alamin Student Profile, as required by the Merdeka Curriculum in madrasahs. The approach of converting traditional oral knowledge into written descriptive texts serves as a flexible technique for preserving culture for future generations. This writing exercise not only enhances students’ linguistic and academic abilities but also fosters the development of pious character, ethical behavior towards family, and an understanding of diversity that is based on valuing the local knowledge of their region. Therefore, ayam ingkung within the Langkahan tradition has effectively progressed from being merely a ceremonial offering to a practical, contextual, and enriched resource for language education.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully uncovered the system of meanings associated with ayam ingkung in the langkahan wedding tradition of the community in Bolo Village, Boyolali Regency, using Endraswara's (2018) literary gastronomy framework and Spradley's (2016) ethnographic analysis. Three complementary aspects of meaning form a cohesive system of meaning.

First, the symbolic meaning of the "ayam ingkung" (10 data points) is contained within three main aspects. The posture of the chicken, resembling a person in prostration with the head tilted upward, represents submission to Allah SWT. The binding of the wings and legs using sharp bamboo symbolizes the control of carnal desires enforced by the firmness of divine law. The integrity of the chicken, served whole without being cut, serves as a metaphor for the hope that family life will always remain harmonious and intact.

Second, the philosophical meaning of ayam ingkung (21 data points) encapsulates seven noble Javanese values, encompassing the relationship between humans and God, and interpersonal relationships within the family, represented by the values of andhap asor, tepa slira, and lilo legowo, which govern the attitudes of younger siblings toward older siblings and vice versa. This finding confirms the process of cultural adaptation described by Koentjaraningrat (2009), namely that Javanese culture demonstrates flexibility in integrating local traditions with Islamic values.

Third, the cultural significance of ayam ingkung (12 data points) reflects the Javanese people's knowledge regarding ingredient selection and the preparation of ritual foods. The choice of male free-range chickens is based on their higher protein content compared to commercial breeds. The use of spices and natural ingredients rich in health benefits. The slaughtering process adheres to Islamic guidelines, and cooking techniques involve boiling and/or roasting without excessive oil.

All these aspects of meaning converge on two main cultural themes that serve as the common thread throughout the findings, namely (1) respect for the family hierarchy as the foundation of Javanese social order, and (2) the balance between Javanese traditions and Islamic values as a manifestation of harmonious cultural acculturation.

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