

Natural Elements in Malay Proverbs: An Inquisitive Semantic Analysis

Unsur Alam dalam Peribahasa Melayu: Analisis Semantik Inkuisitif

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Abstract

A proverb is one of figurative languages delivered from generation to generation aimed to be a guide in living life. Thus, people can learn many lessons through it. In Malay language, there are quite a lot of proverbs that have natural elements such as water, fire, earth, and wind/air in them. Unfortunately, learning about Malay proverbs in schools has not been able to restore the existence of Malay proverbs among young people. This research aims to interpret the element of nature in Malay proverbs based on semantic inquisitive science. The primary data sources used in this study were the Malay Correspondence Reference Center Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka on the <http://prpm.dbp.gov.my> website and the book *Malay Traditional Expressions* by Tenas Effendy. The researcher looked for proverbs with the theme of nature and collected as many as 40 proverbs which will then be sorted again so that the remaining 20 proverbs. The data are then classified and analyzed by script semantic analysis, cognitive semantics, and inquisitive semantics. Specifically, this study found proverbs containing elements of nature meaning hypocrisy, greed, thoroughness, and courage. This study found the fact that Malay Society is indeed very close to nature as proven by the many natural elements found in Malay proverbs. In these proverbs, many things can be learned, for example, culture, history, and also the mindset of the Malay Society itself.

Key words: Malay proverbs; elements of nature; Inquisitive Semantic

Abstrak

Peribahasa merupakan salah satu bahasa kiasan yang diturunkan secara turun temurun yang bertujuan untuk menjadi pedoman dalam menjalani kehidupan. Dengan demikian, masyarakat dapat mengambil banyak hikmah melaluinya. Dalam bahasa Melayu, cukup banyak peribahasa yang mengandung unsur alam seperti air, api, tanah, dan udara. Sayangnya, pembelajaran peribahasa Melayu di sekolah belum mampu mengembalikan eksistensi peribahasa Melayu di kalangan generasi muda. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menginterpretasikan unsur alam dalam peribahasa Melayu berdasarkan kajian semantik inkuisitif. Sumber data primer yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah Pusat Referensi Korespondensi Melayu Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka di website <http://prpm.dbp.gov.my> dan buku *Ungkapan Tradisional Melayu* karya Tenas Effendy. Data-data tersebut kemudian diklasifikasikan lalu dianalisis dengan analisis semantik skrip, semantik kognitif, dan semantik inkuisitif. Secara spesifik, penelitian ini menemukan peribahasa yang memuat unsur alam bermakna kemunafikan, ketamakan, ketelitian, dan keberanian. Penelitian ini menemukan fakta bahwa masyarakat Melayu memang sangat dekat dengan alam terbukti dengan banyaknya unsur alam yang terdapat dalam peribahasa Melayu. Dalam peribahasa tersebut banyak hal yang bisa dipelajari, misalnya budaya, sejarah, dan juga pola pikir masyarakat Melayu itu sendiri.

Kata kunci: Peribahasa Melayu; unsur alam; semantik inkuisitif

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs offer valuable insights into the cultural mindset of a community (Maneechukate 2018). Passed down through generations, these figurative sayings serve as a guide for navigating life's complexities (Kridalaksana 2008, p. 90). Beyond mere guidance, proverbs function as reminders, advice, and even veiled criticism (Bakar et al. 2020, p. 299). Notably, proverbs are often employed strategically in communication to deliver potentially sensitive messages in a way that minimizes offense

while ensuring comprehension (Herningsih & Amir 2020, p. 1). Consequently, the selection of objects and imagery within proverbs becomes particularly significant.

The selection of objects within Malay proverbs is influenced by various factors. Notably, Jalaluddin (2020) suggests that proverbs emerging in Malay society reflect how the community perceives and interprets its surroundings (p. 221). This perspective underscores the significance of nature for Malays, who view it not only as a source of sustenance but also as a wellspring of inspiration and life lessons (Sahdun & Rosly 2021, p. 141). Consequently, the natural world frequently features prominently in Malay proverbs, shaping the choice of objects used to convey wisdom.

Malay proverbs have traditionally played a significant role in shaping the character and moral compass of the community (Indrawati 2019, p. 342). However, research suggests a concerning decline in the younger generation's appreciation for proverbs. This is reflected in their infrequent use of these traditional sayings. Unfortunately, proverbs are often perceived as archaic and irrelevant in contemporary society. This perception overlooks the rich repository of knowledge and timeless moral values embedded within Malay proverbs.

Understanding the full value of a proverb necessitates a thorough examination of its meaning. This process involves delving into multiple semantic layers. The first layer encompasses the literal meaning derived from the dictionary definitions of the words employed. The second layer considers the meaning shaped by the proverb's social context. Finally, the deepest layer, known as inquisitive semantics, explores the underlying reasons and philosophies embedded within the proverb (Jalaluddin 2014).

Emerging in 2014, inquisitive semantics represents a novel branch of semantic science pioneered by Professor Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) (Jalaluddin 2014). This field endeavors to meticulously analyze the implicit meanings within proverbs, fostering a more nuanced understanding (Hermandra 2022, p. 381). The analytical process in inquisitive semantics integrates existing data and factual knowledge with human reasoning faculties. Furthermore, it acknowledges the influence of culture and the rationale of the language community (Amran 2020, p. 4).

Inquisitive semantics, as proposed by Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin (2014), builds upon established semantic frameworks like script semantics (focusing on dictionary definitions) and resonance semantics (exploring cognitive aspects). Jalaluddin argues that these existing approaches leave room for deeper interpretation, residing within a conceptual space referred to as "mental space" (Zaini & Jalaluddin 2019, p. 6). This mental space necessitates a multifaceted approach, where researchers engage with various disciplines beyond linguistics to fully grasp the meaning embedded within proverbs (Zaini & Jalaluddin 2019, p. 6). Such disciplines may encompass science, religion, history, etymology, and cultural studies.

Inquisitive semantics has seen growing application, as exemplified by studies on the lexical item 'Ayam' in Malay proverbs (Amran 2020), rice in Indonesian proverbs (Kinanti & Rachman 2019), and the element of birds in Malay pantun (Che Man & Jalaluddin, 2018). While prior research utilizing inquisitive semantics has examined various objects individually (Amran 2020; Kinanti & Rachman 2019; Che Man & Jalaluddin 2018), this study adopts a broader scope. It delves into the symbolic meanings of several objects categorized within the four main elements of nature in Malay culture: water, fire, earth, and air. This selection reflects the deep connection between the Malay community and the natural world (Effendy 2009). This connection is evident in proverbs such as "The sign of a long-minded person, destructive of nature he abstains" and "Signs of people holding customs, nature is guarded by remembrance." By prioritizing these fundamental elements, the study establishes a foundation for understanding the intricate symbolism embedded within nature-related proverbs.

The abundance of natural objects like plants, water, wind, animals, and soil in Malay proverbs underscores the profound influence of nature on their creation. This prevalence suggests that the natural world served as a primary source of inspiration for Malay proverbs. Indeed, the degradation or depletion of natural elements could potentially impact the existence of these proverbs themselves. Consequently, Malay communities are often guided by principles that emphasize the protection and preservation of their environment (consider adding a citation here for relevant sources on these principles). Furthermore, proverbs that incorporate natural elements offer insights into how past Malay communities interacted with and protected their surroundings. In essence, Malay proverbs with natural elements play a crucial role in transmitting ecological knowledge and fostering adaptation to environmental changes within the Malay community.

METHODS

The type of research conducted is qualitative research. The data derived from a collection of Malay proverbs with natural elements (water, fire, earth, and wind/air). Data on Malay proverbs with natural elements (water, fire, earth, and wind/air) collected amounted to 20 proverbs. The primary data sources used in this study were the Malay Correspondence Reference Center Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka on the <http://prpm.dbp.gov.my> website and the book *Ungkapan Tradisional Melayu* by Tenas Effendy. The data collection method used in this study were documentation method.

The documentation method is a method of collecting data from existing documents and the research context (Hardani et al., 2020, 149). In this study, data was obtained after going through several stages, namely looking for proverbs about nature (water, fire, earth, and wind) in the Malay Correspondence Reference Center data source Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka on the <http://prpm.dbp.gov.my> website and the book "Malay Traditional Expressions" by Tenas Effendy, found and recorded in table form as many as 40 initial data which then after sorting back the remaining 20 proverbs.

The data analysis method in this study was carried out in several stages. First, classifying the proverb into four main categories of natural elements, namely water, fire, earth, and wind/air. Second, looking for the literal meaning, that is, the meaning of proverbs according to the dictionary meaning. Third, looking for cognitive meaning, that is, looking for the meaning of proverbs associated with the context of the community. Finally, looking for the semantic meaning of the inquisitive is to find the reason behind the creation of a Malay proverb based on its reason and philosophy. In general, the stages of data analysis with inclusive semantic theory are as follows.

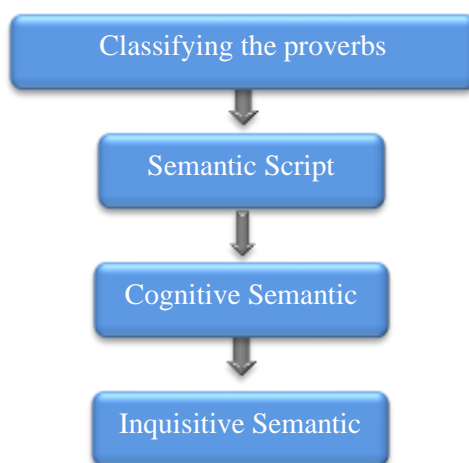


Figure 1. Data analysis technique (Jalaluddin 2017)

FINDING

This research identified four recurring natural elements within Malay proverbs: water, fire, earth, and air/wind. These elements are often juxtaposed with other objects to enhance the intended imagery. Each proverb incorporating these natural elements conveys distinct meanings and extends across various domains. To fully grasp these meanings and domains, a multifaceted approach is required, drawing insights from disciplines like religion, science, culture, history, and geography. The following section will delve into the descriptions and analyses of four illustrative Malay proverbs that utilize natural elements.

1. Malay Proverbs containing Water Elements

Air susu dibalas air tuba (PRPM 2015)

a. Semantic Script

A literal interpretation of the Malay proverb "Susu dibalas tuba" yields several definitions for the individual words according to Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI, 2023). "Susu" can refer to various meanings related to milk, including a woman's breastmilk, animal milk, or a beverage

ingredient. "Tuba" translates to a specific liana plant (*Derris elliptica*) known for its poisonous properties, commonly used as fish poison. Based solely on these dictionary definitions, the proverb could be interpreted to mean "one who receives life-giving sustenance (milk) in return offers deadly poison (tuba)".

b. Cognitive Semantic

Cognitive semantics offers a deeper level of analysis compared to script semantics, which relies solely on dictionary definitions. This approach introduces the concept of domains: the source domain refers to the literal meaning or concept conveyed by the words in the proverb, while the target domain represents the underlying intent or message the proverb aims to convey (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). In the proverb "susu dibalas tuba" (milk repaid with tuba poison), the source domain encompasses the literal meanings of "susu" (milk) and "tuba" (fish poison).

Source domain	Target domain
milk	good deed
tubal water	bad deed

Bak pepatah **air susu dibalas dengan air tuba**, wanita di Palembang kena tipu sahabat sendiri. Akibat ulah sahabatnya, wanita di Palembang sampai terjerat pinjaman online(Pinjol) hingga Rp22 juta. Begini awal mula wanita di Palembang dimanfaatkan sahabat sendiri hingga punya utang Rp22 juta. Kisah seorang wanita yang berniat membantu teman kesusahan malah berujung apes. Ia mengaku terjerat pinjaman online dengan nominal puluhan juta. (Source: Humas POLRI 2023)

The aforementioned news excerpt exemplifies the active use of the proverb "air susu dibalas air tuba" within contemporary society. In this context, the proverb serves as a commentary on individuals who respond to acts of kindness with malice (literally, "repaying milk with tuba poison").

c. Inquisitive Semantics

A cognitive semantic analysis unveils the deeper meaning behind the specific choices of "susu" (milk) and "tuba" (fish poison) in the proverb "susu dibalas tuba." While alternatives like "sirup" (syrup) or "air racun" (poison water) might seem conceptually similar, the traditional selection reflects the Malay people's cultural values and environmental awareness.

Milk, particularly breast milk, universally embodies nurturing and sustenance (Maryanti et al., 2018). It provides essential nutrients for infants and signifies a profound act of care. Conversely, tuba water, derived from the *Derris elliptica* plant, possesses a physical resemblance to milk in terms of texture and color (Okarini, 2017). However, unlike milk's life-giving properties, tuba water contains rotenone, a toxic compound traditionally used as a biopesticide (Yoon, 2009). This deliberate selection of contrasting elements highlights the stark opposition between kindness and malice.

The tubal root poison is commonly used by the Malay community for fishing or menuba (Chandra et al. 2022, 46). This activity has been a long-standing tradition among the Malays, demonstrating their deep understanding and familiarity with the natural surroundings. They possess the knowledge of the appropriate dosage of tubal roots to effectively poison fish while still ensuring its safety for consumption. This is crucial because any miscalculation in the dosage could have harmful effects on humans who consume the poisoned fish. Symptoms of poisoning in humans caused by tubal root extract include eye and skin irritation, throat discomfort, nausea, and cough. It is even reported that consuming 300-500 mg/kg of tubal root extract can be fatal for humans (Yoon 2009 27). Based on these facts, the Malay community has come to associate tuba or tubal water with negative connotations and evil deeds.

Milk reciprocated with tube water symbolizes the principle of reciprocity, suggesting that when an individual presents a pure object, they can expect to receive a pure object in return. The initial party offers positive and beneficial attributes, while the subsequent party seemingly reciprocates with similar qualities. However, upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that the latter actually delivers something harmful to one's well-being. Within the realm of its domain category, the proverb 'air susu dibalas air tuba' is associated with the concept of treachery.

2. Malay Proverbs containing Elements of Fire

Api kalau kecil jadi kawan, kalau besar jadi lawan (PRPM 2015)

a. Semantics Script

A strictly literal interpretation of the proverb, based on the definitions provided by Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI, 2023), yields the following meanings for the key terms, Api (fire) refers to heat and light produced by combustion. Following this literal approach, the proverb could be interpreted to convey the idea that fire, when controlled and used in moderation, can be beneficial to humans. However, excessive fire can become destructive.

b. Cognitive Semantics

Cognitive semantics offers a deeper analysis compared to script semantics, which relies solely on dictionary definitions. This approach introduces the concept of domains: the source domain refers to the literal meaning or concept conveyed by the words in the proverb, while the target domain represents the underlying intent or message the proverb aims to convey (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). In the proverb "api kalau kecil jadi kawan, kalau besar jadi lawan" (fire, when small becomes a friend, when big becomes an enemy), the source domain encompasses the literal meanings of "api" (fire), "kecil" (small), "besar" (big), "kawan" (friend), and "lawan" (enemy).

Source domain	Target domain
small so friends	if the amount is small it is useful
great to be a friend	if the amount is excessive it will be dangerous

"Jadi tak henti-hentinya kepada kita semua marilah sama-sama kita mencegah, karna mencegah jauh lebih baik dari pada memadamkannya. Kalau **api itu kecil jadi kawan, tapi jika sudah besar akan jadi lawan.**" terang Camat Rupert.

(Source: Berita Kecamatan Rupert 2019)

The inclusion of the proverb "api kalau kecil jadi kawan, kalau besar jadi lawan" (fire, when small becomes a friend, when big becomes an enemy) within the news fragment exemplifies the continued relevance of proverbs in contemporary Malaysian society. This proverb serves as a potent social commentary, highlighting the potential for something initially beneficial to turn harmful when present in excess. The proverb's metaphorical nature allows it to be applied to a wide range of situations, making it a versatile tool for expressing caution and advocating for moderation. This specific instance in the news text suggests the proverb's application to a situation where something initially positive, perhaps an action or influence, has grown out of control and become detrimental. By referencing this well-established proverb, the news report leverages the cultural understanding embedded within Malay society to effectively convey a message of potential danger or caution.

c. Inquisitive Semantics

Having established the literal meaning (source domain) through cognitive semantics, inquisitive semantics allows for a deeper exploration of the proverb "api kalau kecil jadi kawan, kalau besar jadi lawan" (fire, when small becomes a friend, when big becomes an enemy). This approach delves beyond the surface meaning of fire to consider its multifaceted nature within Malay culture. Fire, as a chemical reaction producing heat and light (Winarti et al., 2022), has traditionally served various purposes for the Malay community. Its heat has been employed for cooking, providing warmth, and even crafting (elaborate on specific crafts if relevant to your research). Similarly, fire's light has played a crucial role, particularly before the widespread availability of electricity. In the absence of electric illumination, fire served as a primary source of light at night, a fact evident in the historical practices of many societies, including the Malay community.

Fire has held multifaceted significance for the Malay people, particularly in rural areas prior to the implementation of widespread electrification. In addition to its basic chemical definition as described by Winarti et al. (2022), fire served various purposes within the community. Traditionally, it provided illumination through torches or coconut husk lamps, ensuring the safe return of villagers after attending evening prayers at the surau (community prayer hall). Beyond its role in lighting, fire

was also utilized to generate smoke, an indispensable element in traditional beekeeping practices. Through the controlled burning of materials such as coconut husks, Malay communities were able to create a smokescreen that gently deterred bees during the honey harvesting process. These instances exemplify how fire, when properly managed ("api kecil," meaning small fire), became a valuable tool deeply integrated into the Malay way of life.

There is abundant evidence showcasing the utility of fire in existence. Nonetheless, when fire proliferates in great quantities, it can pose a threat, despite its capacity to illuminate and confer warmth. Instances such as wildfires, residential fires, and major explosions exemplify the potential ferocity of fires when they spread extensively. The Malay community grasped this notion and transformed it into a parable. Fire is deemed perilous when it eludes effective control. However, if appropriately managed, fire can also bestow advantages. In terms of significance, this proverb falls within the realm of cautionary wisdom.

3. Malay Proverbs containing Earth Elements

Tanah lembap kandungan air, kayu bengkok titian kera (PRPM 2015)

a. Semantics Script

A strictly literal interpretation of the proverb, based on the definitions provided by Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI 2023), yields the following meanings for the key terms:

-**Tanah lembap** (damp soil): refers to soil with a high moisture content.

-**Kayu bengkok** (crooked wood): describes wood that is not straight.

Following this literal approach, the proverb could be interpreted to mean that damp soil is likely caused by water, and that wood becomes crooked due to frequent trampling by animals.

b. Cognitive Semantics

Cognitive semantics offers a deeper level of analysis compared to script semantics, which relies solely on dictionary definitions. This approach introduces the concept of domains: the source domain refers to the literal meaning or concept conveyed by the words in the proverb, while the target domain represents the underlying intent or message the proverb aims to convey (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). In the proverb "tanah lembap kandungan air, kayu bengkok titian kera" (damp soil has water content, crooked wood is a monkey bridge), the source domain encompasses the literal meanings of "tanah lembap" (damp soil), "kandungan air" (water content), "kayu bengkok" (crooked wood), and "titian kera" (monkey bridge).

Source domain	Target domain
most soil	a phenomenon that occurs
water content	factors that cause phenomena to occur
bent wood	phenomenon that occurs
monkey footbridge	factors that cause phenomena to occur

Move underground,
 So that the land is covered again
 Become living land
 And the world is possible
 Is the product of the land
 Moist water content,
 Bent wood monkey footbridge.
 (Aldy 2021, 88)

As exemplified in the excerpt from Aldy's poem (2021, 88), the proverb is employed to illustrate the concept of underlying causes and formative processes. The poem's structure reinforces this message. The initial lines evoke the image of something hidden beneath the surface, urging the reader to "move underground." This metaphorical descent parallels the proverb's shift from the observable ("damp soil" and "crooked wood") to the underlying reason ("water content" and the formative process implied by "monkey bridge"). The poem's concluding lines, "Is the product of the land" and "Moist

water content," directly echo the proverb's source domain. Ultimately, the poem utilizes the proverb to convey the idea that the world we see is built upon unseen foundations and formative processes.

c. Inquisitive Semantics

Inquisitive semantics delves deeper into the proverb "tanah lembap kandungan air, kayu bengkok titian kera" (damp soil has water content, crooked wood is a monkey bridge) to explore the rationale behind the specific word choices. This approach reveals the proverb's embedded environmental knowledge within the Malay community. The proverb highlights the connection between damp soil and the presence of water—"tanah lembap" (damp soil) signifying an area likely containing subsurface water or proximity to a river (Assolihat et al., 2019). This practical knowledge is likely rooted in the Malay community's close relationship with nature and their traditional agricultural practices. Their daily lives honed their ability to identify suitable locations for various agricultural activities based on subtle environmental cues.

Inquisitive semantics unlocks the rationale behind "kera" (ape) in "tanah lembap kandungan air, kayu bengkok titian kera" (damp soil has water content, crooked wood is a monkey bridge). Damp soil suggests potential for cultivation due to likely water sources. The proverb connects this to "kayu bengkok" (crooked wood), theorized (Monica et al., 2019) to bend from animal contact. The proverb specifies "kera" likely due to their arboreal habits and foraging patterns, increasing interaction with specific branches that could bend over time. Unlike pigs, tigers, deer, or birds, apes' behavior better aligns with the proverb's message of seemingly minor, repeated actions causing a lasting impact.

"Tanah Lembap Kandungan Air, Kayu Bengkok Titian Kera" (damp soil has water content, crooked wood is a monkey bridge) exemplifies causality in Malay proverbs. Word choices emphasize cause-and-effect: damp soil suggests water's influence, and crooked wood implies a transformation from pressure. This proverb falls under causality, reflecting the understanding of events and their causes.

4. Malay Proverb with The Element of Wind

Seperti elang menyongsong angin (PRPM 2015)

a. Semantics Script

Based on the definitions provided by Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI, 2023), a strictly literal interpretation of the proverb yields the following meanings for the key terms:

-**Elang** (eagle): refers to a sizable avian predator, usually characterized by shades of brown, black, white, or gray.

-**Angin** (wind): describes the atmospheric phenomenon of air movement from regions of high pressure to low pressure.

By adhering to this literal approach, the proverb can be comprehended as "resembling a powerful avian creature soaring against the opposing forces of the wind."

b. Cognitive Semantics

Cognitive semantics offers a comprehensive analysis in contrast to script semantics, which solely relies on dictionary definitions. This approach introduces the concept of domains: the source domain pertains to the literal meaning or concept conveyed by the words in the proverb, while the target domain represents the underlying intention or message that the proverb aims to communicate (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). In the proverb "seperti elang menyongsong angin" (like an eagle facing the wind), the source domain encompasses the literal meanings of "elang" (eagle) and "angin" (wind).

Source domain	Target domain
eagle	somebody
facing the wind	not afraid to face the enemy

Meminjam peribahasa '**Bagai elang menyongsong angin**' yang bermakna tidak gentar menghadapi musuh, begitulah kira-kira gambaran persona barisan gerbong pemain terbaik pekan kedelapan Indonesia Junior League U-11. Tak ada hampa terasa jika mau terus berusaha jadi pembeda.

(Source: Indonesia Junior League 2022)

The inclusion of the proverb "seperti elang menyongsong angin" (like an eagle facing the wind) within the news fragment exemplifies the enduring role of proverbs in Indonesian society. This proverb transcends its literal meaning (source domain: eagle=bravery, wind=challenge) to enter the realm of the target domain. Here, the target domain refers to the underlying message the proverb aims to convey (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). In the context of the news report, the proverb likely serves as an analogy for someone who confronts their opponent with courage and unwavering determination, similar to an eagle facing a strong wind. This metaphorical association effectively conveys the individual's resilience and fearless spirit.

c. Inquisitive Semantics

Inquisitive semantics delves deeper into the proverb "seperti elang menyongsong angin" to explore the rationale behind the specific word choices. This approach goes beyond the surface meaning to consider why the proverb uses "elang" rather than other birds. The proverb serves as a symbol for an individual who maintains unwavering resolve in the presence of an adversary. The selection of the eagle as the representative entity most likely arises from its cultural connotations within Indonesian society. Eagles are commonly regarded as regal raptors, renowned for their physical prowess, acute vision, and valor. These attributes harmonize effectively with the intended message of the proverb, which seeks to communicate the notions of unyielding perseverance and fortitude. Consequently, the utilization of "elang" (eagle) significantly enhances the proverb's efficacy as a metaphor for confronting difficulties with courage.

Inquisitive semantics sheds light on the selection of "elang" (eagle) in the proverb "seperti elang menyongsong angin" (like an eagle facing the wind). Eagles (Accipitridae) are birds of prey renowned for their physical prowess (Widiana et al. 2017). Their impressive strength is evident in their powerful talons, capable of gripping prey during flight. Eagles also possess exceptional eyesight and remarkable speed, further enhancing their hunting abilities. This combination of physical attributes elevates the eagle beyond a mere predator; it becomes a symbol imbued with meaning.

Culturally, eagles transcend their biological characteristics and take on symbolic value (Ruwindika & Ernisa 2022). Their strength and agility are often depicted in paintings and carvings, associating them with concepts of power, courage, and resilience. This established symbolism is precisely why the proverb employs "elang" (eagle) to represent someone who confronts challenges with unwavering determination. The proverb, therefore, leverages a well-understood cultural symbol within the domain of nature to convey a powerful message about human conduct.

DISCUSSION

The analysis presented in this study underscores the carefulness with which the Malay community selects objects for their proverbs. These choices are not random, but rather grounded in the inherent qualities and symbolic associations of the selected elements from the natural world. Through the use of objects as metaphoric references, Malay proverbs successfully convey abstract values while remaining firmly rooted in the material realm.

This research supports Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin's theory of inquisitive semantic research (2014), which suggests that each object in Malay proverbs must have a specific rationale. In the study of Malay proverbs involving natural elements, the selected objects not only serve aesthetic purposes but also have significant underlying reasons. For example, the object 'air tuba' in the proverb 'air susu di balas air tuba' was chosen to represent evil. This choice was not arbitrary, as tubal water refers to water extracted from the tubal root, which is inedible and poisonous. The inherent nature of 'air tuba' associates it with something negative or evil, as it can cause harm to humans.

This research distinguishes itself from previous works, such as "Leksikal Ayam dalam Peribahasa Melayu: Analisis Semantik Inkuisitif" (Lexical Analysis of "Ayam" (Chicken) in Malay Proverbs: An Inquisitive Semantic Analysis), by focusing on the most fundamental elements – earth, water, fire, and air. These elements represent the foundational building blocks of the universe as understood by many cultures. The current study offers a unique perspective by juxtaposing these four elements within a framework of Malay proverbs. This approach allows for an exploration of the interconnectedness between the natural world and Malay cultural expressions.

This research bolsters Jalaluddin's (2014) inquisitive semantic theory concerning the selection of objects in Malay proverbs. Jalaluddin (2014) posits that the choice of each element within a proverb is not arbitrary, but rather driven by a specific rationale. The current study's findings provide robust

support for this notion. The analysis demonstrates that the objects employed in Malay proverbs hold inherent qualities or cultural associations that motivate their selection.

For instance, the proverb referencing "tubal water" to symbolize evil resonates with the established understanding of tubal water as toxic and hazardous. This alignment between the object's properties and the metaphorical meaning exemplifies the purposeful selection within Malay proverbs.

Furthermore, this research transcends geographical boundaries by combining and adapting Malay proverbs from both Indonesia and Malaysia. By identifying proverbs used in both countries, the study establishes a category of shared cultural heritage reflected in language. This cross-regional analysis enriches the understanding of the proverb repertoire within the broader Malay linguistic sphere.

CONCLUSION

This study's findings hold the potential to contribute to a deeper appreciation for Malay proverbs among the public. By demonstrating the deliberate selection process behind proverbial objects, the research challenges the notion of proverbs as mere happenstance creations. This newfound awareness may spark public curiosity, encouraging individuals to delve deeper into the rationale behind object choices within other proverbs. Ultimately, the study's exploration of the "extraordinary science and lessons" embedded within proverbs can elevate their status from trivial sayings to valuable repositories of cultural knowledge and wisdom.

Inquisitive semantic analysis offers a powerful tool for unlocking the deeper layers of meaning within Malay proverbs. This approach extends beyond surface interpretation to encompass the underlying rationale behind the selection of words and objects. The current study's application of inquisitive semantics to proverbs involving natural elements demonstrates the multifaceted nature of proverb analysis. It highlights how these proverbs can be examined through diverse lenses, incorporating insights from history, geography, sociology, etymology, cultural practices, and even religious beliefs.

This research lays the groundwork for future scholarly inquiries in this field. It is recommended that further investigations explore a wider range of proverbs related to nature, including not only basic elements like earth, water, fire, and air, but also various flora, fauna, and other natural phenomena. Additionally, it is suggested that thorough semantic analysis be applied to other genres of Malay literature, such as pantuns (a traditional Malay verse form) and folk poems. By expanding the scope of analysis, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between language, culture, and the natural world as portrayed in the artistic expressions of the Malay community.

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