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Names of *Bakso* Eateries in Indonesia: Patterns, Meanings, and Sociocultural Reflections

Abstract

This study examines cultural onomastics in the naming of Indonesian *bakso* eateries, focusing on naming patterns, semantic dimensions, and their sociocultural implications. Adopting a qualitative approach, the analysis is based on a corpus of 101 eatery names. The findings reveal a predominance of single-word and noun-based constructions, indicating a preference for direct and informative naming practices that emphasize product attributes (such as ingredients or portion size) or the identity of the owner. From a semantic perspective, these names exhibit multiple dimensions of meaning, most notably through the use of personal names, geographical references, and sensory associations. Striking and metaphorical names function as effective marketing devices, enhancing memorability and evoking emotional responses. Furthermore, names that express prayer and hope point to a spiritual dimension of business practices. The sociocultural significance of these naming conventions is equally pronounced. The predominance of male anthroponyms in the eatery names under study reflects enduring patriarchal

norms and the historical distribution of gender roles. Toponymic elements underscore a strong sense of locality and communal identity, while the use of striking names demonstrates linguistic creativity and a cultural openness to unconventional forms of expression. Finally, the incorporation of aspirational and religious elements highlights the importance of religiosity in Indonesian society. Thus, *bakso* eatery names serve as rich cultural artifacts that convey identity, aspirations, and adaptive business practices aligned with core Indonesian societal values.

Keywords

cultural onomastic; commercial naming; restaurant naming; *bakso* eateries; naming pattern; sociocultural factors of naming; Indonesia

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Названия индонезийских заведений общественного питания, специализирующихся на баксо: модели, значения и социокультурные аспекты именованя

Аннотация

Данное исследование посвящено анализу названий индонезийских заведений, специализирующихся на баксо (особом супе с фрикадельками, одной из основ уличной еды в Индонезии). В статье изучаются структурные модели именования, их семантика и социокультурная

мотивированность. В работе применяется качественный подход; эмпирическую базу составляет корпус из 101 названия заведений. Результаты исследования демонстрируют преобладание однословных и субстантивных моделей, что отражает тенденцию к прямому и информативному именованию, акцентирующему характеристики продукта (например, состав или размер порции) либо идентичность владельца. С семантической точки зрения данные наименования характеризуются многослойностью значений, прежде всего за счет использования личных имен, указаний на географическое происхождение и сенсорных ассоциаций. Экспрессивные и метафорические названия реализуют маркетинговые стратегии, направленные на запоминаемость названия и стимуляцию эмоционального отклика. Кроме того, обращают на себя внимание названия, связанные с благопожеланиями, текстами молитв, что указывает на наличие духовного «измерения» в предпринимательской деятельности. Включение в названия антропонимов, среди которых почти нет женских, отражает устойчивость патриархальных норм и исторически обусловленных гендерных ролей. Топонимические элементы подчеркивают значимость локальной идентичности и коллективной принадлежности, тогда как использование экспрессивных номинаций свидетельствует о языковой креативности и культурной открытости к нестандартным формам выражения. Таким образом, названия заведений, предлагающих баксо, могут рассматриваться как значимые культурные артефакты, отражающие идентичность, ценностные установки и адаптивные стратегии ведения бизнеса, тесно связанные с базовыми ценностями индонезийского общества.

Ключевые слова

культурная ономастика; коммерческая ономастика; наименования мест общественного питания; названия заведений, в которых подают баксо; модель именования; социокультурные факторы именования; Индонезия

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1. Introduction

Meatballs (*bakso*) constitute one of Indonesia's most iconic and ubiquitous culinary dishes and are widely available across the archipelago. These soup-based dishes, originating from Chinese culinary traditions and prepared from ground meat, have become thoroughly integrated into local flavours, undergoing significant processes of cultural acculturation within Indonesian society. Their widespread popularity elevates bakso beyond mere sustenance, positioning it as a salient cultural phenomenon, particularly from linguistic and sociocultural perspectives.

Despite the deep cultural integration of bakso, scholarly literature specifically addressing the onomastics, or naming conventions, of bakso eateries in Indonesia remains limited. This lack of research represents a notable gap in the existing

literature. Studies devoted to other popular dishes, such as soto, have demonstrated the considerable analytical potential of onomastic approaches [Halim 2023: 677]. For example, Wiyana et al. [2021] show that the naming of soto stalls frequently reflects key ingredients or regional origins (e.g., *Soto Ayam*, *Soto Lamongan*, *Soto Banjar*). Such naming practices function not only as markers of identity but also as strategic instruments for the promotion of traditional food through branding and culinary representation [Gulisova 2022: 155].

The naming of culinary businesses in Indonesia is currently characterised by distinctive and often sensationalist tendencies aimed at eliciting emotional responses and attracting consumer attention. Examples include *Rawon Setan* in Surabaya, as well as *Mie Setan*, *Es Gendruwo*, and *Ceker Maut* in Malang [Atyanto 2023: 280]. This tendency is likewise evident in the naming of *bakso* eateries, rendering them a particularly relevant object of linguistic and sociocultural analysis.

Scholarly interest in the onomastics of *bakso* cuisine is driven by the linguistic, semiotic, and cultural richness embedded in the names of such establishments. Malang, often referred to as the “Bakso City” due to the high concentration and diversity of *bakso* eateries, provides a particularly valuable empirical context for this investigation. The distinctiveness of these naming practices further reflects broader dynamics of linguistic development and evolving cultural trends.

The present study examines the naming of *bakso* eateries as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon. It focuses on (1) communicative patterns in naming practices, (2) the meanings embedded in these names, and (3) the ways in which they reflect societal culture, values, and norms. The study thus seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the communicative and cultural dimensions of *bakso* eatery naming in Indonesia.

2. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative ethnographic research design oriented towards communicative and cultural onomastic analysis [Grebnev 2024]. It analyses the naming patterns of 101 *bakso* eateries across nine representative Indonesian cities (Bandung, Jakarta, Malang, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Denpasar, Medan, Makassar, and Banjarmasin) in order to identify their underlying linguistic and sociocultural characteristics. Data were collected between July and September 2024 from online sources (including Google Maps, culinary directories, social media, and review platforms), as well as through field observations. These data were supplemented by semi-structured interviews with purposively selected eatery owners.

3. Findings

The naming patterns of bakso eateries in Indonesia exhibit significant diversity, encompassing seven structural types. Table 1 summarizes these patterns, their frequencies, linguistic characteristics, and representative examples.

Table 1

Structural patterns of bakso eatery names

Naming pattern	Frequency, %	Common lexical characteristics	Dominant word class	Representative examples
(<i>Bakso</i>) + owner's name	27.69	two-word phrases (generic + personal name/ title)	Noun	<i>Bakso Pak Sabar</i> 'Bakso Mr. Sabar'; <i>Bakso Cak Man</i> 'Bakso Brother Man'
<i>Bakso</i> + words expressing regional identity	18.46	place-based names (generic + place name) or locational phrases	Noun	<i>Bakso Solo</i> 'Bakso Solo (place name)', <i>Bakso Malang</i> 'Bakso Malang (place name)', <i>Bakso Kidul Pasar</i> 'Bakso South Market'
<i>Bakso</i> + words expressing taste/quality associations	15.38	descriptive phrases (generic + evaluative expression)	Noun, Adjective	<i>Bakso Selera Senja</i> 'Bakso Evening Taste'; <i>Bakso Raja Rasa</i> 'Bakso King of Taste'
<i>Bakso</i> + unique creative lexical element	12.31	varied (single words, phrases, metaphorical expressions)	Noun, Adjective	<i>Bakso Setan</i> 'Bakso Devil'; <i>Bakso Mercon</i> 'Bakso Firecracker'; <i>Bakso Pocong</i> 'Bakso Indonesian ghost'
Names derived from phrases of ethical, ritual or philosophic value	10.78	single words or two-word phrases	Noun	<i>Monggo Mampir</i> 'Please stop by'; <i>Podo Moro</i> 'Come together'; <i>Berkah Rezeki</i> 'Blessed sustenance'
<i>Bakso</i> + words meaning 'super', 'giant'	9.23	two-word phrases	Adjective	<i>Bakso Super</i> ; <i>Bakso Rudal</i> 'Bakso Missile'
Names containing numerals	6.15	name + number	Noun, Numeral	<i>Jagalan 87</i> ; <i>Slaughterhouse 87</i>
Total	100			

Table 1 indicates that structural patterns based on the owner’s name are the most prevalent (27.69%), frequently involving the owner’s given name followed by a common honorific such as *Pak* or *Cak* (equivalent to *Mr* in English). This pattern typically takes the form of a single word or a concise noun-dominant phrase. Furthermore, names incorporating regional or origin-based identity (18.46%) are also prominent, highlighting geographical associations. Such names are generally realised as single words or locational phrases (e.g., *Bakso Kidul Pasar* ‘Southern Market’) and predominantly belong to the noun class. Patterns based on taste or quality associations (15.38%) tend to be descriptive, employing either a single word (e.g., *Bakso Selera*) or a phrase, and may involve both nouns and adjectives.

Overall, lexical analysis reveals a marked preference for two-word phrases (approximately 80.3%) over phrasal constructions, reflecting the demand for concision and memorability. The majority of names (approximately 96%) are nouns referring to concrete entities such as ingredients (e.g., *Bakso Sapi* ‘Beef’, *Bakso Jamur* ‘Mushroom’), locations (e.g., *Bakso Stasiun* ‘Station’), or product attributes (e.g., *Bakso Urat* ‘Tendon, fibre’). Nevertheless, the use of adjectives (e.g., *Bakso Kuning Gading* ‘Ivory white’) and discourse particles (e.g., *Bakso Dong* ‘Of course, right, duh’) is also attested, albeit with lower frequency.

Table 2

Categorization of semantic meanings in bakso eatery naming

Semantic Category	%	Examples
Personal Names (real or iconic figures)	22.3	<i>Bakso Cak Man, Bakso Pak Tris</i>
Location/Place of Origin	15.7	<i>Bakso Kidul Pasar, Bakso BNI, Bakso Solo</i>
Anomalies/Others (creative)	10.5	<i>Bakso Pocong, Bakso Dong, Bakso Sabar</i>
Based on Ingredients/Materials	9.2	<i>Bakso Sapi, Bakso Jamur</i>
Social Interaction/Community Terms	9.2	<i>Bakso Podo Moro, Bakso Monggo Mampir</i>
Objects or Things	9.2	<i>Bakso Granat, Bakso Permata, Bakso Pocong</i>
Wishes, Prayers, or Positive Intentions	7.8	<i>Bakso Anugerah, Berkah Rezeki</i>
Size Descriptors	3.9	<i>Bakso Super, Bakso Jumbo</i>
Family Identity/Relationships	3.9	<i>Bakso Mas Bambang, Bakso Sulung</i>
Family Hierarchy	3.9	<i>Bakso Ragil, Bakso Sulung</i>
Status Indicators	2.6	<i>Bakso Presiden, Bakso Radja</i>
Prestige or Position	2.6	<i>Bakso Keraton, Bakso Istiroso</i>

Table 2 indicates that names based on personal names are the most frequently observed (22.3%), suggesting an emphasis on personalisation and the establishment of trust. The category of location or place of origin (15.7%) is also prominent, reflecting a strong connection to geographical identity. These meanings range from conveying information about ingredients, size, and location to expressing aspirations, prayers, and the intended sensory effects.

4. Discussion

The naming of bakso eateries in Indonesia reflects prevailing societal values and norms across four principal dimensions.

1. Gender roles in business (male dominance). Bakso eatery names frequently incorporate the owner's name, predominantly male, followed by honorifics such as *Cak*, *Mas*, and *Pak* (e.g., *Bakso Cak Man*, *Bakso Cak Kar*, *Bakso Pak Nur*, *Bakso Pak Kus*). Only one female name (*Bakso Mak Kati*) was identified. This imbalance reflects the historical association of bakso vending with male street vendors and broader patriarchal norms shaping commercial visibility.

2. Locality and community connection. Location plays a central role in naming practices. Many names reference streets, cities, or landmarks (e.g., *Bakso Jagalan 87*, *Bakso Perjalanan Pahlawan*, *Bakso BNI*, *Bakso Malang*, *Bakso Solo*, *Bakso Kidul Pasar*), reinforcing geographical identity and facilitating consumer orientation. Such practices underscore local pride and the importance of spatial embeddedness in Indonesian business culture.

3. Creativity and sensory appeal. Contemporary naming often employs metaphor and anomaly to create strong impressions. Names such as *Bakso Granat* 'Grenade', *Bakso Rudal* 'Missile', and *Bakso Mercon* 'Firecracker' denote size or spiciness rather than ingredients. References to supernatural entities (e.g., *Bakso Pocong* 'Shrouded ghost', *Bakso Demit* 'Demon') further illustrate a cultural preference for imaginative and attention-grabbing branding, reflecting openness to unconventional and experiential consumption.

4. Religiosity and optimism. Names such as *Bakso Anugerah* 'Grace', *Bakso Berkah Rezeki* 'Blessing of sustenance', and *Bakso Mekarsari* 'Blooming essence' express aspirations for success and divine favour. This practice highlights the role of spirituality in business naming, where names function as both identity markers and expressions of hope.

From a communicative perspective, bakso eatery naming demonstrates strategic adaptation. The predominance of single-word forms (80.3%) reflects a preference for concise and memorable branding, consistent with principles of communication efficiency. Similarly, the dominance of nouns (96%) facilitates direct and

informative communication, indicating ingredients, size, or ownership, thereby reducing information asymmetry between sellers and buyers. Location-based names further enhance accessibility and visibility, particularly in digitally mediated search contexts.

The meanings embedded in these names also reflect deliberate positioning strategies. The most frequent categories — personal names (22.3%) and place of origin (15.7%) — signal authenticity and quality, drawing on trust and established culinary associations. In contrast, metaphorical and sensational names shift towards persuasive and experiential communication, aiming to evoke curiosity and memorability. Such strategies align with experiential marketing approaches, where consumption involves affective and symbolic dimensions [Lee et al. 2021].

Names expressing hope and blessing (7.8%), such as *Bakso* Anugerah and *Bakso* Berkah Rezeki, reveal a significant sociocultural dimension. They communicate not only personal aspirations but also shared values, strengthening emotional resonance and consumer trust [Narasagondar & Patil 2024].

Overall, bakso eatery naming constitutes a dynamic intersection of linguistic practice, business strategy, and cultural expression. The persistence of male names reflects enduring gender norms, while location-based naming highlights community identity. At the same time, metaphorical and unconventional names demonstrate increasing creativity and market differentiation, indicating a shift towards experiential consumption. Religious and aspirational names further emphasise the centrality of spiritual values in Indonesian business culture.

The implications of this study are multifaceted. For practitioners, an understanding of naming patterns can inform effective branding strategies across informative, persuasive, and experiential dimensions. For policymakers and cultural institutions, culinary onomastics represents an important domain of cultural heritage, as names encode historical and social meanings. Academically, the findings contribute to research in onomastics, sociolinguistics, and marketing, and open avenues for comparative and interdisciplinary studies.

However, several limitations of the present study should be noted. The dataset comprises 101 names and, while geographically diverse, cannot fully capture the variation across Indonesia. In addition, the absence of extensive interviews limits insight into individual naming motivations. Future research should expand the dataset and incorporate more in-depth ethnographic methods to explore naming practices more comprehensively. Quantitative studies of consumer perception could further assess the impact of different naming strategies. Comparative analyses across other culinary domains (e.g., *mie ayam* — chicken noodle dish, *sate* — grilled skewered meat) would also help identify broader patterns in Indonesian culinary onomastics.

5. Conclusion

Onomastic research into the names of bakso eateries in Indonesia reveals communication patterns, embedded meanings, and broader sociocultural reflections. The findings indicate that business owners predominantly employ direct and informative naming strategies, favouring single-word forms and nouns that refer to ingredients, size, or the owner's name, thereby facilitating the clear communication of product characteristics. In addition, locational naming patterns that draw on geographical reference points prove effective in guiding consumers.

The meanings encoded in bakso eatery names are multidimensional and extend beyond mere identification. The most prominent categories — personal names and places or regions of origin — reflect ownership identity and regional culinary authenticity. Notably, the use of sensational and metaphorical names demonstrates efforts to achieve differentiation and create distinctive consumer experiences, functioning as attention-grabbing marketing strategies. Names expressing prayer and hope further highlight the spiritual dimension of business practices in Indonesia.

From a sociocultural perspective, these naming practices reflect key values and norms within Indonesian society. The predominance of male names points to enduring patriarchal structures and historically gendered roles in commerce. Location-based naming underscores the importance of locality and community identity, while sensational and unconventional names reflect creativity and a degree of openness to non-standard forms of expression. Finally, the inclusion of elements of prayer and hope signals the centrality of religiosity and optimism in the cultural framework shaping business practices.

In sum, bakso eatery names in Indonesia function not merely as commercial labels but as complex cultural signifiers that communicate identity, aspirations, and adaptation to market dynamics, while reflecting deeply embedded societal values.

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